



Oppressor, Resistor, or Enabler

Who are you in the
Neoliberal Capitalist
System?



Author
Lisa Charity
Nabuchabo






NYUKI: *The Bee Story* presents a powerful allegory of modern-day neocolonialism. Bees and their hive represent the African continent, people, and the oppressive systems they live under. Each character in the story mirrors real-life societal roles, imploring readers to question and consciously witness their own place within oppressive structures.


The Bees represent the everyday African people; resilient, communal, industrious, yet trapped within systems exploiting their labour and resources. Just as bees work tirelessly to build and sustain their hive, so too have Africans toiled under colonial and now neo-colonial systems that extract wealth while offering little in return. Their wax and honey, like Africa's natural riches, gold, oil, cocoa, cobalt etc, are looted by outsiders, leaving them with mere crumbs of what rightfully belongs to them. The hive reflects a continent rich in potential but destabilised by foreign interference, systemic inequality, and internal/native traitors.

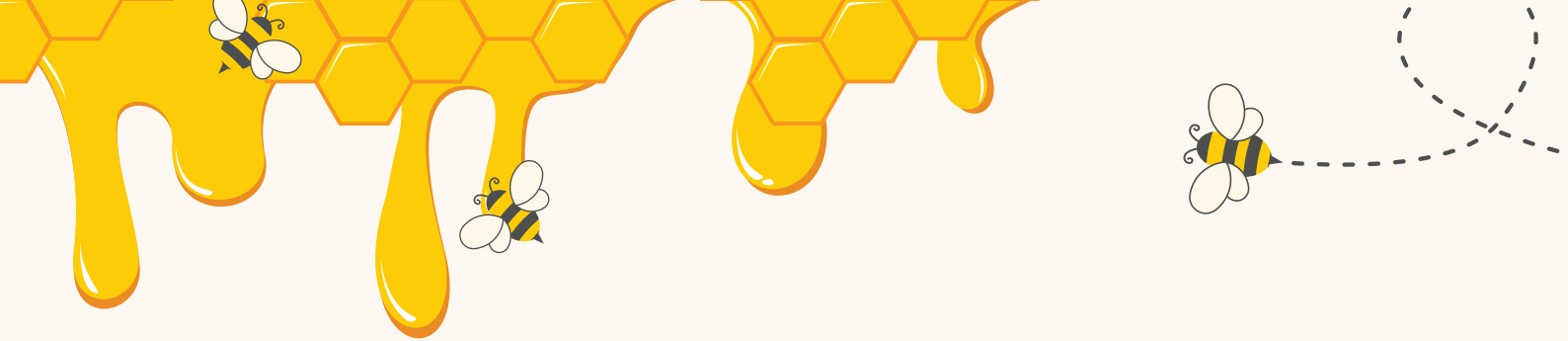
The Hive Beetles, described as explorers, clearly personify the European colonialists who arrived in Africa during the "**Scramble for Africa**" in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, under the guise of exploration, trade, and "civilising missions," only to occupy, divide, and plunder violently. Today, they are mirrored by international financial institutions like the International Monetary Fund, multinational corporations, and donor governments that still maintain economic dominance over African states through debt traps, resource extraction, and policy manipulation.

The Queen Bee symbolises the possibility of feminist, community-centred leadership, contrasting sharply with the autocratic, extractive rule of *MFLAME*, leader of the Hive Beetles, who represents the modern-day capitalist elite and former colonial powers who continue to control African economies through debt, asymmetric trade dependencies, and exploitative corporations. She describes an alternative leadership model rooted in care, equity, and collective well-being that counters patriarchal colonial governance's violent legacy, leading with empathy and community focus. This role, later restored by Xxora, within the colony, challenges the extractive systems left behind by colonial powers, suggesting that true liberation requires a return to indigenous, feminist governance that values the people over profit.



Xxora, the hive's elder and ancestral memory keeper, represents freedom fighters who remind us of the roots of our oppression and the need for collective resistance. She embodies the enduring spirit of resistance rooted in lived memory, much like anti-colonial educators and revolutionaries who used historical truth as a weapon against colonial amnesia. In colonial times, women like her were the griots, the underground teachers, and the mobilizers.





