

## **Africa's reactions to colonial oppression: Canice Nwosu's *Hopes of the Living* and Ebrahim Hussein's *Kinjeketile***

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### ***Abstract***

*Colonial rule in Africa especially Nigeria and Tanganyikain particular is characterized with oppression and dehumanization. The Europeans enslaved and killed Africans; moreover slaves obtained from Africa were completely dehumanized and forced to work against their will, while the slave Masters raped the females at will. Thus, the researcher argues that colonialism is the root cause of oppression and dehumanization in Nigeria; it came in disguise of bringing development but ended up exploiting, dehumanizing, subjugating and implanting into Nigerians wrong notion of putting personal interest before National interest. Therefore, it is pertinent for Africans, especially Nigerians to reflect deeply on their history as it relates to their present life conditions and their future. Although, the paper is on Africa, it is narrowed down to Nigeria and Tanganyika as African countries. Nigeria and Tanganyika have been experiencing lots of oppression and dehumanization which have deterred the integral development of these great countries. Therefore, the paper explores the link between the present predicaments and colonialism. Furthermore, the advent of colonialism in Nigeria and Africa's reactions to colonial and post-colonial oppressions and dehumanization are analysed from the perspective of the Revolutionist and Loyalists theories. The researcher adopted the qualitative research method while analyzing the plays of Canice Nwosu's *Hopes of the Living* and Ebrahim Hussein's *Kinjeketile*.*

*Other sources of data include journal articles and internet sources. The paper suggests that education and conscientization of the citizenry is the best solution to put an end to oppression and dehumanization. It calls for serious revolution via policy formulation like the legal profession, Human Rights activist and NGO's to fight the perpetrators of all forms of oppression and dehumanization. The paper concludes that Nigerians should rise and fight for their freedom which in turn could liberate them from all forms of oppression and dehumanization inherent in the country.*

## **Introduction**

Literature, as an imaginary work of art does not build on Vacuum, it is always instigated by radical and critical observations of social, political, economic and even religious background and attitude of people. The political system said to be practiced in Nigeria is Democracy, which we know is best understood in the words of Abraham Lincoln as the “government of the people, for the people and by the people”. But in Nigeria, it seems to be contrary, because Democracy in Nigeria appears to be impoverishing and exploiting the citizenries of this country. Nigeria is a country made up of about 250 ethnic groups. Before the European colonist conquest, Nigeria was a home to a number of sophisticated and influential societies with admirable political system. Historically, different forms of slavery existed in Nigeria, but the arrival of the Portuguese in the coast of Nigeria in 1470's was the beginning of trans-Atlantic slavery, which was brutal and reduced the population of the country. But with the abolition of slave trade in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century, interest was diverted into Agricultural produce like Palm Oil. At the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century, Britain began aggressive military expansion in the region. Britain

declared a protectorate in South in 1885 and sponsored the creation of the Royal Niger Company in 1886. A protectorate was later declared over Northern Nigeria in 1900 and in 1914, the southern and Northern protectorates were amalgamated, and this was the beginning of British colonial rule. The form of governance they used was the indirect rule whereby the 'chiefs' were made heads of the Nigerian communities and the checks and balances, which used to control or constrain their powers diminished. After the centuries of brutal British colonial rule which was meant to exploit and subjugate Nigeria in order to develop Europe, power was handed over to the Nigerians on October 1<sup>st</sup>, 1960 and the first president was Chief Nnamdi Azikiwe and Alhaji Ahmadu Bello was the first Prime Minister. After independence, Nigeria still experience lots of problems and instability till date.

### **Synopsis of the plays**

#### ***Hopes of the Living* by Canice C. Nwosu**

The play tells of the lepers from Port Harcourt. It lays bare the consequences of indirect rule on the Ubomiri community in one of the Eastern states of Nigeria. The play is a historical incident which has remained evergreen, as great story tellers hand it down from generation to generation. It is a re-enactment of the Odokara-Ulo experience over the lepers' action in Ubomiri leper settlement. The play has four Acts. Act one reveals the state of the community before the visit of the health officers from Port Harcourt. Act two reveals the contact between the health officers and the 'Eze' and other heads of the community. They arrive at a decision to give out an evil forest in a neighbouring community to build a leper settlement. Ewurum is selected to be an 'Eze', who will mediate and oversee the affairs of the community on behalf

of the British government. In Act three, the actual coronation of Ewurum takes place, with some youth, led by Patrick, an educated son of Ubomiri who lives in Port Harcourt, invades the arena in protest against the coronation. Some older members of the community refuse to recognise Ewurum as 'Eze', so that the homage that is due him as 'Eze' is protested against, a character named 1<sup>st</sup> Man raises alarm over his goat that is being taken to the 'Eze', another female character raises alarm over her chicken that is being taken too,. The villagers protest over the land given to health workers to build a leper settlement. This caused some pandemonium and confusion amidst the celebration.

