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**The Image of Expatriates in Modern African Drama: A  
Study of Selected Plays by African Playwrights**

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**Abstract**

*In the unholy romance between Africans and Expatriates from Europe, Asia and America, which culminated into colonialism, neo-colonialism and imperialism, African playwrights, observed and portrayed Expatriates in their actions, and interaction with Africans. These Expatriates, claimed to have come as agents of civilization, beacons of light, civil administrators, missionaries, merchants and law enforcement agents. In spite of these claims, literary artists, especially playwrights, presented on stage their perception of the personalities of Expatriates, roles and actual influences in Africa. In the three plays selected for this study: *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi*, *I Will Mary When I Want* and *Sizwe Bansi Is Dead*, African playwrights perceived and depicted Expatriates, especially in East and South Africa as Exploiters, high-handed administrators, false religious leaders, exploitative and collaborative missionaries, apartheid initiators and sustainers, imperialists, colonialists,*

*and agents of impoverishment. From the inception to the end of the plays, no single work of mercy, or developmental attributes was credited to the Expatriates. The study cumulatively reveals that Expatriates in East and South Africa came to Africa on selfish grounds because the playwrights revealed that they (Expatriates) came to Africa with the Holy Bible in their left hands and Guns in their right hands. Significantly, the two objects served as instruments of colonization, oppression and deprivation.*

### Introduction

The historical period of colonialism and imperialism in Africa occupies such a centre point that any discussions on the two concepts would be grossly incomplete without the contributions of playwrights; who are not only the most sensitive and practical of all literary artists. They do not just “tell us” but “also show us.”

This paper examines in detail, the playwrights perception and portrayal of Expatriates and their roles in Africa visa-vis their claimed roles as agents of civilization, beacons of light, humanitarians, missionaries, law enforcement agents, civil administrators, and philanthropists among other noble and social roles in their diaries.

In achieving the objectives of this study, three plays, written by notable African playwrights from East and South Africa are thoroughly studied and critically analyzed with a view to discovering the actual roles of Expatriates in Africa as depicted by playwrights.

The results were obtained through what the playwrights said or wrote about the Expatriates, the views of other characters or actors about the Expatriates and through the utterances and workings of the minds of the Expatriates through soliloquies.

The plays studied include:

Ngugi Wa Thiong'o's and Micere Mugo's *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi*, Ngugi Wa Thiong'o and Ngugi Wa Mirii's *I Will Marry When I Want* and Athol Fugard's *Sizwe Bansi Is Dead*.

However, before going deeply into the main thrust of the paper, it is considered appropriate to give a working definition of the basic terms or concepts in the study. The key concepts are **Image** and **Expatriates**. Image or Imagery, according to M.H. Abrams, taken collectively, is used to signify all

the objects and qualities of sense perception referred to in a poem or other works of literature, whether by literal description, by allusion or in analogues (the vehicles) used in its similes and metaphors. (M.H. Abrams, 78 – 79).

This definition is apt for the purpose of this research because in the plays selected for the study, the playwrights sense of perception and literal description of the Expatriates are critically examined and brought into focus for the readers to objectively evaluate the actual roles of Expatriates in Africa in comparison with what they purported to have come to Africa to do.

In the same vein, the word Expatriate got from Latin word “ex” meaning “out of” and (patria) meaning country from etymological perspective refers to persons temporarily or permanently residing in a country or culture other than that of their place of birth or upbringing. The term also refers to westerners living in non Western countries. In this study, for purposes of clarity and to avoid ambiguity, Expatriates are restricted to Europeans, Asians and Americans who came to live and work in Africa for purposes of colonialism, evangelism, civilization, humanitarianism, government and administration, adventurism among other clear, obvious and hidden agenda.

In the subsequent parts of this paper, genuine efforts are made to read and extract African playwrights’ perception and portrayal of Expatriates and their roles in Africa visa-vis their (Expatriates) purported roles in the continent.

### **Expatriates as Colonizers, Oppressors, Exploiters and High-Handed Administrators**

In the play, *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi*, Ngugi Wa Thiong’o and Micere Mugo used the play to expose the roles of Expatriates in Africa, with special reference to Kenya in East Africa.

In this regard, the destructive roles of an Expatriate Soldier who became stinkingly rich through his exploitation of the natives is outstanding. He applies trick to confuse and convince Kimathi to plead guilty in the court so that Kimathi would be “pardoned”. His real aim is to deceive Kimathi into admitting guilt so that he would be hanged.