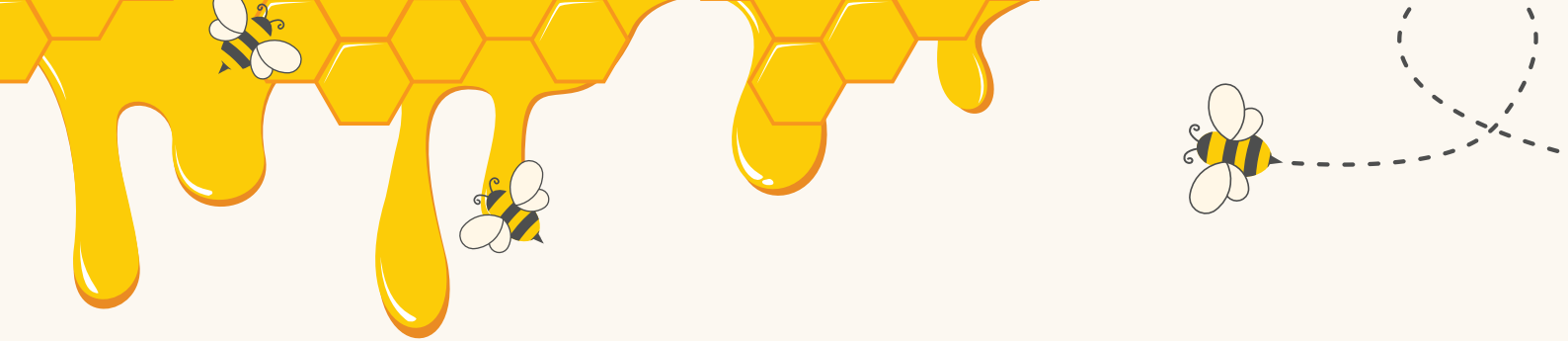
In today's context, she reflects the work of grassroots organisers, elders, and radical historians who help young people connect their present struggles to the historical and structural forces that shaped them. Her role highlights how reclaiming history is an act of revolution that dismantles the myths told by the empire, nurturing collective consciousness and action.

Xoe, her granddaughter, represents the new wave of African activists and truth-tellers, many of whom, like journalists or student leaders across the continent, are routinely arrested or silenced for speaking out against state-sanctioned injustice. She embodies resistance passed down through generations, and truth tellers who risk everything to expose injustice. In colonial times, she mirrors the defiant voices who led liberation movements despite brutal crackdowns. At the same time, today, she reflects the courage of young Africans who challenge authoritarian regimes, economic exploitation, and social inequality. Her arrest for "spreading propaganda" highlights how speaking truth to power is still criminalised, showing that though colonialism has evolved into neo-colonial control, the silencing of dissent remains a persistent tactic of domination.

Xona, her father, reflects the many ordinary citizens who, out of fear or exhaustion, choose silence and survival over resistance, mirroring the countless parents who tell their children to "stay quiet" to stay safe under repressive regimes. He embodies the trauma passed down through generations who have lived under both colonial and neo-colonial repression. Having watched his wife die in prison, punished simply for dissent, he becomes a symbol of the silenced survivor, scarred by state violence and haunted by the cost of resistance. His silence isn't born of apathy but of grief and fear, much like many Africans during colonial rule who, after witnessing brutal crackdowns on protests or uprisings, chose to protect their families through quiet endurance. In today's world, Xona reflects those who internalise oppression, prioritising survival in systems that have taught them that speaking up leads only to loss.

Xavi, a bee working on the Hive Beetle plantation, represents the countless African labourers who, during colonial times, were forced into working on European-owned plantations and infrastructure projects under harsh conditions. Even today, many workers in African countries remain trapped in exploitative labour systems owned or influenced by foreign corporations or elites, receiving meagre wages while the wealth flows outward.