Act four enacts the arrival of lepers and various attacks from members of Ubomiri community and the Lepers and vice versa. The lepers come in with a very pathetic emotional moving song 'Atulegwu' meaning, 'Do not be afraid'. Members of the community are angry over the lepers invasion of their farms and harvesting of their products .The Lepers are also nonchalant because they were starving and need to survive. Act five describes the masquerade attack and the final arrest and prosecution of the youths and some older members of the community who joined force to attack the colonial masters and their representatives.

### ***Kinjeketile* by Ebrahim Hussein**

The play, *Kinjeketile* opens in the village of Ngarambe, in the Rufiri Region of Southern Tanganyika. Chausika, daughter of Kitunda, Bibi Kintunda, her Mother and wife to Kitunda and Bibi Kinjeketile, wife of Kinjeketile are seen walking a path leading to a river. They discusses especially on the plantation owned by Bwana Kainoo. Many of the Tanganyikan burghers have taken to this plantation in order to earn a living. They are being cut out

from every source of livelihood and are compelled to rely on the plantation as their only means of survival. However there appears to be a famine all over the land, which has affected all the populace except Bwana Kainoo's. The only option is to rely on Bwana Kainoo's plantation, and those who work therein are treated with contempt, and are made to work indefatigably. As they walk, a plume of smoke is spotted from a distance drifting out of the thatch roof of Kinjeketile, very quickly, Chausiku is sent to see if it is really the cooking that is causing the smoke or something else, that shows the level of hunger they are experiencing. In the plantation, Wamatumbi is been whipped by the overseer.

In scene 2, Ngulumbayo, Mingindo, Kitunda, and old man-Mkichi are discussing on whether to set up a brawl against their German overlords or not. Kainoo is depicted as a German, and as the owner of the plantation. Having established a despotically Teutonic authority over the people, He later set up some instruments of coercion such as the Askari (the police force) which will compel and also be labour the people to work subserviently for them. Doubt soon hits Tanganyika coup plotters, Kitunda is questioned about his visit to Kilwa, although he denies it. There is betrayal amongst the Tanganyikans, as there could be someone who has decided to be 'parrots'. Mnypala approaches Kitunda for something concerning the plantation, later he is being whipped seriously to a point of his falling unconscious. His daughter, Chausika is taken away as slave in lieu of her parents; she is forcibly raped and molested by Askaris. Kinjeketile emerges, preaches revolution and outright purgative exorcism of the aliens (Germans). He appears as a Messiah-Majimaji. They later declared war against the Germans, but victory is not attained. Kitunda and some leaders of the land were both

arrested and incarcerated. Kinjeketile is captured by the Germans, tortured and atrociously brutalized for refusing to renounce the power of Maji-maji (spiritual water). He is later persecuted to the point of his death.

### **Oppression and dehumanisation in Nigeria**

The plays *Kinjeketile* and *Hopes of the Living* dramatize the oppressions and dehumanization suffered by Africans, Nigeria inclusive, during the colonial era. The oppressions and dehumanization appears in different forms – Exploitation, marginalization and Violence, all these were rampant during the colonial era but are still much rampant now.