He speaks to Kimathi in these words:

Look here, Dedan. I am a plain soldier. It is true that at times I play the special Branch, a hunter of men. You see

am not a poet or a dreamer like you. You must plead in court tomorrow and you must plead guilty (33).

He uses words “plead” twice yet he was pleading with Kimathi to plead guilty. And when Kimathi shows him that he knows his tricks, all aimed at nailing him, Henderson tells Kimathi:

I have told you, you are too suspicious, it is not a trick. I give you my words as a British Gentleman. Plead guilty and we shall spare your life (33).

In spite of Henderson’s tricky and deadly sugar-coated offers to Kimathi, Kimathi refuses to agree to confess in court as suggested by Henderson. He rather tells Henderson the plain and painful truth about the negative roles of expatriates in Kenya. According to Kimathi, he tells Henderson that when the hunted has truly learnt to hunt the hunter, then the hunting game will be no more. He puts the matter bluntly to Henderson in these words:

With the British, we have been losers all the way-yes-but this is a new era. This is a new war. We have fought your wars for you against the Germans, Japanese, Italians. This time, we shall bleed for our soil for our freedom until you let go (34).

In spite of Kimathi’s resolution to die, instead of confessing and pleading guilty, Mr. Henderson still continues to persuade Kimathi to plead in order to be granted clemency. He mockingly tells Kimathi:

Life comes before pride. You once vowed that no white man would ever get you. But now you are in custody. Hanging between life and death. Plead, plead, plead guilty. It is a game, yes, you can have your life only we must end this strife. Plead guilty for your life (35).

It is pertinent to note here that the playwrights are depicting these expatriates in their high-handedness as if they were gods that hold the key to life and death. They arrogate this divine power to themselves because if Kimathi does not confess and plead guilty, he would be killed by the colonial masters. It is at this point that Kimathi gets really angry and asks the expatriate solicitor/solicitor, “who are you, imperialist cannibal to guarantee my life? He continues:

My life is our people struggling, fighting, not like you to maintain slavery, oppression, exploitation; but to end slavery, exploitation and modern cannibalism. Go back to your masters and tell them Kimathi will never sell Kenya to the British or to any other breed of man eaters now or in the years to come (35 – 36).

Cumulatively, the playwrights depict the expatriates as colonialists, oppressors, imperialists, cannibals, exploiters, slave masters and dealers. In addition, the statement of the Banker who came with Henderson to plead with Kimathi to confess and plead guilty is noteworthy. Following Kimathi's complaint that Blacks in Kenya are toilers and sufferers, the Banker opines:

Toilers there will always be. Even in America, England, Sweden, Germany, Switzerland, Japan... all the civilized world. There are servants and masters, sellers of labour and buyers of labour, masters and servants (40).

The above is the expatriates' firm belief in class demarcation and segregation. When it becomes obvious that Kimathi does not want to confess nor plead guilty, Mr. Henderson, who is a soldier and at the same time a judge trying Kimathi, gets really angry and issues a serious threat to him in line with his colonial and oppressive tendencies: He barks at Kimathi thus:

Shut up! I will shoot you dead in this very cell. I have done my best to save you. This democratic government has stretched its patience to limits. But you are obviously beyond rescue. You play it rough so you will get it rough (35).

It is ironical for Henderson to refer to the colonial government in Kenya as "a democratic government," when the prosecution and trial of Kimathi, takes place in a dark cell where threats of instant shooting of a freedom fighter is given. At this juncture, Shaw Henderson gets too angry and the playwrights report it thus:

Now really wild, Shaw Henderson strikes him (Kimathi) again and again, using hand, leg gun and swearing as he strikes him, this is not your forest kingdom (55).

The role of African collaborators is not overlooked by the playwrights while depicting the white man's destructive roles in Africa. It is on the basis of this

that Kimathi tells one of the African soldiers who helps the white men to torture him:

And for a hundred shilling, and posho, and a medal, you help them murder, you help them massacre, you help them plunder, you are ready to die, in the pay of imperialists (65).