Xinti, his son who has risen to the position of supervisor and is desperate to please the Hive Beetles, symbolizes the colonial era intermediaries like the “headmen” or “overseers” in British colonies, or “évolués” in French territories; Africans who were given minor privileges to manage and police their people on behalf of the colonizers. In modern contexts, Xinti echoes the figures within post-independence African governments or corporations who continue to enforce exploitative policies for foreign benefit, believing their loyalty and obedience will earn them advancement. They are the border agents, tax collectors, and local administrators who implement IMF austerity measures, evict communities for foreign mining companies, or greenlight exploitative trade deals, often at the expense of their people.

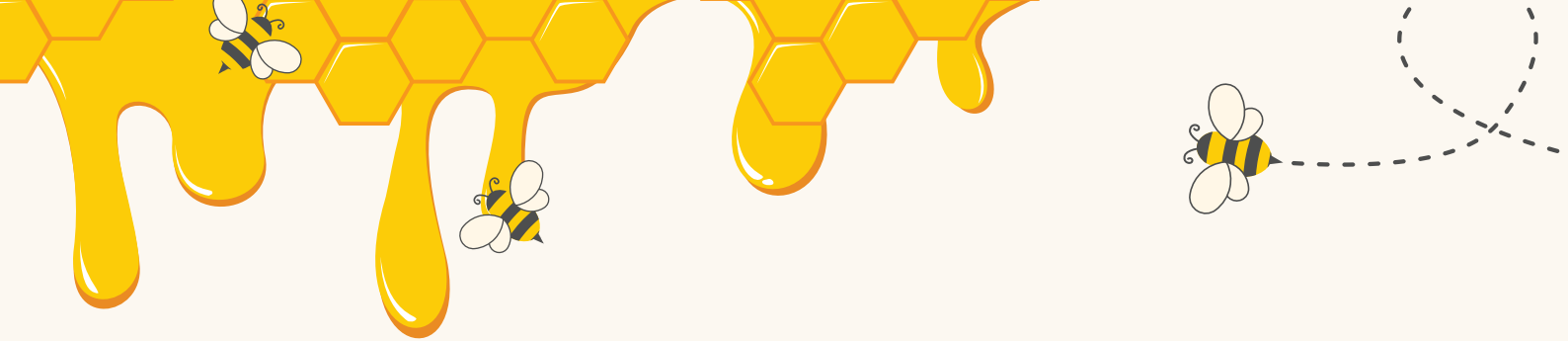
Xavi and his son **Xinti** ultimately represent the collaborators, those who enforce colonial systems for their benefit, similar to post-independence bureaucrats and militarised police who protect corrupt elites while brutalising their people.

MFLAME represents the charismatic face of authoritarianism and imperialism; white supremacist, or shall I say, “hive beetle supremacy”, controlling, extractive, and manipulative. Like colonial governors or modern corporate-backed leaders, he masks exploitation with charm, silencing dissent and maintaining dominance. His rule critiques how power often hides behind performance to sustain injustice.

Aethina, the chief advisor to the Hive Beetles, represents the architects and strategists of imperialism; the likes of Cecil Rhodes and Lord Lugard in the past, who crafted the ideologies and systems of divide and rule, racial superiority, and exploitative governance. In a modern sense, Aethina could be likened to think tanks, consultants, or economic advisors aligned with global capitalism, who continue to draft structural adjustment programs or promote neoliberal reforms that devastate public sectors in the Global South while enriching foreign investors.

Princess Fara, the daughter of **MFLAME**, is a critique of white femininity and saviourism, which often masks complicity, much like colonial figures such as wives of missionaries and slave owners, or today’s celebrity “humanitarians” who speak of justice without surrendering power or calling out imperial systems. She wields inherited power under the guise of innocence, much like aid workers and philanthropists who unknowingly reinforce white supremacy while appearing benevolent. She is a “white woman” who begins to question inequality but remains trapped in her privilege, unable or unwilling to grasp the depth of the injustice fully. Her curiosity about where the resources go is met with lies, symbolic of how colonial administrators and modern-day aid institutions often obscure the truth to protect vested interests. Like many liberal reformers throughout history, she expresses concern without challenging the violent structures that uphold her comfort.





