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The Market as an Instrument of Political Control and Exploitation: Some Insights from Kenya

Abstract

The vast majority of developing countries, especially on the African continent, have leapt into the new the millennium trapped in enormous economic decline. The popular diagnosis blames the self-defeating tendencies of the Third World states as the main source of the dismal economic performance. It is against this background that the paper seeks to present an alternative account for the rampant economic stagnation experienced by developing countries on the African continent. It has been motivated by the dramatic ascendancy of Afro-pessimism, which seems to conclude that the African condition is largely of its own making and, therefore, there is little or no hope for improvement. The argument of this paper is that the colonial legacy has, to a very large extent, shaped, influenced and impacted on the range of post-colonial policy options for most countries within the policy framework of the market. The pervasive market distortions that presently characterise the majority of the economies on the continent are an enduring heritage of the colonial schemes and machinations.

Introduction

The paper takes its point of departure from Platteau's paradigm of the market, which contends that the Third World governments' behaviour and excessive interference with economic activities are the source of all existing troubles (Platteau 1994:534). The thesis of Platteau's paradigm of the market is that the widespread stymied growth and the gross abuse of market institutions in developing countries is a result of the absence of cultural norms and values that are congenial to the development of robust market traditions. The foregoing conviction has led to the primacy of prescribing policy measures that are intended to accord the market prominence in allocating scarce resources among competing activities in the economy. The state is seen as the villain and hence a target of reforms that are intended to contract its stake in the economy.

The dearth of discussions in the existing literature that systematically attempt to track the origin of the retrogressive tendencies of the state is, however, quite striking. While we do not disagree that the large part of the

blame for the unfavourable developments can be attributed to the self-defeating tendencies of the state, we, however, argue that the scope for the systematic inquiry into the forces that have shaped the policy motivations of developing countries should be broadened to include the enduring colonial legacy.

The analysis is preceded by a brief overview of Platteau's paradigm of the market in developing countries. The account draws heavily on the experiences of Kenya supported by isolated parallels from Malawi and Ghana.

Platteau's paradigm of the market

The widespread market failure and the resultant chronic economic crisis in developing countries is seen as a consequence of the absence of social fabrics that can make markets function perfectly well. The problem is that developing countries are poorly endowed with virtues of trust, cooperation and integrity that cut across parochial identities such as clans, tribes, regional enclaves etc. The foregoing virtues are reportedly very crucial for market transactions. Any attempt, in the absence of the virtues outlined above, to transform a traditional society into a market based one is likely to be frustrated by entrenched acts of fraud and deceit. This is to say that economic development is difficult in countries where norms of limited group morality prevail and do not readily give way to 'generalised morality' (Platteau, 1994:534).

The argument that Platteau makes is that market institutions are embedded in cultural values and norms of particular societies. This means that even if conscious efforts can be made to transfer the market logic to social set-ups to which it is exogenous, markets can hardly function exactly in the same way as in societies in which the market logic is entirely a spontaneous phenomenon. Markets are reported to have thrived in the West because of the development of 'generalised morality in which abstract principles of conduct are considered equally applicable to a vast range of relations beyond the narrow circle of acquaintances' (Platteau, 1994:769). The performance track record of markets in developing countries is awful because of the resilience of relationships patterned on parochial identities. People tend to remain entangled into all sorts of tightly knit networks of personalised relationships encompassing the family, the clan, the religious sect, the ethnic group, the locality of birth and so on. These patterns of social interaction are inimical to the development of functional market societies because the sort of trust that govern transactions in developing countries rest exclusively on clientelistic networks. Given the inherent limited scope and density of clientelistic relationships, it is argued, a great deal of functional trade relationships are under-exploited in developing countries.

