

**“Anatomy of ruthless power” or misplaced aggression: Performing Bad Leadership in  
*The Days of Woe* and *A Play of Giants*.**

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**Abstract**

This paper is devoted to critically examining the lopsided approach of Africa’s committed playwrights to performing leadership, in which leaders alone are blamed for failed system. Through a study of *A Play of Giant* by Wole Soyinka and *The Days of Woe* by Stella Oyedepo, two plays that present the ugliest image of African leaders, the paper argues that the trend in which all attention is focused on the leader alone amounts to marginalising the people and rendering them irrelevant, while at the same time elevating the leader to the level of superhuman and creating an enabling environment for the emergence of despots.

**Introduction**

When a patriotic, highly educated person sees the fate of the country decided by the whims of corrupt, incompetent and often barely literate leaders, silence is impossible. Passivity will be tantamount to the betrayal of the people and a lack of principled integrity. Only those insensitive to the misery of the people can lock themselves up in a room full of flights of imagination... (Khalid al Mubarak Mustafa, 2001: 6)

The above is the creed of committed African writers which informs what they write and how they write it. The quotation is taken from *African Theatre Playwrights and Politics* edited by Martin Banham, James Gibbs and Femi Osofisan. Mustafa goes on to validate the above idea with a statement credited to Prophet Mohammed to the effect that the best jihad is to uphold the truth in the face of an unjust Sultan. He goes on further to quote the Prophet, ‘if you see a deplorable injustice, your duty is to set it right (change it): with your hands. If you can’t then with your tongue. If you can’t then with your heart. The later is the weakest degree of faith.’ With this the link between creative writing and political activism has been established. It clarifies issues for people who have been wondering and who must have observed that African writers produce literature with more politics than creativity. They are clearly on the war path aimed at ridding the society of corrupt leaders and, by implication, entrenching just and literate leaders, though they are yet to begin this latter part of their mission for it will not make sense to destroy without rebuilding.

All the chapters in that volume of *African Theatre* are devoted to studying African playwrights and the strategy of their political activism both in the text of their plays and the context of their societies. In his study of Bole Butake’s plays, Eckhard Breitingner observes that though the playwright does not attack the government bluntly as his colleagues do, the overall concern is same as other playwrights – “good governance” (9). Foluke Ogunleye reveals that this trend is developing tap roots in the academia, when she illustrates how all convocation plays of the University of Ife, from 1976 to 1998, “have provided sturdy

political comments on the Nigerian situation” (18). The question that motivates this writing is how much “good governance” has Africa achieved inspite of decades of political literature. Rather, from civilian to military and back to civilian regimes we are yet to see the much desired but apparently elusive “good governance”. After all these years of monumental failure in almost all aspects of existence, it is doubtful if we still understand what good governance really entails. The premise on which this paper is hinged is that good governance is not the duty of leaders alone. Governance is governance and as the word implies, there is the governor and there is the governed and each has important roles to play. The failure of one individual in a society, to some degree, affects others. In governance, the failure of the leader affects his followers, but same is equally true in the reverse. It may even be easier to deal with a bad leader than to deal with bad followers.

### **Leadership – Leaders and Followers**

Leadership has been variously defined by writers as direction, governance, management, control, guidance and headship. It does not matter at what setting or level it occurs, leadership basically involves two parties. On one hand is the leader whose duty is to direct, govern, manage, control and guide the people towards the realization of the group’s dreams and aspirations. On the other hand are the followers, subjects or citizens whose duty is to support and adhere to the guidance of the leader for the actualization of that shared dream. A leader, therefore, is as important as his followers because without a leader there will be chaos, a recipe for disaster, and without the support of the followers, the leader becomes truly irrelevant. This collaborative ethos demands a holistic approach in portraying leadership and performing same in the theatre. It follows, then, that when a leadership problem occurs and the mission fails, both the leader and the led are liable to scrutiny with a view to determining how each aided or contributed to the failed project. Drama, being a communal art that capitalises on collective human behaviour and action, is the best site for this balanced approach to addressing leadership problem.