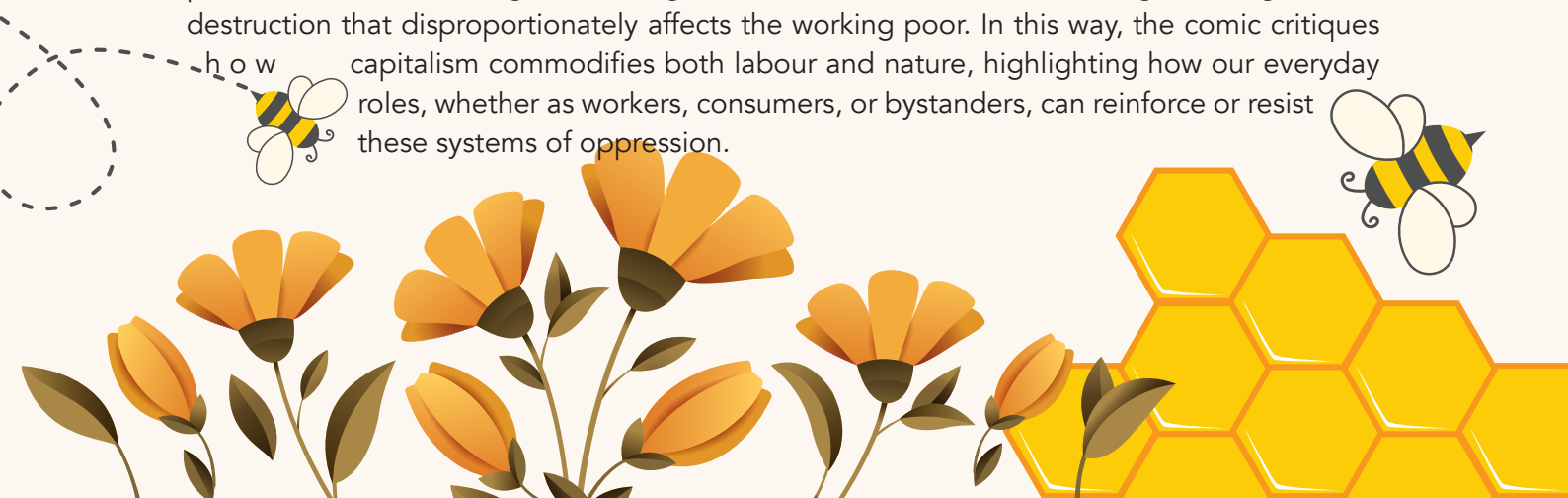
The two generals serving **MFLAME** with unquestioning loyalty epitomise the militarised enforcers of colonial rule; commanders of colonial armies whose work was to suppress African uprisings and enforce European rule. In the post-independence era, these figures are mirrored by security forces trained and funded by foreign governments or corporations, deployed to protect extractive interests and suppress dissent. From soldiers guarding oil pipelines in the Niger Delta, police brutalizing protesters demanding land reform, or military regimes propped up by international alliances, these generals show how violence remains central to the maintenance of global inequality.

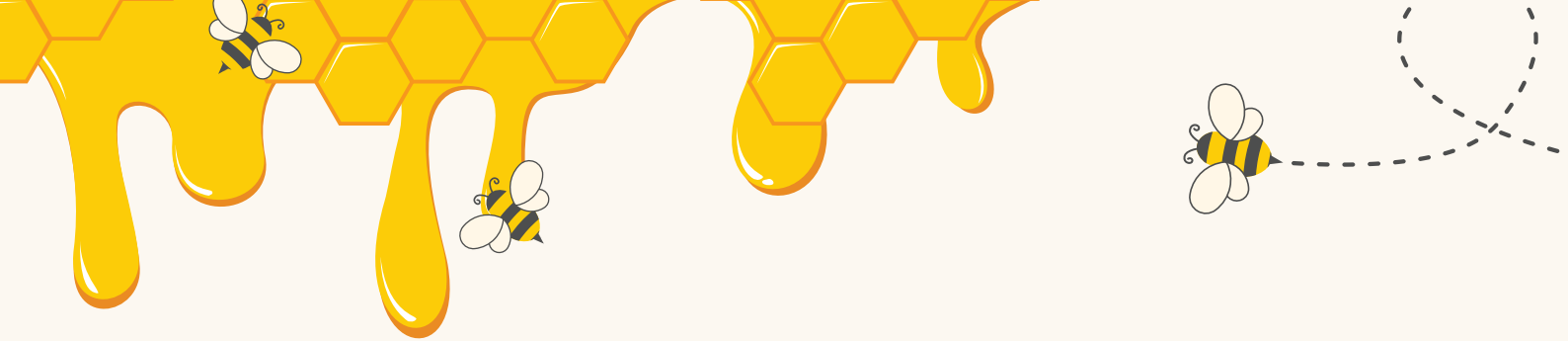
Through these characters, NYUKI paints a layered portrait of how colonial structures are not relics of the past but living systems still upheld by real people with real motivations: ambition, fear, greed, and survival. It forces us to reckon with how even seemingly small roles contribute to the machinery of oppression.