The expatriates are depicted as murderers, plunderers and killers who often use menial gifts of medals, gun power, trinkets, bicycles, guns and necklaces as baits to confuse and enslave Africans, particularly their leaders. The white colonialists are able to achieve their destructive objectives based on their superior arms; the types they used against Abame people and other communities in Igbo land. Kimathi acknowledges the imperialists superior arms in these words:

The enemies of the people are strong, they have the bombers, they have the machine gun fire, their striking power is awesome, they have greater and more efficient weapon of propaganda (68).

And because of the superior military power of the expatriates, Kimathi calls on his men and fellow freedom fighters to unite and work in concert in order to achieve success. Kimathi encourages his men in these words:

Our love of freedom is our bullet. Our successes are our newspapers. But stronger than any machine-gun fire. Stronger than Lincoln and Harvard bombers. Mightier than their best Generals. Is our unity and discipline in struggle (69).

According to Kimathi, the imperialists use their radio, and newspapers as instruments of propaganda and their schools and universities:

“To give our children, an education to enfeeble their minds, make them slaves, apes, parrots, shadows of the men and women they could have been.” (69).

Now, before the soldier/judge sentenced Kimathi to death by hanging, he Kimathi, finally tells his followers, that with unity, discipline and total commitment to the liberation struggle, freedom would be won. He puts the matter succinctly in these final exhortation, “Truth is our atomic bomb and

discipline our hydrogen bomb” to enable us fight and destroy the expatriate colonialists and imperialists, whom he also referred to as oppressors, enslavers and plunderers.

In a similar vein, Ngugi Wa Thiong’o and Ngugi Wa Mirii portray the expatriates in their play entitled: *I will Mary when I want*. The play is used to depict expatriates as heartless exploiters, who deprive the Kenyan people of their arable lands and employ them to do menial jobs that negatively affect their health and life. As soon as the black fall sick, following the contamination in their work place, they are summarily dismissed and a pittance or a useless medal is given to them as gratuity or compensation. The sick, dismissed and helpless worker dies miserably shortly after. We get a good dose of the expatriates’ exploitative and imperialistic tendencies from Giccamba, one of Kiguunda’s neighbours. He tells Kiguunda regrettably:

We are without clothes. We are without shelter. The power of our hands goes to feed three people imperialists from Europe, imperialists from America and of course, their local watch men (42).

The picture being painted here of the Expatriates is a pathetic image of exploitation and man’s inhumanity to man. A situation that leads Gicamba to lament about the general mass poverty being experienced by the local people of Kenya. He laments:

“Poverty! Poverty! Nobody can govern over poverty. For poverty is like poison in a body. Exploitation and oppression poisoned our land.” (42).

The most worrisome thing about the expatriates is that they also hide under religion to impoverish the people. According to him, Religion would drive the Kenyan people into full madness. There is always fund-raising ceremonies for the building of churches under the following denominations: white Padre and Virgin Mary, Anglican, Greek Orthodox church, Kikuyu Independent Church, Salvation Army, Church of the Deep Waters and the P.C.E.A of Scotland among others. And then he asks:

Religion! Religion! Religion! Are we the rubbish heap of religions? So that wherever the religions are collected, they are thrown in our courtyard? (9)

Here, religion is used as instrument of exploitation. Furthermore, the expatriates, in their bid to suppress and subdue the natives, declared a state of Emergency in Kenya, a situation that affects the freedom of the people and accentuates their suffering and impoverishment. According to Kiguunda, the

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were crippled through beatings; others were castrated, local women were raped with bottles; wives and daughters were raped in the glare of everybody. It was this ugly development that led to the emergence of Mau-Mau, the Jungle freedom fighters of Kenya.

As part of the exploitation and deprivation, individuals who have lands in strategic positions are deprived of such lands through hook and crook. For instance, Kiguunda, the major character is a victim of this. He shows us the letter written by an African collaborator, Mr. Ikua Wa Ndifika. According to Kiguunda in the letter:

And he (Ikua Ndifika) told me there is a company belonging to some foreigners from America, Germany, and Japan which want to build a factory for manufacturing insecticide for killing bed bugs! They want to buy my one and half acres of land (3).

Kiguunda could hardly complete his speech before his wife shouted at him; “Stop. Stop it here! Are they not the real bedbugs? (31) Indeed, the expatriates appear to be the real bed bugs because these factories are built to exploit the labour of the local people. That is why Giccamba tells Kiguunda:

Look at me, it is Sunday. I am on my way to the factory; this company has become my God... Day in day out, week after week, a fortnight is over. During that period you have made shoes worth of millions. ...you sweat and sweat and sweat, you are given a mere two hundred shillings. The rest is sent to Europe (33-34).