However, it is observed that most postcolonial writers often fail to recognise the role of the followers in a failed leadership situation. The reason for adopting this lopsided attitude is articulated in the committed artists’ creed in which they are sworn to ridding the society of tyrants and despots and creating a new society that will practically flow with milk and honey and the “poor masses” will live in peace and harmony. Creative arts has great potential to change society and it worked perfectly in displacing colonial usurpers leading to the independence of many third world countries. This must have helped to encourage writers to adopt the same method for dealing with indigenous leadership without considering the dynamic forces of the two situations. The persistence of bad leadership in the continent is a proof that the approach is not adequate in the present political dispensation, for, as the committed writers are busy satirizing and anatomizing the ruthless power of leaders, problems keep multiplying. This approach resonates with what Chimamanda Adichie calls “single story” which often fails to present an objective picture of an event. As custodians of truth, writers cannot afford to appear subjective in their representation of the society. The

bias with which many writers represent socio-political issues bring them into direct confrontation with the powers leading to their imprisonment, exile and death.

### **Romantic Image of Leaders, ‘Single Story’ and the birth of tyrants**

Literature is believed to possess the power to change the mindset of people and bring about the desired change in the society. But the persistence of bad leadership in Africa despite the quantum of creative output on the subject shows that the ‘single story’ approach of our creative writers, in which they blame bad leadership on the leaders alone, is not working. Leaders are thus portrayed as all knowing and all powerful, for why else are they blamed for everything that goes wrong in the society? The problem with the mystification of leadership is that it raises the leader far above his subjects almost to the level of a superhuman or supernatural being, and at the same time leaves the subjects completely powerless and completely dependent on the leader. Creative writers have thus, inadvertently, created an autocratic situation where the leader is a be all and end all and the subjects “poor masses”. In many works of literature the populace is often addressed as ‘poor masses’, a very condescending expression showing that the writers are as guilty as the leaders in the uncritical manner in which they put down the people. ‘Poor masses’ is equivalent to ‘poor mortals’ which is used to separate humans from the super naturals in a religious discourse.

The mystification of leaders and leadership begins with writers who paint a romantic image of leaders in textbooks. John Maxwell holds a leader responsible for the condition of the followers. Ratifying Max Depree’s idea that “The signs of outstanding leadership appear primarily among the followers,” Maxwell agrees that “to see how the leader is doing, all you have to do is look at the people” [2008: 75]. This, of course, is a hypothetical statement, just another of such aphorisms. In Education we know such hypotheses as “when the pupil has not learned the teacher has not taught,” which critically examined makes the teacher all knowing and the student a tabula rasa. Any wonder that many educational theorists have debunked that line of reasoning, among them is Jerry Harvey who declares;

Many of them (teachers) have the maxim on their desks (or in their minds), "If the student hasn't learned, the teacher hasn't taught." That maxim is quite peculiar, because it clearly implies that the basic responsibility for learning belongs to the professor. Consequently, if the student does badly, the professor is at fault. But, following the same logic rigorously, if the student performs competently the professor must get the credit. For all intents and purposes, then, the student doesn't exist, except as a sort of inanimate, passive receptacle for the professor's competence or incompetence.

In my opinion, anytime a professor accepts responsibility for his students' learning, he denies their existence. He doesn't respect them very much, if at all. If students permit the professor to accept responsibility for their learning, they don't respect themselves (or the professor) very much either. (Learning to Not Teach by *Jerry B. Harvey*. The George Washington University. [www.tealdragon.net/humor/articles/notteach.htm](http://www.tealdragon.net/humor/articles/notteach.htm))

Harvey goes further to state that whenever the purpose is to teach, something is destroyed.

Writers on the subject of leadership, thus, have often concerned themselves with the quality of a good leader which often cast leaders in an idealistic mould. The leader is

