

## HOPE AS RESISTANCE: YOUTH AGENCY AND THE RECLAMATION OF MORAL POWER IN NIGERIA'S WOUNDED SOCIAL IMAGINATION

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### ABSTRACT

Nigeria's contemporary socio-political and economic environment is marked by persistent insecurity, rising poverty, institutional fragility, and widespread youth disillusionment. Yet within this wounded national landscape, a counter-movement is increasingly visible: youths and marginalized citizens who are critically interrogating inherited political narratives that perpetuate dependency, corruption, and moral exhaustion. This article argues that such critical civic awakening constitutes hope as resistant; a psychological, moral, and social force through which agency is reclaimed from below. Drawing on contemporary guidance and counselling psychology, African communitarian ethics, moral philosophy, and Christian social theology, the paper reframes hope not as passive endurance or emotional consolation but as disciplined resistance embodied in youth civic engagement, ethical insistence, and communal responsibility. While grounded in the Nigerian experience, the discussion is extended to African and global contexts where similar patterns of inequality, leadership deficit, and civic fatigue prevail. The article concludes that nurturing youth-led hope is essential for restoring moral imagination, sustaining democratic agency, and enabling social healing in wounded societies.

**Keywords:** Hope, Youth Agency, Moral Resistance, Guidance and Counselling.

### 1. Introduction:

#### **The Anatomy of a Wounded Imagination, National Weariness and the Question of Moral Agency**

Nigeria today is shaped by deep and intersecting crises: economic precarity, widespread insecurity, youth unemployment, inflationary pressure, and public distrust in institutions. These realities are not merely structural; they penetrate everyday psychological life. In counselling rooms, parishes, classrooms, and informal conversations, Nigerians, especially the young ones express not only frustration but a growing sense of moral fatigue. Many no longer ask when change will come but whether meaningful change is still possible. With youth unemployment exceeding 53% and the "Japa" (emigration) syndrome reaching an all-time high rate of 73% of Nigerians expressing a desire to leave the country (Africa Polling Institute, 2022), the prevailing narrative is one of exit or despair.

Empirical studies confirm this atmosphere. Afrobarometer surveys consistently show declining trust in political institutions alongside increasing dissatisfaction with democratic outcomes (Afrobarometer, 2023). Yet these same data also reveal a paradox: Nigerian youths, while disillusioned, remain highly interested in politics and governance compared to older cohorts. This paradox invites a deeper question—not simply about despair, but about how hope is being reconfigured.

This article contends that within Nigeria's wounded social imagination, hope is not disappearing; it is mutating. Among youths and marginalized citizens, hope increasingly takes the form of resistance, a refusal to accept inherited political narratives that reproduce poverty, voicelessness, and moral compromise. It is no longer a "waiting for Godot" but has become an active refusal. We examine how the "hoi polloi"—the marginalized youth transitioning from learned helplessness to collective efficacy.

### 2. Psychological Framework: From Helplessness to Agency

In the context of contemporary Guidance and Counselling psychology, the Nigerian condition often mirrors Learned Helplessness, where repeated exposure to corruption leads to civic paralysis. Hope is understood as a core resource for agency wellbeing. To counter this, we apply Snyder's Hope Theory, which posits that hope requires three components: Goals, Pathways, and Agency.

Snyder et al. (2021) conceptualize hope as a cognitive-motivational system involving both agency (the will to act) and pathways (the perceived ability to generate routes toward goals). Where hope collapses, individuals often experience learned helplessness, disengagement, and diminished moral initiative.

Nigeria's prolonged exposure to instability provides fertile ground for such helplessness. Youth unemployment, underemployment, and systemic exclusion have been shown to correlate with psychological distress and civic withdrawal (Adebayo, 2023). However, counselling encounters with Nigerian youths increasingly reveal a counter-dynamic. Beyond migration fantasies and resignation, many young people are developing critical political consciousness, questioning ethnic clientelism, rejecting vote-selling, organizing civic education, and insisting on credible leadership defined by character, competence, compassion, and moral force.

From a counselling standpoint, this represents a shift from helplessness to collective efficacy. Hope here is not optimism about immediate outcomes but commitment to meaningful participation despite uncertainty. Such hope restores dignity and psychological coherence, enabling individuals to experience themselves as moral agents rather than passive victims of circumstance (Nwoye, 2022).