Platteau's thesis hinges on the fragmented nature of societies in developing countries along the lines of parochial identities. These invariably permeate the state apparatuses and have, therefore, far reaching implications for the effective operation of the market institutions. The state institutions are consequently

conglomerates of rival networks, which makes the attendant social, political and economic milieu hardly supportive to the creation of truly market driven societies. The attempted wholesale transfer of Western market institutions to developing countries is, therefore, the cause of the current economic malaise. Platteau (1994: 195) argues that 'markets cannot be made to work efficiently and effectively by a simple act of will'. Taken in this light, the argument is that the importation of market institutions to social set-ups unfamiliar with their underlying logic will not automatically make the market order an effective self regulating device. To work, markets need to be supported by norms and values that span beyond particularistic identities that still reign supreme in developing countries. Thus, according to Platteau (1994:534), 'diverse sets of cultural beliefs place societies on different trajectories of economic growth'.

The advice to policy makers in developing countries in the light of Platteau's thesis is that they should not get bogged down into prescribing market friendly policies as remedial measures for the prevailing economic problems. Instead, they should question the appropriateness of market based policies for developing countries as a mechanism to get their 'economics right'. Unless conditions propitious to market development exist, policy strategies guided by market logic are more likely to cause further dislocations in the economies (Platteau, 1994).

Moore (1994) counters the validity of Platteau's thesis of embeddeness. He contends that it is based on a rather biased judgement to justify its pessimistic conclusions. The major shortfall is that it does not fully elucidate on how exactly the problem of trust is resolved in advanced market societies. Moreover, in arguing for the functional importance of trust, Platteau fails to distinguish between consumer and inter-business market transactions. The problem of limited trust in consumer markets is more likely to engender deceit and fraud since transactions are often one-off exchange relations between buyers and sellers. The situation is totally different in inter-business transactions whether in developed or developing countries. The question of establishing enduring relations of trust is a business imperative because the same people engage in transactions on a regular basis. The argument that lasting trust relations and integrity are business attributes peculiar to developed countries is obviously a complete perversion of the reality of business dealings. The conclusions that Platteau reaches are, therefore, to a large extent, speculative because 'who businessmen transact with, and under what conditions and understandings constitute valuable and confidential pieces of information' (Moore, 1994:824).

When Platteau (1994:535) writes that 'the social fabric and the culture of human societies matter a great deal, and the extent that norms and cultural beliefs are rooted in historical process, necessarily determines the development trajectories of particular countries', his thesis is vulnerable to further criticism. He quotes North to emphasise the role of history in development who posits

that 'economic history is overwhelmingly a story of economies that have failed to produce a set of sustained growth' (Platteau, 1994:535). Ironically, Platteau's own work justifies our inquiry into the implications of colonialism on the subsequent growth prospects for developing countries. It is, for all purposes and intents, an integral part of the wider historical process which, very rightly for that matter, Platteau claims plays a vital role in weaving social fabrics congenial to the ultimate development of market based societies. Norms and values of trust exist in the Third World but perhaps what is really at stake are enforcement mechanisms which, paradoxically, smack of a colonial flavour.

Colonial Kenya

The concept of the market as it exists today was virtually unknown in the pre-colonial Kenya. The notion of exclusive land ownership was in fact non-existent prior to the advent of market transactions (Kitching, 1980). Unlike the European concept of ownership, which implied exclusivity, the pre-colonial land tenures permitted simultaneous user rights both to previous and incumbent owners. Thus, the Western notion of land ownership meant that 'to own presupposed that there were others who do did not own' (Kitching, 1980:285).

Access to land depended on the clan, sub-clan, tribe or ethnic group to which one belonged. The task of land allocation was vested in the leaders of lineages. They allocated tracts of land to constituent household heads depending on the magnitude of their needs. They were also responsible for adjudicating land disputes involving different households. Sometimes, land could be acquired by force. But even then, the previous owners still enjoyed some residual user rights (Kitching, 1980 & Bates, 1981). The arrival of the Europeans towards the end of the 19th Century dramatically changed the face of pre-colonial land tenure patterns. The penetration of market forces rapidly transformed the apparently harmonious economic, social and political relations that flourished in the country-side.