arrogated a lot of excellent qualities that make him, in theory, seem omniscient, omnipresent and even omnipotent. This unrealistic image of leadership has the potential of creating on one hand, tyrants and autocratic leaders who believe that they are indispensable and all powerful; and on the other hand the followers who are powerless and passive, and over dependent on the leader for their very existence, and therefore easy prey for dictatorship. The situation also robs them of the motivation to contribute positively to the society. In a situation such as this, it becomes appropriate to lay blame on the leader alone. At the same time as it ascribes so much power and significance to the leader, it renders the followers powerless and insignificant. This notion of leadership which aligns itself to the Trait Theory championed by Thomas Carlyle and others who believe that leaders are born not made, held sway for many decades, and perhaps still does, in spite of the emergence of alternative theories that stress the fact that a leader cannot be effective in all situations. Leaders are thus criticized when they fail to live up to the high expectations. The truth is that leaders are humans too, humans who are assigned higher responsibility. They are not the wisest in the society, nor are they the richest or strongest. They need the followers as much as the followers need them. So while writers are busy debating thus about the quality of leaders, they seem to forget the followers who are inseparable from the leader, a dangerous oversight that has coursed solution to bad leadership to elude us and continue to elude us. The power of followership is thus ignored and this has led to leading to an imbalance.

Rather than give the subject the balanced view it deserves for the purpose of finding real solution to it, many African writers pick on the leaders and present them as demons or heartless blood sucking vampires, thereby begging the question where did these “demons” come from and how did they get to the number one position in the country?

In her interview with thirty single women, Jill Reynolds expected their story to fall within the two likely direction such stories often follow – progressive or regressive. This did not happen and this made her realise that,

For most of us, it is not just one story anyway, waiting to be drawn out by an interviewers’ question, and proceeding seamlessly from the start to a known endpoint. The story is capable of taking different directions, depending on the way the conversation goes.

([www.mysinglespace.org/images/Jill\\_Reynolds\\_SingleStories.pdf](http://www.mysinglespace.org/images/Jill_Reynolds_SingleStories.pdf)) Accessed 26/7/2012.

She also realized that there are stages and levels in each person’s story. This is a pointer to the fact that no single person is totally bad or good. People are affecting each other all the time and learning and reacting to these influences. Leaders are no different.

Chimamanda Adichie tells us the danger of single story in which a character is either statically positive or negative, (depending on the perspective of the storyteller) thereby negating the dynamic nature of man. Hence she was shocked to see that somebody from a family that was painted as very poor, as though being poor means being useless, was actually a very artistic being who was producing exquisitely beautiful and artistically designed baskets. Something no member of the rich family could do. That aspect of the family was conveniently missing from the story her mother told her about the poor family. Single stories, therefore, offers half truths and leaders are often represented in this single story technique. The questions that beg for answers include, what will a writer achieve when he has presented a leader as everything negative and his followers as only victims of bad leadership? Is it really true that the leader is all to blame for the failed system? How much has this single

story technique achieved in solving problem of bad leadership in Africa? Leaders come and go but our problems remain unsolved, rather they keep multiplying. This calls for a change in creative technique, especially when the purpose is to achieve social change and sustainable development which is the dream of all committed African writers.

### **Anatomizing bad leaders**

The popular image of leaders in literature is captured in Stella Oyedepo's weekly column titled "Peeping Through the Window of Life", in *Kwara Weekly*. In this particular episode titled "The Anatomy of Wrathless Power" she gives a detailed description of a bad leader thus,

A tyrant rears his ugly head from time to time in the history of a people. He presents himself like the agent of Satan viciously determined to make the lives of his fellow men a misery.

The crevices of his mind are dark and a good habitat for evil. Those shammed charming smiles, he might exhibit, but they hardly reveal his state of mind....

As the tyrant veers out of his way after snatching the reins of power, he dishes out malefactions in a plate and compels others to eat. He brews treachery with adroitness and force-feeds others with it. As the poor souls who eat the perfidious meal writhe and wriggle in pain, he smiles and grins with great conceit, knowing that he has scored well. (1990: 7)