Exploitation involves using people's labour or resources to produce profit while not compensating them fairly. For instance, the civil servants and some Lecturers work tirelessly in their various offices and Institutions but are yet to receive their salaries. They find it difficult to cope with the economic recession and during this COVID-19 pandemic. During colonial era (Africans) Nigerians were exploited, after toiling and sweating in the colonial master's farmland or plantation, they were given peanuts and taxed too. This is evident in *Kinjeketile*. Bibi Kinjeketile's conversation with Bibi Kitunda vividly captures it:

Our men work a lot, but they get nothing,  
we don't even have food in the house ...  
Anyway, some of these roots are poisonous.  
BibiBobiali's son died from eating some.  
(kinjeketile 23)

From the above statement, it is evident that African has no money to fend for them after toiling day and night. In Nigeria today, most families cannot afford 3 (three) square meal a day,

due to the economic situation in the country after working also in the various streets in Nigeria, Many beggars on the street are, begging to survive. The colonialists left many people to die of hunger, disease and sorrow, while they benefit from the people's sweat. Unfortunately, the oppressed have no courage, moral indignation and revolutionary spirit to fight. *In Hopes of the Living*, the indigenes are suspicious of the white man's exploitation of the community, the indigenes and their land. They believe that the white man does not come to a community without any gain in return. The members of the community are weeping against the white man's presence in the community. To them, the white man is deceitful and corrupt, by cunningly taking their farm lands and bringing lepers to their community, they see it as an act of exploitation. In Nigerian, aside from the exploiters from the top, ordinary Nigerians, also oppress one another with impunity.

Marginalization and Violence are other forms of oppression and dehumanization. During the colonial era, Africans (Nigerian inclusive) were not allowed to mingle with the whites or inhabit the same land with them. In *Hopes of the Living*, the white man comes to the community, dictates what happens, installs a new Eze who will mediate and oversee the affairs of the community on behalf of the British Government. The community members' goat and chicken are forcefully taken to the Eze. Members register their displeasure immediately.

This is also evident in *Kinjeketile*, the natives were whipped and taken away to slave in the plantation. Kitunda is being whipped to unconsciousness, Chausika, his daughter is taken away in lieu of her parents, and she is forcefully raped and molested by the Askaris. Nigeria today is not an exception. The rich are getting richer, while the poor getting poorer. Some Nigerians are slaves, some do not have luxury of walking freely

as they are treated like animals – the current issues of Boko Haram, Kidnap of Chibok girls and incessant Bomb blast, scaring and killing innocent Nigerians and most of the Chibok girls were reportedly raped. This is another form of violence.

Kidnapping is very common in Nigeria. Some Nigerians kidnap others for reasons best known to them; their victims are subjected to another form of slavery. Some females and children are currently slaves and are facing all forms of violence, marginalization and exploitation in Nigeria. In some families, due to economic hardship, children are expected to provide or supplement their family upkeep. Some have no childhood as they are ‘lent’ or given out by their parents to strangers who in turn pays an agreed amount of money before taking them, Some leaves their houses at a very tender age and forced to do many degrading things – maybe house helps, trading, street hawking, forced marriages among the girls, all these are modern day slavery and oppression. Some leadership roles are kept for a certain group while others are marginalized. Some ethnic groups believe that they must randomly inflict attacks on others, just to damage, humiliate and oppress innocent Nigerians. Marginalization, violence and exploitation are vices that should be flushed out of the Nigerian government.

### **Reactions of Nigeria and Tanganyika to Colonial oppressions in Canice Nwosu’s *Hopes of the Living* and Ebrahim Hussein’s *Kinjeketile***

The reactions of Africans took various forms as could be seen in both plays. Some reacted passively and others actively. Some saw it as an opportunity for their personal aggrandizement. Some are loyalists and others Revolutionaries. Olagoke states “... Colonial system in East Africa ... was one that pushed the

masses... into forming militant groups to resist colonial denomination of their lives and lands”<sup>(2)</sup>. The loyalists are African enemies in sheep clothing. They were narcissistic in nature. They love and cherished colonialism. The loyalists in *The Hopes of the living* include Eze Kamanze, a warrant chief who believes in the colonial masters, and encourages members of his community to work closely with them instead of despising their visit to the community. Simeon and Nwanyimma are also loyalists. The Revolutionaries were made up of Ewurum who is very suspicious of the white man’s coming and opposes their visit to his community despite Eze Kamanze’s explanations to convince him that the white man’s coming will create more communities and he, becoming an Eze.

In *Kinjeketile*, the tragic hero, Kinjeketile is adamant in his struggle; he refuses to renounce his maji-majipower. Mkichi, one of the characters, voices out against the brutality, oppression and dehumanization.