The broad land policy that the colonialists embraced is quite essential to understanding the subsequent policy instruments that used the market to realise their intended objectives. The land was divided into the reserves and the highlands, designed exclusively as the residential areas of the natives and whites, respectively. The natives in the reserves were involved in subsistence crop production on very small holdings. On the other hand, the settler farmers in the highlands were engaged in large scale farming of lucrative crops such as tea, coffee etc (Gertzel, 1970; Leys, 1975; Kitching, 1980). According to Leys (1975), the demarcation of land into the white highlands and the reserves was intended to deprive the natives of access to capital, roads and well paying crops. The question, then, is how was the market used as an instrument of political control and exploitation.

The market for land

Once the settlers fully consolidated their power, the natives were progressively disenfranchised of their ownership claims to any tract of land. The ownership of the entire Kenyan land was in fact transferred into the hands of the crown. The ownership decree was further supported by a series of laws, which provided for uncompensated appropriation of land from the subsistence sector. Of particular interest in the present case, however, is how the attendant land market operated. The 'free' land market that was established heavily discriminated against the natives. Land could be transferred freely between the white settlers but any land transfer to the non-whites could not be made unless it was sanctioned by the governor (Bates, 1981; Miller, 1984; Bermon & Londale, 1992).

The land market, inter alia, intended to make it extremely difficult for the natives to gain access to additional tracts of land save for those allocated to them in the reserves. In the words of Bates (1987:38), 'land was secured in a manner that allowed commercial farmers, as opposed to subsistence producers, to capture the rents created by the growing commercial agriculture'. The ultimate policy goal was to create a pool of cheap labour for settler farmers. Increasing population pressure on the land in the reserves forced a greater number of people to migrate onto settler farms in search of wage employment. The statistics as presented by Miller (1984) are quite revealing in this regard. In 1912, some 12,000 natives were engaged outside the reserves; by 1927 the number was 152,000, and by the beginning of 1939, the number had risen to over 200,000. The land market, therefore, deliberately created structural constraints that consigned the vast majority of the natives to the market for subsistence (Brett, 1973).

Taxation and markets for labour

Taxation was widely used as a policy instrument to regulate the labour market not only in Kenya but also throughout the British Colonial Empire (Leys, 1975; Bates, 1981; Millers, 1984). The use of taxation in Kenya for the purposes of releasing labour from the subsistence sector became particularly pronounced after the First World War in 1918. As a result of massive loss of life in combat, labour shortages for the settler farmers became markedly acute.

It is important to note that the adoption of the use of taxation in regulating the labour market was not without debate (Miller, 1984 & Burman & Lonsdale, 1992). The colonial state was caught up in the process of trying to be responsive to the demands of the settler farmers but at the same time eschew the possibility of alienating the natives any further. While the natives were expected to pay taxes as part of their obligations to the colonial state, the settler farmers lobbied for a calculated increase in the level of taxes with the intention of attracting them to their farms as wage labourers.

They could, alternatively, have attracted additional labour by offering attractive wages. This avenue was not favoured at all on the pretext that the labour market was essentially characterised by a backward bending supply curve. The argument was that an increase in wages would not necessarily be associated with an increased labour supply since the natives had limited pressing cash needs except paying tax. Increasing tax levies was, therefore, the only option. It would escalate the cost of living beyond their means of subsistence, and hence force the natives to migrate in search for wage employment on settler farms (Bates, 1981; 1987; Berman & Lonsdale, 1992).