One gets the impression that General Ibrahim Babangida is in this picture. He was the president of Nigeria at the time Oyedepo wrote this article and he is famous for his charming smiles, and considered by many political analysts as a tyrant. He seized power from President Buhari after a bloodless coup in 1985 and handed over power to Ernest Shonekan, an interim president after the democratic president-elect, Moshood Abiola was murdered in prison. The first letter bomb incident in Nigeria occurred during his regime, killing Dele Giwa, a highly talented and admired editor-in-chief of one of the country's most powerful print media, *NewsWatch Magazine*. During his regime also, a lot of High ranking political and military officers were executed, imprisoned or banned from elections for life or for ten years. One of the most controversial political action he took without adequate consultation was the execution of Major General Mamman Vatsa and ten other top military officers whom he accused of plotting to overthrow him. He was accused of paving the way for his life presidency, especially when he changed from military leader to a civilian one. He registered Nigeria with the Islamic Conference Organization (ICO) to the chagrin of everyone including his top cabinet officers. He refused to appear in the Oputa Panel of investigation. The article may also be alluding to Buhari who exhibited much tyrannical traits and had become so unpopular that his overthrow by Babangida was roundly welcomed by Nigerians. The description can also fit any of the many infamous African despots – Idi Amin of Uganda, Mobutu Sese Seko of Zaire, Fransisco Marcias Nguema of Equatorial Guinea, and the rest of them. One thing that should be born in mind is that all these so called tyrants were regarded by their people as saviours and were well received and applauded, initially. At what point then did they turn into monsters and what or who is responsible for such an ugly transformation? Why are there so many of them in African continent? Is it not possible that people can corrupt their leaders or at least help to create an enabling environment for this ugly situation? These are some of the questions that bug the mind of

this writer and for which answers are being sought in this writing through an examination of two plays – *A Play of Giant* written by Wole Soyinka and *The Days of Woe* written by Stella Oyedepo – both of which capture the image of tyrannical leaders. The study is aimed at striking a balance in the representation of bad leadership, with particular focus on the followers.

### **Truth be told, Leaders are Humans too**

This lopsided picture of leadership has been debunked by Barbara Kellerman in her provocative book, *Bad Leadership: What it is, How it Happens, Why it Matters*. Kellerman's study of bad leadership reveals, among other things, that the leader is as human as the people he is expected to lead; a leader can only be talented in particular aspect of life; and that the followers are equally to blame for bad leadership. Though Kellerman's book focuses on leaders in the business sector, the book is very relevant in the study of leadership in general because leadership can occur at any level of human existence and the perspective of Kellerman's study applies also to other levels of leadership since the goal of leadership remains the same at all levels. Kellerman reveals how complex bad leadership situation is and declares that "there is no bad leadership without bad followership."

She goes further to elaborate on this when she declares:

..., when leaders are evil, but it is understanding the followers that presents the greatest challenge. How can we make sense of those that tolerate, enable, and even actively support leaders who are widely viewed as wicked? How does it happen that evil leaders hold sway, in some cases for many years? Why are they not more often done in, literally, by their own constituents, who are often the victims? [P.192]

Kellerman, thus is suing for a balanced, more critical and objective discussion as well as representation of leadership situation, for a more result oriented outcomes.

Again, blaming leaders alone for failed system creates a tension between the leaders and the led such that a battle line seems to be drawn between the leader and the led where the people look at their leader as responsible for all their woes and the leader sees and treats his followers as uncooperative, saboteurs, and unpatriotic.

### **The Untold Story about the Bad leader**

If my enemy speaks the truth, i won't say because it's spoken by my enemy i won't listen, (Nwabueze, 2005: 53). With this idea from Emeka Nwabueze's play, *When the Arrow Rebounds*, which emphasizes the need for fair play and upholding of truth no matter what, we re-examine the bad leaders in *A Play of Giants* and *The Days of Woe*. The aim is to discover whether they are truly demons and monsters as the playwrights lead us to believe? Are they just humans cut up in a political pressure? To discover what these targets of dramatic contempt really are we shall examine their speeches and their actions searching for the human behind the mask. In other words searching for motivations and stimuli to which they are responding. We need also look at what other characters have to say about them. On the other hand, we need to critically evaluate the role of the followers to see how both their actions and inactions may have put some pressure on the leader to react in some negative manner.

There is enough evidence in *A Play of Giants* to suggest that Kamini, the dramatic monster, has human feelings, and can trust and love, abhors senseless killing of innocent

people; however, he can be quite ruthless with enemies of the state, irrespective of who that perceived enemies are. The way he receives his friends from other African countries shows that he values friendship. He loves and respects the United Nations Secretary which is why he almost goes into a fit with anger when he realises he has betrayed him. Kamini's anger appears to emanate more from the fact that he could not show him how angry he has made him the way he knows best. The man had escaped before Kamini realises that the secretary was not really his friend. He seems more frustrated by the escape than the betrayal. He loves to be addressed as "uncle". He makes sure his guests are well-fed and comfortable. He strives to elevate the culture of his people, though we are made to see that as being superstitious.