### **3. Philosophical and Ethical Anchors**

#### **3.1 African Communitarian Ethics**

Challenging Old Narratives: Hope and Moral Imagination

In the African ethical tradition otherwise known as African communitarian philosophy (Ubuntu) deepens this insight. (Ubuntu), personhood is inherently relational.. Here, hope is an act of solidarity; to hope for

a better Nigeria is to affirm the dignity of the "other" (Metz, 2020).

Philosophically, hope functions as the guardian of moral imagination—the capacity to envision alternatives to normalized injustice. Appiah (2021) argues that societies stagnate when inherited narratives go unchallenged, especially those that reward loyalty over integrity or treat suffering as destiny. In Nigeria, such narratives have long shaped political culture, encouraging resignation and patronage dependency.

Youth resistance directly (exemplified by the #EndSARS movement) reflects a move away from ethnic clientelism toward a Universalist Communitarianism. This stance is sober rather than utopian, grounded in realism rather than illusion. When young Nigerians insist on accountability, interrogate political myths, and refuse to trade conscience for survival, they enact hope as a moral stance. It resists cynicism, the most corrosive enemy of democratic life by insisting that ethical action remains meaningful even when outcomes are delayed.

Thus, hope exercised by youths is never merely personal. It is an act performed on behalf of the community and future generations.

#### **3.2 Moral Imagination and Narrative Subversion: Hope from Below as Prophetic Resistance**

Drawing on Appiah (2021), we argue that the primary site of resistance is the narrative. By interrogating myths that "politics is a dirty game," Nigerian youths are engaging in Epistemic Resistance—reclaiming the right to define what is possible.

### **4. Theological Grounding: The Prophetic "No"**

Christian social theology views hope as a subversive virtue. It is the "prophetic imagination" that refuses to accept the status quo as final. It offers a further interpretive lens. Biblical hope consistently emerges from the poor, the excluded, and those denied power. Contemporary theology emphasizes that hope is performative: it reshapes present conduct rather than guaranteeing future success (Pope Francis, 2020).

In Nigeria, where faith-based institutions often compensate for weak state capacity, hope is embodied through accompaniment, advocacy, and moral formation. Youth ministries, parish-based social initiatives, trauma-healing programs, and civic education efforts reflect hope as lived resistance—quiet, persistent, and transformative.

Theologically, this resonates with the biblical *anawim*—the lowly whose fidelity sustains history. The resistance of Nigerian youths and marginalized citizens is therefore not peripheral to national renewal; it is its moral engine.

### **5. Humanizing Hope: Youth and the Praxis of Resistance**

Hope takes flesh in ordinary yet courageous choices: young Nigerians who mobilize voters despite intimidation; students who reject cultism and corruption; community volunteers rebuilding schools after violence; professionals choosing integrity over rapid enrichment; families prioritizing education amid economic hardship.

When youths—the *hoi polloi* of society—become objectively committed to dismantling political narratives that bind them to poverty and voicelessness, they embody hope as resistance. Their insistence on ethical leadership and their willingness to do what is necessary to achieve it—organizing, voting, monitoring, speaking—constitute a refusal to surrender the future.

Psychologically, such practices sustain meaning. Socially, they keep democratic imagination alive. Morally, they affirm that agency has not been extinguished, even under adverse conditions.

### **6. From Nigeria to Africa and the Global Context**

Nigeria's experience mirrors broader African and global realities. Across the continent, young people confront unemployment, inequality, and fragile democratic institutions. Globally, political cynicism and authoritarian temptation thrive where hope collapses (Brown, 2023).

Youth-led hope, therefore, is not a local anomaly but a global necessity. Wherever young citizens reclaim moral agency and resist inherited injustice, hope becomes a transnational resource for social renewal.

### **Conclusion:**

Hope as Moral Discipline and Civic Responsibility. This article has argued that hope, properly understood, is not emotional consolation but moral resistance in action. In Nigeria's wounded social imagination, youth agency emerges as a critical site where hope confronts despair, learned helplessness, and inherited injustice. For counsellors, educators, clergy, and policymakers, nurturing this hope is both therapeutic and civic. To cultivate youth-led hope is to safeguard moral imagination, restore agency, and affirm that history remains open. In wounded societies, to hope—especially from below—is already to resist. And to resist, in this sense, is to keep faith with the future.

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