Structure of markets for inputs and outputs

The structure and the terms of participation in the markets were generally in favour of the settler farmers. Capital markets, for instance, provided them with enormous credits at interest rates considerably below genuine market levels. They were also beneficiaries of the subsidy scheme meant to facilitate speedy land acquisition which could in turn create scarcity in order to push the natives into wage employment (Bates, 1981; Millers, 1984; Sandbrook, 1985). Entry into production and markets for lucrative crops such as tea, coffee and cotton was highly regulated. Through the Marketing of Native Produce Act, the natives could only participate in the markets if they were in possession of permits and licences (Brett, 1973; Leys, 1975; Bates, 1981).

The marketing boards were perhaps the hallmark of systematic attempts designed to use the market as an instrument of political control and exploitation. The idea that started out merely as a crisis response during war-time exigencies, however, survived. The first to be established was the Maize Control Board. Within few years that followed, each major crop had its own board vested with powers to oversee both the production and marketing processes.

The market institutional structures worked in favour of the settlers by systematically repressing the purchasing power of the natives. Keeping them out of the production of lucrative crops ensured that they earned their living barely at the borders of subsistence and would, eventually, be pushed into wage employment. The stringent terms of participation in the market coupled with the discriminatory pricing structure of marketing boards meant that the natives could hardly achieve a standard of living much above the margins of subsistence. Brett (1973:286), thus, concluded that 'the colonial system created structures that forced the bulk of the population to be without independent means of subsistence, therefore, forced them to sell their labour on the market'.

The logic of indirect rule

We have, thus far, presented the colonial policy strategies as if there were no exceptions in their application to the subject population. To understand how the policies worked, it is imperative that we fully grasp the underlying logic of indirect rule on which most of the policies were premised. To effectively penetrate the countryside, the colonialists needed at least some base of support from some segments of the native population. The indirect rule structure proved tremendously useful in this respect. The scheme largely targeted chiefs and significant others in the countryside by allowing them the unhindered accumulation of wealth under the aegis of the state (Brett, 1973; Leys, 1975; Miller, 1984).

The differential access to the means of accumulation, therefore, created a subset of natives whose interests coincided with those of the colonialists. In fact, indirect rule turned out to be a schematic ingenuity that ultimately 'inhibited the coalescence of the [natives] resistance into a colony-wide challenge to the colonial order... kept political tensions divided and, in large part, contained within villages and compounds... offered the [natives] no arena for political debate wider than tribes' (Berman & Lonsdale 1992:163-4).

In Kenya, to emphasise the point above, a story is often told of Harry Thuku who started out as a very militant opponent of colonial rule but dramatically softened his stance once he was allowed to consolidate his landholdings with title deeds and granted entry into the market on terms akin to those of the settler farmers (Brett, 1973; Kitching 1980).

To what extent do the traits of the logic of indirect rule show up in the policy choices of the post colonial Kenya? The desire for a decisive break with the colonial past notwithstanding, evidence abounds that the Kenyan government has attempted to adapt the logic of indirect rule to regulate the market in a way that it could likewise salvage a reliable constituency of political support (Leys, 1975; Bates, 1991). In the language of institutional economics, Kenya just like many other nations on the continent, has miserably failed to elude the dictates of path dependence, that is, the constraints of the circumstances and institutions inherited from the colonial past. Government business has largely been executed in the shadow of the colonial heritage.

Transitional politics – from colonialism to self rule

There is overwhelming unanimity that the question of excessive loss of land was the prime mover of the independence struggle in Kenya (Leys, 1975; Kitching, 1980; Miller, 1984). The tempo of the struggle picked up an accelerated pace due to worsening labour conditions on the settler farms, increasing land shortage due to population pressure in the reserves, and the discriminatory agrarian policies that did not allow the natives to participate in lucrative markets. The struggle against the hegemonic land ownership by the settlers can

be traced back to the formative years of colonialism but did not pose any serious challenge till the outbreak of the Mau-Mau rebellion in 1952 (Leys, 1975; Kitching, 1980; Miller, 1984).