We are led to believe that these leaders engage in senseless killings, but they believe they are fighting subversive elements within their countries who have been brainwashed to destabilise the country and pave the way for imperial powers to plunder the developing nations. Right from the beginning of the play these leaders made it clear that they are not dealing with patriots but saboteurs. Kasco states what he saw in the so called guerrilla fighters in his country;

But that is obvious, no? It is not the lust for responsibility which makes the social misfits to become guerrillas. If you think first of responsibility and governing, you give up search for power. Lust for power, oui. But lust for responsibility – I never hear of it. (2)

Gudrum, the journalist from Scandinavia among them lends support to Kasco's opinion of the guerrillas whom she describes as "hiding from their failure to cope with reality...never-do-wells from the third world who ought to be in their countries, contributing something to development." This description fits the image of an irresponsible outlaw who is a liability to his country and family. This crop of people who always blame their indolence and failures on somebody else and run away to other countries at the slightest chance they get. While in their new home they are still what they were back home. The same fate follows a perceived saboteur or renegade anywhere in the world in the form of banishment, imprisonment or death, depending on time and place. Hence Kamini proposes death, "All subversives bad people. Mostly imperialist agents. Better you kill them first (3). As a defender of African course, for which he has won a lot of medals and recognitions, it is not surprising that he hated those who uncritically act as stooges for the capitalist nations. When the Chairman of Bugara Central Bank tells him about the conditions given by World Bank before it would give loan to Bugara amounts to mortgaging Bugara body and soul, Kamini flares up;

So they can come and send their stinking spies into Bugara saying they come to supervise loan projects? No deal. Kamini wise to their game of infiltrating Third World country with syphilitic spies... (5)

He frankly does not understand why World Bank, which belongs to every country, should discriminate against his own country, Bugara. For him and his friends, this is economic sabotage and a further proof that the capitalist nations are in conspiracy to stifle developing countries, economically. When he is denied world bank loan, he instructs his central bank chairman to print more Bugaran currency. It is the duty of the chairman to explain the implication of such action, but he does not chose his word carefully when he bleats, "...Even now, at this moment our national currency is not worth its weight in toilet paper" (6/7). A

careless remark like that would pass unnoticed at other times, but not when the president is at his wit's end about the financial disaster looming in his country and World Bank practically refuses to grant him loan by placing conditionality which the chairman himself agrees amounts to mortgaging "Bugara body and soul" (6). What Kamini needs at that moment is solution not careless comment. The tension created by the activities of the imperialist governments and their stooges within Bugara, adds in making such a remark most inappropriate and the chairman has his face washed in the toilet bowl for calling Bugara currency "shit money".

### **Performing bad leadership**

#### *A Play of Giants*

The giants are the notorious dictators of African leadership represented in the play by Benefacio Gunema, Emperor Kasco, Field Marshal Kamini of Bugara and general Barra Tubuom, who are stereotypes of Macias Nguema (Equatorial Guinea); Jean-Baptiste Bokassa (Central African Republic); Idi Amin (Uganda); Mobutu Sese Seko (Congo/Zaire) all self-made life presidents.

In the play these leaders are gathered in Bugara Embassy in New York, but the story is centred on Kamini while the other three have come to give support to their friend who has been invited to give a speech at the United Nations assembly. As they dine and wine while posing for a sculptor, they discuss issues of state and compare their experiences, problems and their strategies of dealing with perceived enemies of the country and their internal stooges. These leaders are convinced of their leadership style and blaming everyone else for their failures, exchange strategies of crushing perceived subversive elements in their countries who they accuse of being agents of imperialist powers.

These leaders seem to have two overpowering fears that motivate their actions and decisions and which also run through their conversation from the beginning to the end of the play. They are afraid of foreign influences and intelligence as well as fear of being overthrown. The two fears are related because they think that foreign powers are inciting dissidents within their countries to edge them out of office. They consider these indigenes as traitors and treat them as such. When a perceived activist is caught, in addition to gruesomely murdering him, his family is subjected to nightmarish existence.