One thing was clear: this story masterfully unpacks how colonialism and capitalism restructured African societies, particularly through the lens of labour and gender. As in pre-colonial times, at the beginning of the story, the hive thrived on abundance, communal sharing, and mutual care, mirroring traditional African economies rooted in collective prosperity. This drastically shifts under the rule of the Hive Beetles, where land dispossession and forced labour reflect historical events like the enclosure of communal lands and the rise of slavery and wage labour in colonial Africa.

The comic emulates how the burden of survival increasingly falls on the bees; Africans, especially women and caregivers, whose unpaid labour, tending to gardens, ensuring food is brought to the table, nurturing the sick, holding families together, sustains a system that exploits them. The demand for multiple shifts and strict quotas represents the extractive nature of modern capitalism, where the working class is expected to do more for less. At the same time, elites like MFLAME and Fara perform oversight without understanding or acknowledging the toll.

The “enhanced” flowers that make bees sick symbolise how industrial agriculture and profit-driven innovation ignore ecological balance and ancestral knowledge, driving climate destruction that disproportionately affects the working poor. In this way, the comic critiques capitalism commodifies both labour and nature, highlighting how our everyday roles, whether as workers, consumers, or bystanders, can reinforce or resist these systems of oppression.





The bees' deteriorating health and overwork reflect how capitalism externalises costs onto the most vulnerable, from rural African women to informal sector workers globally. Their forced dependency on harmful technologies and unsustainable methods mirrors how corporate-driven development erodes traditional, self-sufficient livelihoods. Even the act of growing food becomes politicised labour under surveillance, stripping communities of autonomy and binding them to cycles of exploitation. The storyline also reveals how ecological degradation becomes another tool of control, where poisoned flowers symbolise polluted environments that disproportionately harm the poor.

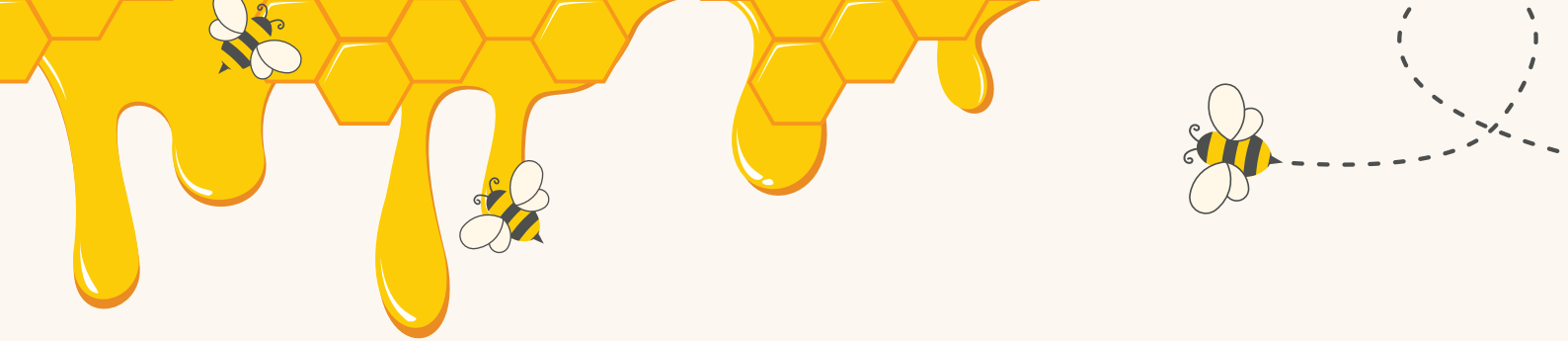
As bees are pushed into survival mode, care work and community support are not seen as valuable, but as invisible burdens. Meanwhile, the Hive Beetles continue to thrive off the crisis, using scarcity and the myths of it to tighten their grip on the hive. NYUKI challenges us to rethink the value of labour, and to closely witness how neo-colonial capitalism relies on both environmental destruction and gendered exploitation. It calls on readers to question systems that reward hoarding and punish nurturing, and to imagine an economy where care, community, and sustainability take centre stage.



