



# **AUTOCRACY AND POWER ABUSE THROUGH CHARACTERS IN *INHERITANCE* BY DAVID MULWA AND *AN ENEMY OF THE PEOPLE* BY HENRIK IBSEN**

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## **Abstract**

Autocracy and power abuse have become recurring themes in the narratives of post-colonial leadership across numerous countries, often leaving an indelible mark on society. This phenomenon finds resonance in literature, where authors artfully mirror such societal ills by crafting imaginary leadership scenarios using fictional characters. This way, they create vivid images that resonate deeply with readers, offering understanding of the oppressive regimes and their impact on individuals and communities. The current paper undertook a thorough examination of two seminal texts, *Inheritance* by David Mulwa and *An Enemy of the People* by Henrik Ibsen, to uncover how these works harness the power of character portrayal to its fullest extent, deftly conveying their intended messages about autocracy and power abuse. The Marxist theory by Karl Marx informed the study, with descriptive research design being used to analyse the qualitative data obtained through textual analysis. Through thematic analysis, the study finds that through contrasting characterizations and interactions, authors demonstrate the consequences of unchecked power and the complexities of navigating systems of oppression. Additionally, characters confront autocracy and the misuse of power through their unwavering commitment to truth and justice, underscoring the importance of individual agency and moral courage in effecting positive change within society. By portraying characters who struggle against oppressive structures and highlighting the consequences of poor leadership, the texts underscore the urgent need for accountability and ethical governance.

Keywords: Autocracy, Abuse of power, Marxism, Characters, leadership, corruption

## **1.0 INTRODUCTION**

The themes of autocracy and power abuse are widespread in stories touching postcolonial period, showing the challenges of governing. Authors often use literature to explain these problems, using made-up characters to reveal the details of oppressive systems. They often utilize fictional narratives as a medium to delve into the complexities of oppressive regimes and their impact on society. Through the lens of characters, authors portray the struggles and challenges faced by individuals under autocratic rule, offering insights into the dynamics of power and authority. As noted by Orock (2022) literary works by authors such as Chinua Achebe, serve as a mirror to society, reflecting its triumphs and tribulations.

In literature, Duvanova (2023) argues that the portrayal of characters navigating political authority is key to understanding autocracy and power abuse. Characters often represent both victims and agents of oppressive regimes, dealing with moral questions, agency, and resistance. Authors use their experiences to reveal the complexities of power dynamics, showing how autocratic rulers control and silence dissent. Studying how characters interact with their socio-political surroundings helps scholars understand the complex power dynamics in post-colonial societies.

George and Joseph (2019) reviewing the African Literature in Gordon and Gordon, entitled "Understanding Contemporary Africa" explain that in areas where misuse of power and autocracy are common, low development is experienced. The notion that when most leaders ascend into power, they use their power to debase their subjects as is evident in the contemporary society.

Dictatorship has its own means in which it ensures a leader stays in power endlessly. Artists in their works try to reveal how power is demonstrated in their artistic works. Authors illustrate how the exercise of power and authority in society influences the general public changing their perceptions towards power for example, the selected playwrights play up the nature of power in their dramatic plays.

Scholars such as Jabak (2019), highlight the betrayal by leaders to the citizens who entrusted them with the positions. Jack in his analysis indicated that George Orwell's *Animal Farm*: A protest against deceptive revolutionary figures, leaders break their promises, transforming into dehumanizing dictators, even more oppressive than the ones they originally rebelled against. This research assessed the level of power sharing, the theme of misuse of power and dictatorship and the reflection of societal issues that revolve around poor leadership using one selected European play and one selected African play: the selected plays are David Mulwa's *Inheritance* and Henrik Ibsen's *An enemy of the People*.

## 2.0 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The study was guided by Marxism theory by Karl Marx. It is social, political and economic philosophy. The Marxist Theory argues that the struggle between social classes –especially between the bourgeoisie- a capitalist and the proletariat of workers- defines economic relation in a capitalist's economy and will lead inevitably to a communist revolution. Karl Marx's theory aims to promote social equality by advocating for equal treatment of both the poor and the rich in society. Fabian (2020) applying the principles of Marxist theory states that his intention aimed at accomplishing two things which included: the objective to create an economic and social history while offering a distinctive perspective on the implementation of Marxist theory, as termed by the author "non-capitalists".