Soyinka, in the introduction to the play describes these men as monsters and Idi Amin of Uganda he baptized, "certified psychopath", "mindless terror", "cold-blooded killer" and "repellent dictatorship". 1<sup>st</sup> Russian calls General Barra Tuboum, "the well-known neo-colonial stooge and shameless exploiter of his own African peoples" [44]. He also brands Kamini a "Buffoon" and an "overgrown child" and then presents him a symbolic gift of Babushka doll.

While on this mission, Kamini's wrathless nature and insecurities are played out, obviously meant to make us lose sympathy for the man and forget the injustices he has suffered.

The seven types of bad leadership revealed in Kellerman's book— Incompetent, Rigid, Intemperate, Callous, Corrupt, Insular and Evil – are also found in the followers, but non of the plays under study pays enough attention to that fact. The leaders in both plays are cast in evil image and yet they hold office for a long period of time. The leaders in *A Play of Giants* have all been president for so many years and have no intention of stepping down anytime soon, hence they declare themselves "life" presidents.

It does appear that it is the followers that create the enabling environment for bad leadership to occur and thrive, either by being accomplices or playing victims. In both conditions it will be illogical to expect the followers to resist bad leadership. In *A Play of Giants*, Kamini finds accomplices not only in the cream of his society, but also in African Union who regard him as hero and defender of African heritage; and foreign governments who find him a useful instrument for the propagation and advancement of their national interest both in Bugara, in particular, and Africa as a whole. With such enormous support coming from both within and outside his country, illustrated by the numerous awards and recognitions he has received, evidenced in the numerous medals that adorn the “massive frontage” of his military uniform [p.1]; one wonders what, when and how things go so wrong for Kamini? We discover that it is the same groups who use him to achieve their selfish goals that fight to depose him when he no longer dances to their tune. When he is amenable to their desires they hail him and support him and when he defies them, they do not only withdraw their support from him, they poison the mind of his people against him. When members of his cabinet begin to desert him in the Bugara embassy, as part of the conspiracy against him, Kamini believes, and rightly too, that it is the handiwork of the imperialists who have risen against him because he champions the cause of his people. As for the deserters he declares,

I know they have been bribed to run away with capitalist money. Soon they will start to write bad things about me in the capitalist press, when the truth is that they ran away from guilty conscience. I know they were in this embezzlement plot with Dr. Kiwawa. [P.25]

He also knows why the super powers have turned against him and he explains it to his guests; ‘They said I killed people, that I tortured people and locked them in prison – all sorts of bad things about me because ... I tell them to go to hell. No black man ever tell them like that before’. [p. 23]

And when the coup happens he reiterates his conviction that it is the super powers who are after him, not because of his purported crimes, but because he stood up against their exploitation.

Is great pity. Is pity I allow that top civil servant (referring to the Secretary General of the United Nations) to escape. He cause the coup. It is a United Nations coup, sponsored by super-powers with World Bank. Because Kamini is not slave. I say to British, bugger off. I say to Americans, bugger off. Then the Russians came. They think also they own Kamini. I tell them also, bugger off. Now they make coup against me. All of them, join together. They not fit to face Kamini, man to man one to one inside Bugara, so they make coup from here with all the United Nations super-powers. Is pity I don’t have their stooge here, that top civil servant man whom I think my friend. I know what i do to him under Bugaran law. [p. 61]

This shows that Kamini is aware or has become aware that the foreign powers were using him to achieve their political purpose and render his own country powerless and vulnerable. Having realized thus how would he shake the hounds off without incurring their wrath? Though he is an illiterate and tactless, but the threats are real. He obviously does not want Bugara to continue to play the underdog in world political economy, but his strategy for asserting himself fails.