We are called to examine the false narratives and propaganda that have perpetuated exploitation, particularly in post-colonial and neo-colonial contexts. The Hive Beetles, who claim to be "Explorers," mirror how colonial powers entered Africa under the pretence of discovery, "civilising missions," and missionary work, only to plunder resources, enslave Africans and leave communities devastated.

Xoe at one point asks, "What schools?...what hospitals?". The false promises of progress, such as the establishment of schools and hospitals, reflect how multinational institutions like the IMF and World Bank sell reforms that only deepen inequality, with debts crippling nations while benefiting a select few. The lie of meritocracy is laid bare in Xoe's counterargument; despite hard work, there is no absolute upward mobility for the oppressed, only further exploitation.





The myth of “partnership” is also echoed in *MFLAME*’s dismissive comments about the supposed benefits of these colonial relationships, masking the reality of their wealth extraction and the lack of support for the bees. He claims that the riches from *Aethina*’s investments are enough to support the community, ignoring that these funds only enrich the elite, leaving the majority of bees in poverty. These false narratives function as tools to maintain the status quo, silencing dissent and preserving exploitation.

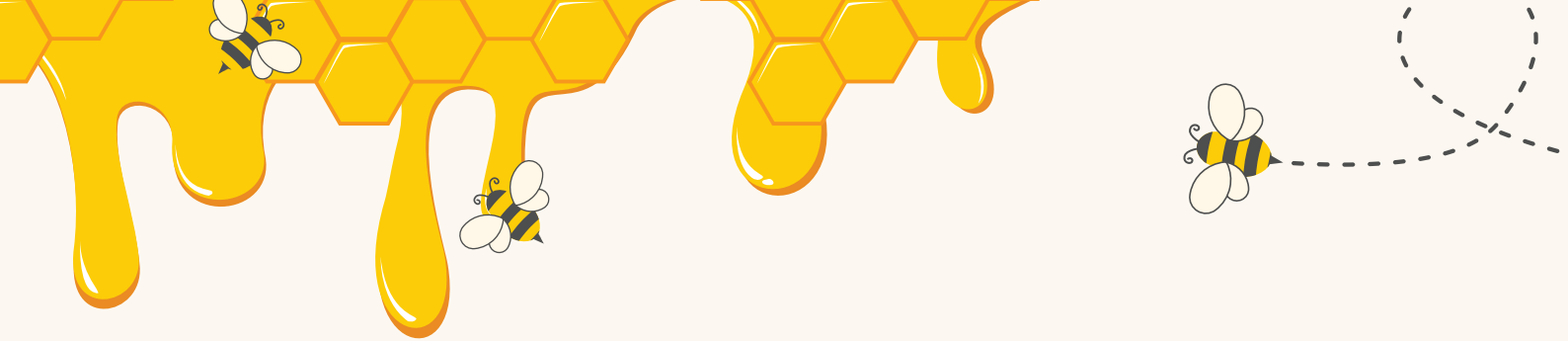
Even when the bees fight back, the false promise of independence is shattered as the Hive Beetles continue to siphon resources under new guises, much like how neo-colonial economic policies exploit former colonies. *The bees*’ newfound “independence,” symbolised by the waving of a new flag, initially represents hope for a brighter future free from Hive Beetle rule. The subsequent invasion by investors and multilateral lenders becomes a stark reminder that independence is often undermined by hidden forces that maintain neo-colonial power dynamics in modern society.