Even after the Europeans had finally relinquished ownership of vast tracts of land, the question of land continued to be a contentious issue (Gertzel, 1970 & Leys, 1975). In particular, the question of how exactly to redistribute land rights degenerated into a protracted ideological debate. Senior politicians, who fell prey to the survival tactics of the remaining settler farmers, favoured the disposal of landholdings through an open market. For instance, Gertzel (1970:46) quoted Kenyatta as saying; 'there was need to respect the freedom of the individual and the protection of his rights, including the right to the ownership of property, all of which are protected in the Constitution'.

Junior politicians on the other hand, particularly the backbenchers, regarded the idea of reallocating land rights through the market mechanism as a complete betrayal of the morality of the independence struggle. Their argument was that it was unreasonable to sell land to the people to whom it initially belonged. The land had to be requisitioned as needed. A leading backbench politician, Kaggia, was quoted as saying 'we have used this [free distribution of land] all these years as a policy and in fact it has been the backbone of our political struggle' (Gertzel, 1970: 46).

The backbenchers were dismissed as being ideologically myopic. The justifications for their insistence on the free distribution of land were, however, quite laudable. They wanted priority to be given to those who would not be in a position to afford land on an open market and set ceilings on the maximum size of landholdings lest '[new] large scale landowners would simply step into the former European farmers' shoes' (Leys, 1975:48). Settlement schemes for the landless were planned but were abandoned on the pretext that they were expensive and that large-scale farms were the life blood of the Kenyan economy (Brett, 1973; Leys, 1973; Kitching, 1970; Miller, 1984).

Realities in post colonial Kenya

The extent to which the colonial socio-economic infrastructure remained squarely intact in the post-colonial Kenya remains a major paradox. The independence struggle presented a group of people committed to establishing a social order that would mark a total break from the notorious colonial past. The persistence of the colonial tactics in the subsequent agrarian policies, however subtle, is particularly surprising given that the entire independence struggle can effectively be reduced to the question of land and the related agrarian policies. Ironically, the majority of the very same people who strongly condemned the oppressive colonial socio-economic institutional infrastructure actively supported its continuity.

The fact is that the much-touted agrarian revolution was never attempted in earnest (Leys, 1975 & Kitching, 1988). Even though settlement schemes were

intended to redistribute land rights, it is estimated that 75-80 percent of the large scale settler farms were transferred into African ownership intact – mainly to senior politicians, civil servants and parastatal employees. The magnitude of success of the agrarian revolution depended on the extent to which it could bring back labour power on independently owned farm plots.

The manner in which the mounting resistance to the preservation of large-scale farms was blocked is reminiscent of the colonial tactics of management and administration (Leys, 1975 & Bates, 1987). The Kenyan government came up with a credit policy which was meant to facilitate land redistribution through the market mechanism. However, the policy was crafted in such a way as to create a small but powerful class of people who could support the policies of the state. Leys (1975:99) aptly captured the intent of the credit policy:

> under the doctrine of applying scarce resources where objectively the returns would be the greatest, the differential provision of both credit and technical help benefited a category of land owners whose support the regime needed.

The credit scheme thus gave priority to those who were supportive of the redistribution of land rights through the free market mechanism. The reason settlement schemes fell through was, therefore, not so much a question of overwhelming expenses but rather as a deliberate ploy to create a pool of cheap labour for the new owners of the large scale farms (Leys, 1975; Kitching, 1980; Miller, 1984). In addition to the overplayed importance of large scale farming to the Kenyan economy, it was argued that the trickle down benefits from large scale agriculture to wider economy would entitle every citizen to a decent standard of living in the shortest time possible. Entry into the cultivation of lucrative crops continued to be dependent on quota limitations. Likewise, marketing boards, which, ironically, generated unprecedented resentment throughout colonial history, were retained without even any slightest modification in their institutional infrastructure.