When news of the coup in Bugara reaches the Embassy, Professor Batey calls it “grossly unjust” because all Kamini has done was to extricate his people from the clutches of imperialist plundering, this is why they have turned against him,

And sometimes even the people you serve will betray you. That is the unkindest cut of all. Bought or simply misguided, blinded by their own greed or incapable of transcending their petty clan loyalties, they desert the lofty heights of your vision and burrow busily beneath the mountains of your dreams. [p. 53]

Apparently his mission is no different from that of other Africans, including literary writers, who would never let us forget how Europe underdeveloped Africa and still exploiting her. The difference, perhaps, lies in the approach to ending it. While writers write about the problem, Kamini tries to confront it directly, to put the words into action, so to speak.

When the people overthrow their leader it is understandable and can be viewed appropriate and democratic. But when an aggrieved foreign power overthrows a leader with the help of insiders who are bought over, miseducated or brainwashed it is a different matter. The question then becomes, who and what determines when to label a leader 'bad'.

Prof. Batey is not a Bugaran citizen and neither are the foreign powers that sponsor the overthrow of Kamini. The question is, where are the Bugaran citizens and what is their candid opinion about their president, about the interference from the foreign governments and about the coup that have just taken place? Its all about the president, the foreign governments and their stooges, the subversive elements and saboteurs, nothing about the common citizens, the vast majority of Bugaran masses who are at the receiving end of all these intrigues – the police, priests, doctors, lawyers, teachers, trade unions, labour unions, parents, youths, etc. It is as if they do not exist or they do not matter. It may be easy not to notice that there are no people in Bugara in *A Play of Giants* as a literary text, but in a performance it will leave a gaping hole.

### ***The Days of Woe***

Unlike *A Play of Giant* in which the citizens are written out of their own story, in *The Days of Woe* we meet the people and their king. We see the tyrant and we see his victims, sometimes confronting each other.

A bad leader is portrayed in its most disgusting image in this play. The land of Idera is ruled by a tyrant who seems to relish in terrorizing his community to the point that no one is spared. He rapes women no matter the age or marital status; he kills and dehumanizes his people. He has no respect for the elders of the land and he has no cabinet. He ensures his personal security by fortifying himself with powerful charms imported from other lands. We are also made to know that he came to power by force, but we are not shown how this happened.

The citizens of Idera are so afraid of their king that whenever they hear his voice they scamper into the bush. They breathe a sigh of relief when Agbako set out on a journey and believe their days of woe are over. But he comes back after a while and the rounds of abuse and dehumanization resume.

In *The Days of Woe*, the pathetic condition of the suffering masses opens the play. Against a sombre background, a group of men and women move onto the stage like shadows exhibiting extreme unhappiness. They sit in a semi circle, leaving a gaping big empty space at the centre which speaks of the emptiness in the land. The picture is heightened by the conspicuous presence of two hairless characters, a blind one and a half lame one. All the characters are costumed in torn clothes. Then Oki, the spokesman for the masses, steps into the open space and urges the people to weep and drown their sorrows with their tears. The scene ends with a

vituperation session in which each citizen contributes a curse on the king. The communal mourning session implies a complete loss of hope for the people and a ploy to attract supernatural intervention.

In *The Days of Woe*, the tyrant is reflected in the character of Wokilumo, alias Agbako – a despot and a symbol of everything a leader should not be. A description of Wokilumo reads:

He is in his late thirties, corpulent and with a protuberant stomach.... A fetish hangs pedantry over his chest. [p. 13]

This demonic entity rides onto the stage on a human horse. His retinue is made up of his henchmen and his cronies. The atrocities he unleashes on his people are too many to recount here. He has so terrorized the people that they scamper into bushes on his approach. He turns a young man into a goat with rope round his neck and makes him walk on all fours. We do not know why he has to do that. Oki, the people's spokesman is so frustrated that he has to commit suicide.