The myth of “honourable” collaboration is highlighted, where workers like Xoe are told their service to the Hive Beetles is noble, as they supposedly provide schools and hospitals in return. However, as Xoe points out, these institutions are merely a façade, with the communities remaining in despair. Another lie is the promise of upward mobility within the capitalist system, where the idea of meritocracy is sold to the bees like the carrot on a stick, suggesting that hard work will lead to rewards. In reality, the system is designed to keep them oppressed. Xavi says, “Don’t worry, Xoe, someday you may get a promotion too.”

Through these characters and their narratives, the comic forces readers to confront how falsehoods are sold as truth to justify continued exploitation, and how, as individuals, we are often complicit in perpetuating these lies unless we critically examine the systems that claim to serve us.

This story also powerfully critiques the illusion of progress sold to post-colonial African nations through neo-liberal reforms and foreign investment. The Hive Beetles’ return, this time disguised as investors and multilateral lenders, mirrors how global financial institutions like the IMF and World Bank re-enter African territories under the banner of “development,” only to enforce debt traps, structural adjustment programs, and exploitative trade agreements. *Aethina*’s, *MFLAME*’s, and the *Hive Beetle*’s tax loopholes and shady treaties reflect real-world tax policies and double taxation agreements that allow multinational corporations to extract wealth while contributing nothing back.





The bees, left to shoulder the burden, reflect the ordinary citizens who bear the brunt of austerity measures, rising taxes, and crumbling public services, while elites collaborate with foreign powers. This story urges us to question who truly benefits from foreign investment, how we are seduced by promises of growth, and how we, too, whether through silence, compliance, or comfort, may be enabling systems of exploitation. It demands a reckoning with our economic sovereignty, reimagining policies that serve the people, and a long overdue conversation on reparations and justice.



It also exposes how leadership, often celebrated for securing “deals,” is complicit in auctioning national resources for short-term gain and enrichment of the elite. The bees’ declining quality of life reflects the real consequences of privatisation and deregulation: schools without books, hospitals without medicine, and workers without protections. Through satire, the comic reminds us that exploitation doesn’t always arrive with guns; sometimes it comes dressed in suits, holding contracts and smiling for photo ops.

The *Hive Beetles’* demand for more after each harvest reflects the cyclical nature of debt repayment. African countries are punished by their former European colonial powers for growth instead of being supported. *The bees’* dwindling hope captures the growing disillusionment among African youth who see their futures mortgaged to lenders they never voted for. In doing so, *NYUKI* invites every reader to see past the “investment” smoke screen and ask who pays, who profits, and what true liberation looks like.

The comic’s resolution, where Xxora takes leadership and promises to redistribute wealth and rebuild systems, mirrors the urgent global call for progressive taxation and economic justice. In this, *NYUKI* becomes more than a story; it is a powerful reflection urging us to think on our roles, whether we are silent, complicit, resistant, or transformative, and to ask what we can do to help dismantle the systems that continue to harm our communities.





The essay above is an analysis of *Nyuki*, a political comic published by Akina Mama wa Afrika. *Nyuki*—Swahili for “bee”—is a symbolic story that follows the journey of bees, creatures known for their collective labour and communal strength. Using this allegory, the comic unpacks the legacies of colonialism, imperialism, and patriarchy, revealing how these forces have shaped modern wealth inequality. Told from a Pan-African feminist perspective, *Nyuki* challenges dominant narratives and reimagines taxation as a tool for justice, equity, and Ubuntu. Read the *Nyuki* Comic here [The Bee Story: A Metaphorical Tale of Wealth Disparity and The Need to Tax the Rich](#)



About the Author

Feminist thinker, writer and organizer rooted in decolonial praxis, with a strong track record in SRHR advocacy, movement-building, and transformative communications.