The activities of the Maize Control Board deserve special mention. Just like in the colonial period, the board was used to protect the interests of large-scale farmers. In 1972, for instance, the large-scale farmers used their hegemonic power to sabotage the government's intention to introduce a uniform price for both large and small producers. The large scale farmers used the board to deliberately create scarcity of maize grain by diverting available supplies into black markets and illegal exports markets (Leys 1975 & Bates, 1987). The board also made it particularly difficult for smallholders to sell maize at a profit. They were not allowed to move more than ten bags of maize from one point to another within a district, or two bags of maize across district borders unless they had the written consent of board officials. All this was done with the intention of protecting the monopolistic position of the board and hence controlled the levels of prices accordingly (Bates, 1981, 1987).

Interesting parallels exist with the Malawian policy process after independence. Much as the land question did not heavily dominate the independence struggle there, Malawi's subsequent agrarian policies, however, have shown a great deal of colonial leanings (Kydd & Christensen, 1988 & Sahn & Sarrin, 1990). The consolidation of landholdings into a large-scale farming sector was an outcome of a thoroughly calculated policy.

The 1967 Land Act, three years after independence, for example, not only reaffirmed the existence of customary land but also declared that all customary land was 'vested in perpetuity in the President' (Sahn & Sarris, 1990:399). This particular Land Act, with the benefit of hindsight, was intended to reinforce the post-colonial agricultural strategy that distinguished two sectors, namely estate farming and smallholder agriculture. The sectors differed in terms of landholdings and the types of crops which they could grow. While those engaged in estate farming were at liberty to cultivate a variety of crops without limit, those within the smallholder sub-sector were on the contrary legally prohibited from producing lucrative crops such as tobacco, tea and sugar.

Similarly, the range of auxiliary agrarian policies were designed to facilitate the use of the market as an instrument of political control and exploitation. For instance, the land market created following the 1967 Land Act provided only for one-way transferability of land. Land could only be transferred to the estate sector usually at prices that were far below the prevailing real market levels. Marketing and pricing arrangements further discriminated against the smallholder sector. While the estate sector enjoyed a direct access to remunerative world prices, smallholders earned substantially lower prices dictated by the marketing board. The rents extracted from the marketing arrangements for smallholder crops were used to extend cheap loans to the politically favoured few, mostly party functionaries, senior civil servants, chiefs and high ranking parastatal and industrial employees, in order to accelerate estate expansion (Kydd & Christensen, 1998 & Shan & Saris, 1990).

Land was deliberately alienated from smallholders in order to create a readily available pool of labour for the estate sector. Low smallholder agricultural prices were intended to achieve the same goal. Several studies, in fact, conclude that it was more profitable for peasants to work on estates as tenants than till their own plots since crop prices were low, but prices for farm inputs were enormously high. The government also discontinued migrant labour to the South African mining industry to further create a lasting pool of cheap labour for the estate sector. Sahn & Sarris (1990:401), therefore, concluded that 'land, wage and income [policies] designed by the party and the state controlled by Banda [were intended] to facilitate expansion of the estate sector at the expense of the peasants...'

Ghana's parallel experiences shed further light on this subject. Bates (1987), for instance, noted that rice farming, which was largely a monopoly for politicians and high-ranking civil servants and parastatal employees, enjoyed prefer-

ential treatment. The rice farmers earned domestic prices that were well above the world market prices. The Ghanaian government also used the differential credit policy to clamp down the mounting resistance to its exploitative pricing policy for the cocoa industry. It instituted a parallel cocoa grower's association whose members had either previous debts written off or granted a range of inputs on very soft credit terms. The result was that even the most militant protesters were seduced, and the resistance movement eventually crumbled.

New insights?

The latest commentary by Bates (1989) on Kenya's development is interpreted by many as representing a complete departure from his seminal work. A careful reading of this work, however, does not even in the slightest sense justify the foregoing conclusion. His analytical comparison of the Kenyatta and Moi regimes builds on the central theme of his previous work. The only difference is that his latest work explicitly recognises the inseparable nature of economic and political realities. Gibbon (1995:16) aptly sums up Bates's position as:

> An attempt to show how specific economic and political circumstances give rise to particular combinations of economic and political institutions, some of which become the objects of political struggles whose outcomes are themselves partly determined by the ways in which politics is locally institutionalised.