**MKICHI:** From the day we held out first meeting until today, nothing has been done... the Germans has taken away our country by Force... Now he forced us to cultivate his plantation for him. We just stave... How long are we going to remain meek and silent? Are we going to allow ourselves to be persecuted in our own country? (*Kinjeketile* 5)

Mkichi represent others who were affected by the Germans. Bibi Kinjeketile and Bibi Kitunda recalls the past which triggers their reactions. In *Hopes of The Living*, Ewurum believes that the white man does not come to a place without any major gain in

return. He is conscious of this fact and is not ready to let go. During the conversation between Ewurum and the Eze, he states:

EWURUM: How can the white man create more nations, is the white man Chukwu Okike? ... and more division of our community, more exploitation and slavery. I don't understand... (*Hopes of the Living* 11)

Ewurum represents many voices of members of his society who are weeping against the dangers and presence of the white man in the community. He does not care about cheap gifts or titles from the white man but their freedom. Those who stand against injustice are prosecuted and their rights denied. The chiefs and elders who claim to represent the indigenes in the leper settlement building are corrupt too. Onuoha, a male character is did no hide his feelings, to show the degree of his dissatisfaction, he speaks in a local language to drive hi message home to his local audience. He states:

ONUOHA: (terrified) Chei, anwuomuooo!, abomination!, desecration!, sacrilege!!, Lepers, in my farm? is this a kind of dream... (addressing the lepers) what are you doing here, where are you from, and who are you...I have never heard by any means, laws, tradition, culture or religion that lepers ,the living dead, dwell and move about among the living. '*Tufiakwa, anyam ahulantim*' (*Hopes of the Living* 47)

As far as Onuoha is concern, the worst has happened and he is not ready to accommodate it. In *Kinjeketile*, Kitunda's loyalty to the struggle is being questioned; as could be seen in the conversation below:

MNGINDO: People say that if one goes to Kilwa with the right kind of news, one is rewarded. The Whiteman pays well to get valuable information.

KITUNDA: Are you trying to say that I am selling you and my people to the white man?

MKICHI: There are people doing that. There are people who are paid to stop us uniting.  
(*Kinjeketile* 5)

From the above discussion, we get to know that there is betrayal among the Tanganyikans. In Nigeria, there is no quality representation by some leaders at some levels. Most of the representatives, due to their selfish interest failed to project the interest of the masses appropriately, while some leaders stood firm and are determined to fight a just war, liberate the masses and to represent them well. Generally, Africans reacted negatively and positively, some supported the struggle while some tries to betray their people. But all revolutionists tried their best in the decolonization of Africans from oppression and dehumanization, even though, it cost some of their lives, they didn't give up.

### **Recommendations**

From the foregoing, it is quite clear that the nature and pervasiveness of oppression and dehumanization in Nigeria is

alarming. This calls for serious revolution via policy formulation like the legal professions, Human Right activists and Non-governmental Organizations (NGOs) to fight the perpetrators of all forms of oppression and dehumanization. There should be national rebirth where competence and ability should determine who gets what.

Social workers should embark on massive enlightenment campaigns to conscientize Nigerians on the need to rise up and fight all forms of oppression and dehumanization, just like Ewurum and Kinjeketile did, they tried their best and fought for freedom of their fellow Africans.

Aggrieved Religious sects should resort to dialogue and mediation, if there is any issue at hand, this will prevent incessant killings of innocent citizens.

Youths should be taught how to start up their own business and acquire skills, this will increase creativity and it will engage them, instead of being used as agents of destruction.

Most importantly, Nigerians should rise up, form groups and react/revolt against all forms of oppression and dehumanization because Nigerian leaders are extension of colonial masters. If Africans can react during colonial rules, Nigerian can equally react against the present situation.

## **Conclusion**

Oppression and dehumanization in any form is inhuman and it violates fundamental/Human Rights of the citizens. The negative impact of colonialism includes oppression and dehumanization which is still rampant in Nigeria. It is degrading and dehumanizing and the oppressed are more or less sub-human and sometimes feel worthless and frustrated. For decades, Nigerians of certain ethno-religions group, sex and age have been subjected

to all forms of oppression. This inhumane attitude should not continue as if it is normal. The reactions of African, especially the revolutionaries were an eye-opener. It led to their freedom and independence, equally, Nigerian should revolt against *Boko Haram*, incessant Bomb blast, kidnapping, corruption in high places. Thus as the constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria enunciates, every Nigerian should be treated equally and have equal access to the resources in Nigeria.

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