This is the level of labour exploitation by the expatriates, who ironically brought Christianity that says “keep the Sabbath Day holy,” but for economic benefits, would not allow the black workers to keep the Sabbath day holy indeed. They must go to work on Sundays; the exploitation reaches such a dangerous level that, by the time you know it:

You have sold away, your body, your blood, your wife even your children, there are some who sell away their blood, and they end up dying there (35).

The workers lose their wives by not having time to perform their husband statutory duties to them and allowing other men to do so. Again, they lose their children because, rising too early for work and coming too late after work, their children hardly recognize them. They are rather seen as occasional visitors to their household.

Again, the complicity of the church as agent of oppression and exploitation is re-emphasized by Giccamba, who tells Kiguunda that religion is not the same thing as God. According to him:

All the religions that now sit on us were brought there by whites. Even today, the Catholic Church is still called Roman Catholic Church P.C.E.A belongs to the Scottish, Protestants. The Anglican Church belongs to the English. The Orthodox belongs to the Greeks. The Baptist belongs to the Americans, (56).

According to him, when the British came to Kenya in 1895, all the missionaries of all the churches held the Bible in the left hand and the gun in the right hand and wanted the people to be drunk with religion while the white man was busy “mapping and grabbing our land.” (50).

The fact that the expatriates held the Holy Bible in the left hand and the gun in their right hand shows that their interest is more on the land than on the word of God and whatever it stands for. According to the narrator Giccamba,

The white man was starting factories and business. He drove us from our best lands. Forcing us to eke a living from plots on roadsides, like beggars in our land (57).

From the above information from Giccamba, it is rather very obvious that the interest of the white man in Kenya was more of economic than religious. This is confirmed by the height of injustice and deprivation meted out to Kiguunda, who was deceived and deprived of his highly valued one and half-acres of land by the whites and their local collaborators. They did this by deceptively lending him money to conduct his white wedding and when he could not pay back the money he borrowed for the wedding, they “advised” him to submit the title deed as a collateral to the bank. The land was

auctioned and bought by the same people who lent him the money. Of course that was the aim of suggesting to him to borrow money for the white wedding. This land was Kiguunda's life, and his only inheritance. He loses the inheritance. He reports the incident concerning the land painfully in these words:

When I left the auction place, I thought I should revisit the piece of land. And for a last glance, a kind of good bye, who did I find there? Kioi wa kanoru, Ikia wa Nidfika plus a group of WHITES. I fled. But their open laughter followed me (111).

According to Kiguunda's wife, the planned deprivation of their land by the white merchants, she lamented: "Today was the day the Kios buried us alive" (111).

In what seems like the final lamentation of the painful complicity between the Expatriates and their African collaborators in the exploitation of the people, Giccamba says:

If you find an African over the counter smoking a pipe over a protruding belly, know that he is only an overseer or a well-fed dog, ensuring the smooth passage of people's wealth to Europe and other foreign countries Grabbers. Grabbers; oppressors! (113).

The above is a clear depiction of the Expatriates and their roles in East Africa in general and Kenya in particular; and African collaborators are their agents. The expatriates' prayer, according to Giccamba is always:

Oh! God-in heaven, shut the eyes of the poor, the workers and peasants to ensure they never wake up to and open their eyes to see what we are really doing to them (113).

And to ensure that these sleeping peasant natives do not wake up from their slumber, the expatriates build beer factories and introduce so many church denominations. The overall aim was to ensure that they end up with two alcoholics: "The alcoholic liquor and the alcoholics of rosary." It is in a bid to wake up from their unnatural sleep and fight the hydra-headed monster of colonialism, imperialism, neo-colonialism, oppression, injustice and exploitation that the native in unison opined:

The trumpet of the masses has been blown. We are tired of being robbed. We are tired of exploitation. We are tired of land grabbing. We are tired of slavery. We are tired of charity and abuses (14).

A careful study of the diction chosen by the playwrights shows the real image of the Whiteman in the play. For instance, he is a robber, an exploiter, a grabber, slaver, giver of false charity and master of abuses and harbinger of false religion.