In Kenyatta's era, the principal defining context for the nature of politics was largely shaped by the colonial legacy. Indirect rule, as intimated elsewhere in the paper, entrenched tribal loyalties as the basis for conducting politics. The prominence of the redistribution of land rights through the market was a reflection of the economic stature of the Kikuyu as a dominant political force. The use of market structures for political gains occurred at local levels notably through Harambee projects (Bates, 1989). These involved politicians building up local support by organising their respective constituents to bargain for economic concessions such as higher prices or lower input prices from a centrally administered patronage network. The magnitude of the share of rents extracted was, at least, proportional to the political support promised to the high level leadership.

In contrast, the conditions under which Moi came to power invariably necessitated a substantial reorientation in the use of market bureaucracies to harness reliable political support. The political and economic institutional infrastructure that he had inherited allowed him limited latitude for political manoeuvre (Miller, 1984; Bates, 1989; Gibbon, 1995). Moi needed an ethno-regional constituency of support but then he had to face the challenge of political engineering that as much as possible minimised an open display of its political implications. In particular, Bates (1989) argues that Moi took advantage of the 1979-80 and 1984-85 grain crises to reshape the political as well as the economic power balance among the major social forces of Kenyan

society. Quoting Bates, Gibbon (1995:17) writes: 'Thus Moi seized economic resources from centres of export production and distributed them to less favoured areas but which promised support... meanwhile striving to defend class privilege'.

There is little doubt that the Kenyan policy process was, to a great extent, shaped by the logic of indirect rule. The dominance of the logic of indirect rule in the policy process is further supported by the isolated policy experiences of Malawi and Ghana. In all these countries, the history of the post-colonial policy process is saddled with attempts to create political constituencies by way of offering the targeted groups selective benefits. The market, modelled on the logic of indirect rule, has been quite a useful tool for many desperate politicians facing highly fragile polities. According to Bates (1981, 1987, 1988), the desired political support is achieved through regulating access to the markets, and rationing the rents by conferring selective benefits in the market for inputs while imposing collective deprivations in the markets for final products. Since the favoured groups owe their fortunes to those in charge, they in turn offer them unflinching political support regardless of the merit of overall policies of the regimes of the day.

Concluding remarks

Platteau's thesis cannot adequately explain the underlying causes of the contemporary economic malaise in developing countries. Its methodology is not only fundamentally flawed but is also too general to offer illuminating insights into country specific cases. We have, using Kenya as a case study, tried to demonstrate the extent to which the contemporary dismal progress in economic development across the African continent can, in part, be understood as a colonial legacy. What, therefore, is needed is a broad analysis that meaningfully integrates the historical experiences of developing countries.

In a loose interpretation of Platteau's thesis, it is quite attractive to herald it as shedding light on the seemingly pervasive civil strife in developing countries. The unending conflicts across the continent can be argued to be an incontrovertible manifestation of a repertoire of cultural values and norms that are deficient in the virtues of trust, integrity and honesty. The market cannot, therefore, work. It may be true, but not to the extent of entirely ignoring the role of history in shaping inter-tribal relations, which predominantly turn out to be the underlying spur for most of the civil strife. In case of Kenya, for instance, many commentators (Brett, 1973; Leys, 1975, Bates, 1981, 1987) accept that the colonial concept of indirect rule has had tremendous impact in creating rifts between tribes which still exist up to the present day. Much of the distrust in the political sphere cannot, therefore, be blamed wholly on the backward cultural norms and values of developing countries. What is needed in diagnosing the state of development in developing countries is an approach that recognises the

diversity of causal factors. Any narrowly focused approach, comprehensive as it may be, can only tell part of the story.

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