However, fate has to come in after all attempts to depose the wicked king fail to yield any result. The four revered elders of the land, Ojigi, Epo, Bejide and Ojiji – of ages between seventy and hundred – who dare to go to Agbako's palace to make him see more reason to be human, are shot and wounded with a dane gun. What the people fear most in Agbako and which is the main reason they restrain from any open confrontation with him is his fortification with very potent and powerful charms imported from an unknown community. It is said that matchets and bullets cannot penetrate his body. The over five thousand protective incisions on his body are each capable of warding off ten evils aimed at him. There is nothing for the people to do except to wait for Orunmila, the almighty God to decide their fate. Eventually the Agbako is afflicted by an incurable disease called black tongue

At least the citizens are visible in *The Days of Woe* unlike in *A Play of Giants*. But the nature of the people shows exactly why they are treated like nothing. They are portrayed as indolent mentally incapacitated beings who have lost all sense of self worth. They have no ambition, no trade or skill, dressed dirty and tattered clothing. So afraid of their leader that they scamper into the bush on his approach. They huddle together like a bunch of frightened chickens and when they find their voices all they do is complain about their condition of poverty and blaming same on the leader, who in contrast is living well with his officers. Their laziness irks Agbako

Though this deplorable condition of the citizens is meant to attract our sympathy for them and condemnation for their leader, one does not fail to be disgusted with the people and even understand the Agbako's frustration when he calls them lazy lying bunch of low lives. One does not fail to see the insincerity and fraudulence among them.

### **The profile of the bad followers**

To assess people's contributions to bad leadership, it is important to study the profile of consensus bad leaders, and the way they came into power in the first place. Stating the reality of monsters in the leadership of African countries, Soyinka declares in the opening of his play, *A Play of Giants*, thus,

Unlike many commentators on power and politics, I do not know how monsters come to be, only that they are and in defiance of place, time and pundits. According to some of these last, our grotesqueries are a product of our socio-economic histories, yet no one has ever satisfactorily explained why near identical socio-economic conditions (including a similar colonial

experience) should produce on the one hand, a Julius Nyerere and on the other an Idi Amin. What we are able to observe more confidently (in addition to their mechanism for first acquiring power) is how our subjects succeed in remaining entrenched in power long after they have been unambiguously exposed for what they are. [P.v]

The plays are so focused on the leaders that the followers seem to be nonexistent or unimportant. More in *A Play of Giant* than in *The Days of Woe* the people are left out of scrutiny. Probably because the action takes place in New York, very far away from Bugara where the victims of Kamini's reign of terror reside, we are not able to see or hear from the victims themselves. The leaders, it seems, are thus selected and isolated for study in a controlled environment, like specimen for laboratory experiment.

The type of character a leader was before coming into power will go a long way in determining whether he is really a monster or if he became one while on the job. If he became a monster after becoming a leader, the forces that transformed him must be outside him and must be identified. But if he has always been a monster, and yet the people allowed him to creep into power, then may be they really deserve to be ruled by a monster. The leader and his subjects are constantly influencing and affecting each other, but the situation of bad leadership is often presented in theatre as a forum for the execution of a leader of a failed project instead of a forum for probing into the factors responsible for that failure. This lopsided view of the situation engenders bias and prejudice toward the leader while endorsing the part played by the followers. So while the leader is expected to develop into a superhuman, the followers are being shown the way to degeneration. The followers, who make up the bulk of the audience that watch these performances, leave the theatre believing that their leaders are totally to blame for the failed project and they are immune to growth and development.

### **Conclusion**

Blaming leaders alone for a failed system is the stock-in-trade of many African literary writers, a trend that has survived from colonial era. While it is conventional, the technique has proved ineffectual in bringing about sustainable development. The argument of this writer is that the lopsided approach to performing leadership problem, which neglects the contributions of the followers to bad leadership is counterproductive. It amounts to marginalising the people and ignoring their power and ability to take care of their problem. The truth is that the followers are equally to blame for bad leadership. As the leader needs to change so do the followers. As leaders need orientation in leadership, so do followers need orientation in followership, otherwise it will be difficult to reach a meeting point. Balance, therefore should be brought to bear on the performance of bad leadership so that both leaders and followers will learn their contributions to the failed system. That will be the contribution of theatre to the issue of bad leadership in this twentieth century. It is important, at this point in our development to always remember that two parties are involved in any leadership situation and both parties have role to play for things to work out. In performing bad leadership, therefore, each member of the audience should be able to see how he has contributed to the bad leadership, otherwise the cycle will continue with any leader that comes along no matter his good intentions. If any party fails to perform, it will make the

work of the other difficult. And when a leader's efforts are diminished or thwarted, he sees traitors and saboteurs.

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