A SHORT INTRODUCTION TO ETHIOPIA UNBOUND BY J.E. CASELEY HAYFORD

Published in 1911, Casley Hayford’s *Ethiopia Unbound* is regarded as one of the earliest novels written by an African. Written in a language steeped in poetry and ornamented by the grace of exquisite diction, Casley’s in-depth understanding of the English language reflects in the book. Tracing the trajectory of colonialism in Africa, and the world, the author introduces the readers to the lives of his characters by connecting their individual lives to the events surrounding colonialism in Africa. Furthering his quest to unravel the intricacies and stories around colonialism, the trope of religion and religious dogmatism emerges in the book. Christianity is intensely explored in the novel, and while this is situated in the context of its weaponization against the Africans by the colonialists, Casley allows the readers to wade through his arguments and opinions by gifting us characters such as Kwamankra and Whitely. In his review of *Ethiopia Unbound*, J.O. Olusanya observes:

In this book, cast in an imaginative and fictitious mould, Hayford examines British colonial rule, which he regards as a divisive force directed at the exploitation of Africans as 'hewers of wood and drawers of water for their Caucasian protector and so-called friend'. He chastises the arrogance of the whites, denounces the colonial educational system…(Olusanya, 1970).

In the novel, the idea of black power and governance occupies the center. Stories of countries, races, and people whose contributions to civilization remain pivotal in the annals of history are being told. The resilience of the black people to get educated and prove to the colonialists that they, black people, are fit to confront and engage them and excel beyond their imaginations is evident through the pages. At the beginning of the book, black excellence and black intellectual prowess are celebrated by the author through the mention of black activists and writers such as Du Bois, Booker T. Washington, Blyden, Dunbar, Coleridge Taylor, and others. Discussing *Ethiopia Unbound*, Nnabuenyi states:

Contemporary critics saw it variously as "a product of the tires, when races are feeling after harmony and cooperation", as a book dealing with " the question of retaining all that is good in native institutions " or as a '' profound analytical study of present racial and sociological conditions as see through the eyes of an African scholar and thinker. (Nnabuenyi, 161)

In the book, which, partly, can also be likened to be a factual story of Casely, the character Kwamankra can be appropriated to be Casely. In his quest for African liberation and Independence, he advocates against colonial superiority and religious slavery. He believes in the African religion and the ways of lives of the natives. He criticizes the paradoxes displayed by Christianity. He believes humanity through love and unity define people and not racial/religious/national boundaries.

**Overview Statement about the Quotations**

In reading *Ethiopia Unbound* by J.E. Casley Hayford, many pivotal quotes emerge from the pages. These quotes, carefully selected, attest to the contributions of Casley to pan Africanism, African Independence, anti-colonialism, educational legacy for black people, etc. His larger-than-life visions and works radiate with successes that reflect in this book that details his ideas and thoughts about Africa, religion, the promotion and speaking of indigenous language, etc. These quotes are crucial to our understanding of the Africa’s past and present, and how the future, if we really crave a better one, should be. Aside these tropes explored in the book, I reiterate that the book defines extensively the deft handling of language by the author. Needless to say that there are excerpts of poetic lines infused into the narrative by the author to capture his thoughts through his characters.

Quotes, Book and Page Number(s)

1. And there were sons of God among them, men whom the Gods visited as of yore; for even now three continents were ringing with the names of men like Du Bois, Booker T. Washington, Blyden, Dunbar, Coleridge Taylor, and others — men who had distinguished themselves in the fields of activity and intellectuality (Hayford, 2).

**Annotation**: In the novel, Kwamankra once mentions to Whitely about Ethiopia being the cradle of civilization. For me, this proves to discredit the initial thought possessed by Whitely about the intellectual triumph of white people over black people. Thus, in this quote, the author extends his resolution about the excellence of black people by mentioning the achievements of black folks. This also characterizes the black or Africans as people who are intellectually remarkable and stellar in everything they do. Casely also uses this paragraph to chastise white people who think black people are incompetent, or lesser beings. The idea of white supremacy is castigated, and this, the author does by mentioning names of black achievers who shook the world with their presence and growth to humanity and to black race.

1. You know, Whitely, since I learnt your language, not as a vehicle of thought, but as a means of more intimately studying your philosophy, I have been trying to get at the root idea of the word ‘ God ’ ; and so far as my researches have gone, it is an Anglo-Saxon word, the Teutonic form being Gutha, which is said to be quite distinct from ‘ good. (Hayford, 4).

**Annotation**: In this excerpt, Kwamankra engages Whitely about the idea of God and the origin of the name ‘God’. Even when Kwamankra is a pagan, he also reveres the fact that there is God. What he detests is how Christians or missionaries portray the God they worship while also involving in manipulating others. Colonialism and the acute damages perpetrated by the colonialists on African land also inform how Kwamankra views Christianity and its believers. Even when he is a pagan, he believes fervently in humanity through righteousness. He believes that Christianity should be about acting upon what its adherents preach. This is later seen in the novel when Whitey becomes a colonial officer that acts arrogantly towards his subordinates.

1. He kept constantly before the Committee from the first the fact that no people could despise its own language, customs, and institutions and hope to avoid national death. For that reason the dis- tinctive garb of students, male and female, was national with an adaptability suggestive of the advanced state of society. It was recognised that the best part of the teaching must be done in the people’s own language (Hayford, 17).

**Annotation**: One of the crucial things to know about J.E. Casely Hayford is his advocacy for the teaching of his people in the native language. The efficacy of native intelligence is undoubtable. Through the teaching and learning and speaking of native language, Africans become united against colonial linguistic intrusion. Casely erects a wall of protest against teaching in the language of the colonialists. Hence, this is portrayed in the novel too as Kwamankra executes the task of reinforcing the need for subjects/courses to be taught in the native language (Fanti) for the better understanding of the students. Books in English are also translated into Fanti.

1. The mighty Titan does not knock down his victim and deprive him of life outright. Oh no ! that would be too crude a way. With the gin bottle in the one hand, and the Bible in the other, he urges moral excellence, which, in his heart of hearts, he knows to be im- possible of attainment by the African under the circumstances; and when the latter fails, his benevolent protector makes such failure a cause for dismembering his tribe, alienating his lands ((Hayford, 68).

**Annotation**: In Africa, colonial stories remain inseparable from the scheme of things. To discuss effectively the attainment of Independence in most African countries, the colonial past must be discussed. In this quote from the novel, colonialism in Africa is examined. When the colonialists came, they brought bible with them. They built churches and schools for the natives. They gifted our chiefs gin and mirror, and these items were used to manipulate their way into the hearts of the chiefs and the land. Before anything could be done, colonial masters had started enforcing laws, teaching the bible to children in schools, colonizing the minds of the natives by teaching them against their gods and goddesses. Colonial district officers began to rule and enact laws on African soil, and things fell apart.

**Bibliography**

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