Similarly, another African play that depicts the expatriates in bad light is Athol Fugard's *Sizwe Bansi is dead*. The geographical setting of the play is South Africa, where the obnoxious policy of apartheid was practised. It is a policy that treated men on the basis of colour and segregated between the minority but most power white settlers, the majority but most powerless blacks, the red Indians, and the coloured people. The play is set principally in Style's photographic studio. Styles, a black man, used to be a foreman at Ford Motor Plant, a yes boy to his white bosses. He however decided to quit the Ford Motor Plant to open a photographic workshop, having known that at the end of twenty-five years, the company would only "settle" him finally with a gold wrist watch as his retirement benefits. He therefore hired a shop near a funeral parlour. Unfortunately, cockroaches nearly made it impossible for him to establish the studio, following their innumerable number. The important issue here is that Athol Fugard used the menacing cockroaches to symbolically represent the white authorities who almost gave him impossible conditions to meet before granting him the permission to establish the studio. Again, the same white men who introduced the use of PASS for the blacks in order to regulate their (blacks) movement in and out of white settlements are presented as oppressors, dehumanizers and imperialists. The climax of the expatriates' oppressive laws in South Africa was manifested in the dehumanizing act of Sizwe Bansi; who through the assistance of a fellow black man, Buntu, changed his particulars (pass) with that of a dead black man, Rebot Zwingzima. Sizwe Bansi assumed the name of a dead black man whose work permit was still valid to enable him stay and work in the white settlements. So for Sizwe Bansi to live physically, he had to die symbolically, after all, his life was not better than death before he stumbled into the dead man's passport. In this context, the oppressive expatriate regime reduced a living man to a living-dead man. This is what they made Sizwe Bansi to become.

For instance, the true picture of the expatriates in the play was depicted in what happened at Ford Motor Plant (an American company with a branch in South Africa). The pretence and falsehood in the white man was clearly exposed during the visit of the proprietor of the Ford Motor Plant from America. The spotless cleaning of the plants, the work environment and even the black workers showed exactly the high level of falsehood and insincerity in the white man.

Again the inscription of safety instructions a day before the expected arrival of the august visitors from America is significant, especially when these instructions were not here five years ago. Some of the emergency safety instructions read:

Careful this side, tow motor in motion. No smoking in this area, danger! G-v-e-e-n li-n-e. eye protection area (6).

These safety inscriptions and instructions were introduced now because the Ford Motor Plant owners from America were visiting the company for the first time in five years. Moreover, allowing the over three hundred workers in the company to bathe before ten o' clock, issuing new towels to them; allowing them to bathe in hot showers for the first time and the instant changing of the work overall coat for new ones; issuing of brand new tool bags; set of spanners, shifting spanners all of them brand new-showed the white bosses in the company as not only wicked, insincere to the workers but also inhuman and inconsiderate in all ramifications. According to Styles who was narrating his experiences in the company in retrospect:

Because I worked in the dangerous Hot test section, I was also given a new asbestos apron. And fire-proof gloves to replace the ones I had lost about a year ago. I am telling you I walked back heavy to my spot. Armstrong on the Moon! (6).

The fact that the white bosses saw the need to introduce these sudden changes showed that they knew that the workers were helplessly working under risky, dangerous and inhuman conditions before the expected visit of the owners of the company. Similarly, the instructions given to Styles by his boss Bradley to ensure that the workers smiled before the august visitors to show how happy and satisfied they were in the company showed another aspect of insincerity. The blacks should be suffering and smiling. Mr. Bradley tells Styles:

Styles, tell the boys that when Henry Ford comes into the plant, I want them to look happy. We will slow down the speed of the line so that they can sing and smile, while they are working. That they must impress Mr. Henry Ford, that they are better than those Monkeys in his own country. Those niggers, who know nothing but strike, strike (7).

So the blacks in the company, despite their precarious and non-conductive work condition and situation must manufacture smiles and wear false happy and smiling faces to impress the American visitor. And Mr. Bradley derogatorily called American blacks, monkeys and niggers who specialized in strikes. Put succinctly, Athol Fugard depicted the whites in general and the bosses in Ford Motor Plant as embodiment of falsehood, deceit, insincerity and dehumanization.

### Conclusion

In conclusion, African playwrights vividly used the plays to portray Expatriates in Africa as heartless colonial masters, economic exploiters, highhanded civil and para-military administrators, oppressors, racists, false religious exponents and imperialists, colonizers, and oppressors.

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