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LEADERSHIP IDEOLOGY IN UBONG NDA'S *KHAKHIGBADA*

by

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ABSTRACT

Like oil on canvas, the pages of African literature are replete with ugly deeds done the society by incompetent and corrupt African leaders. Leadership in Africa is portrayed in the mould of brazen corrupt, bare-faced victimization, power drunkenness, obnoxious and destructive policies, wanton wastage of life and other negatively-propelled nuances, which only lead to consistent and cyclic crumbling of post-independent African societies. Leadership in Africa, particularly Nigeria, is painted as predominantly bestial and totally oblivious of either human essence or societal values; *Khakhigbada*, by Ubong Nda, showcases these leadership anomies in their current coins.

INTRODUCTION

Right from creation, man has been given the authority and power to dominate and control other creatures within and around his environment. This, it seems, has been the origin of man's exercise of authority and supremacy over all other animals. This power grew stronger as man engaged in flexing muscles with his fellow human beings in the exercise of his political ambitions. This struggle culminated in oppression and violence, and as a result, only the fittest survived. The fittest have always been those who employ their political, religious, economic and social powers in suppressing their lesser counterparts.

All over the world, the oppressed have always been fighting for their political liberation. In Africa, most of the states were colonized by the Europeans. In South Africa, in the days of apartheid, the blacks who were the actual owners of the land were subjected to untold victimization and alienation. Various obnoxious

laws were put in place by the dominating whites to check and cage the freedom of the blacks. This dovetailed into stiff resistance from the blacks. The struggle for freedom made thousands of people to lose their lives. The sufferings of these blacks are portrayed by such playwrights as Athol Fugard in his plays, *Sizwe Banzi is Dead* and *The Island*. Lewis Nkosi, in his play, *The Rhythm of Violence*, also shows the violence that emanates from resistance to oppression.

In East Africa, opposition to oppression and slavery is evident in Ngugi Wa Thiongo's and Micere Githa Mugo's play, *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi* (1977). This play shows the struggle of the blacks over their imperial masters. Kimathi is the focus as he leads his people firmly against white rule.

In Nigeria, there are many plays which portray the effect of the imperialist regime in colonized Nigeria. Ola Rotimi's *Ovonramwen Nogbaisi* (1974), Wole Soyinka's *Death and the king's Horseman* (1975), to mention a few, show the extent to which white rule went in oppressing Nigerians. Bode Sowande's *Tornadoes Full of Dreams* (1990) is another exposition on the humiliation and oppression of the blacks by their slave masters – the white colonialists.

When independence was finally granted Nigeria, the political experience of the ruled was not different from what it was under colonial rule; the only difference was in the people and their skin colour. Exploitation and suppression still reigned. Hence, playwrights, right from the military era have engaged themselves in exposing and condemning the kind of leadership model that have been prevalent in Nigeria overtime. The image of the leader has not been different as he is still the oppressive, dominating leader who employs everything within his political arsenal to afflict the masses. Gbileka submits that:

... the practice of democracy in Africa has come under two trends – capitalism and socialism ... one thing is common, a violation of democracy. No matter where it is practiced on the African continent, it has been characterized by violence, tyranny, corruption, poverty and greed (92).

The focus of playwrights have now shifted to commentary, criticism and condemnation of obnoxious leadership regimes in post-colonial Africa. *Holding Talks* (1979) by Ola Rotimi portrays a situation in Nigeria where conferences, deliberations and discussions are held in the face of mass suffering and deprivation, without any practical attempt to alleviate the sufferings of the people. This is an indictment on the non-action posture of the Nigerian political leadership whose efforts are exerted much on talk and talk but little or no action. *Hopes of the Living Dead* (1988) by the same playwright x-rays the undauntedness of lepers (Nigerians) to put an end to their abnormal situation. The lepers express their displeasure over years of distress, alienation and callousness into which insane leadership has placed them. *A play of Giants* (1989) by Wole Soyinka also treats political issues. It assesses the kind of leadership found in the African continent; Leaders whose conception of leadership is based on the elimination of others.

Soyinka, in *Kongi's Harvest* (1974) portrays the tyranny visited upon the Nigerian society by a mean, wicked and cynical leadership. And in *The Beautification of Area Boy* (1995), the statement is clear that our leaders are not better than area boys in their conducts of looting the treasury, killings and maiming. The society is portrayed as adrift, dislocated and in want of a direction – a direction on the sane path of good leadership.

Perhaps, more than anyone else, Femi Osofisan stands out as the most consistent voice raised loud and clear against corrupt leadership in Africa; and the need for revolution as the only way out of the imbroglio. Muiyiwa Awodiya acknowledges that in Osofisan's plays "myths of rebellion are enacted to confront the widespread political corruption that has accompanied Nigeria's independence since 1960 (81).

In *A Restless Run of Locusts* (1975) Osofisan reckons with obnoxious and outmoded values like absolute respect for elders, regardless of their brazen corruption. Osofisan out-rightly calls for its dislodging. In *The Chattering and the Song* (1977), a revolt is staged against the oppressive and tyrannical leadership of Alafin Abiodun, the king (a leader-type). In *Who's Afraid of Solarin?* (1978) municipal corruption is given focus as practiced by local council chairman in the play. Here, Osofisan calls for a revolutionary purging for sanity to return to the society. In *Morountodun* (1982) social injustice, political exploitation and the oppressive system of

taxation by the leadership is the focus, while in *Once Upon Four Robbers* (1980) government agents are portrayed as no better than robbers; a phenomenon which warrants the audience to vote enmasse against the government policy of killing robbers. By Osofisan's creati-judicial standards, the government agents and their leaders should rather kill and exterminate themselves from the human society.

On and on, Osofisan, perhaps currently, the most prolific writer in Africa, raves on with his portrayal of uncanny political conducts of the leadership without failing to attach his overt revolutionary arrangee against such. In *Red is the Freedom Road* (1986), *No More the Wasted Breed* (1982), *The Oriki of A Grasshopper* (1986) and *Midnight Hotel* (1986), the Nigerian society is x-rayed and the ugly entrails of its stinking and nauseating political leadership exposed in abandon. *Midnight Hotel*, most typically, leaves no one in doubt as to which society Osofisan brings into focus. The play, "caustic, virulent and vitriolic on the ruling class in Nigeria" (Awodiya, 19) is a hilarious comedy that satirizes political corruption, religious immorality and economic anomie, especially of Nigeria's second republic – all occasioned by incompetent and corrupt leadership. These and many other Nigerian plays have made specific references to negative political usage expressive in obnoxious leadership in the country. In one way or the other, these authors have succeeded in painting negative political images and impressions to their mass audiences.

Very recently, Ubong Nda, in his play, *Khakhigbada*, (2005) joined the band of literary authors and critics in exposing and criticizing the ugly trend of political leadership in the country. The play presents the state of a nation under siege occasioned by purposeless leadership. It presents a leadership that is bereft of commitment and dedication to service. The politics that brings about such leadership is premised on elimination and blackmail. *Khakhigbada* is a social commentary on the current leadership of Nigeria where the ruling party engages in acts of sabotaging their opponents. The play captures the true picture of Nigerian political climate where only the ruling party members are the beneficiaries of the "dividends of democracy". They engage themselves solely in self-aggrandizement, looting the economy and not rendering any service to the citizenry who supposedly voted them into office. Senseless accumulation of money and property constitute some of