In relation to his research study, the theory can be used to show how those in power, misuse power and ensure dictatorship is the order of the day to prevent others from clinging into their positions of leadership. It is through this theory that the researcher was able to raise it in order to place the literary works within the context of the class and continued assumptions of the class. The Marxist Theory is said to play a critical role in accessing the tendency of a literary work and ensures if the social content and literary forms are progressive.

In these literary works, Marxist analysis uncovers how characters represent different social classes and how their interactions reflect broader power struggles within society. For example, characters from marginalized or oppressed groups may serve as symbols of resistance against autocratic regimes, while those aligned with the ruling elite may perpetuate or benefit from systems of oppression. By examining the economic, social, and political contexts in which characters operate, Marxist theory allows scholars to dissect the underlying power dynamics and the mechanisms through which autocracy is sustained.

Moreover, Marxism theory highlights the role of ideology in shaping perceptions of power and authority. Authors often use their works to critique dominant ideologies that justify and perpetuate autocratic rule, such as nationalism, imperialism, or neoliberal capitalism. By examining characters, narratives, and themes through a Marxist lens, scholars can uncover deeper insights into the complexities of governance, oppression, and resistance depicted in works like *Inheritance* by David Mulwa and *An Enemy of the People* by Henrik Ibsen.

## 3.0 MATERIALS AND METHODS

The study employed descriptive research design, through which qualitative data was obtained through textual analysis. According to Hsieh and Shannon (2021) textual analysis is the utmost significant technique in literary studies because it encompasses in-depth analysis of texts in this milieu the two plays. Owen (2020) suggests that the textual technique works with legendary literature, giving special attention to the components of a text that are purposefully crafted, such the narrative viewpoints in a play. The study also paid close attention to how the characters highlight these ideas through their roles as messengers. Additionally, the study investigated the relationships to societal problems related to insufficient leadership. Target population for this study included texts documented in books, journals and other online sources. Mainly the study focused on Literature and historical documents related to the two selected texts; David Mulwa's *Inheritance* and *An Enemy of the People* by Henrik Ibsen as the target population. Purposive sampling was used to select the aforementioned texts. Purposive sampling, according to Kothari (2019), is used to choose participants who are anticipated to produce pertinent and useful research outcomes. It also helps the researcher create the ideal sample, which is necessary to use research questions and objectives to address the research problem. For the content analysis, the sampled texts included one European text and one African text that represented many other European and African texts that address the same themes such as misuse of power and dictatorship. The selected texts were be Henrik Ibsen's *An Enemy of the People* and David Mulwa's *Inheritance*. The primary texts were read and reread under the guidance of the three study objectives in an attempt to gather sufficient data for analysis and interpretation. Reading and analyzing secondary materials was part of the library study that served as the basis for the secondary data. These consisted of any academic texts related to the subject under study. Relevant resources focusing on power dynamics, characteristics related to autocracy and the abuse of power, and societal issues were cited. Data was combined and the two sets of data and outcomes were compared as part of the data analysis. The texts were analyzed using thematic analysis.

## 4.0 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Characters representing autocratic figures often exhibit traits such as manipulation, coercion, and a disregard for the well-being of others in pursuit of their own interests. Characters who challenge or resist autocracy may demonstrate traits of courage, defiance, and a commitment to justice (Ottaway, 2013). By juxtaposing these contrasting characterizations, authors can highlight the consequences of unchecked power and the complexities of navigating systems of oppression. Moreover, the way characters interact and clash in *Inheritance* by David Mulwa and *An enemy of the People* by Henrik Ibsen helps to show the bigger societal problems linked to autocracy and the wrong use of power (Bove, & Rivera, 2015).

#### 4.1 Inheritance by David Mulwa

Mulwa explores the complexities of power within a family setting, particularly regarding the distribution of inheritance and its implications for familial relationships. Power is concentrated within a family, perpetuating a dynastic rule that can lead to misuse of power.

"...Kutula XV: ..Of all the occupations in this world, she wants to preach your God to my people. Had you never come, she would have been a priestess and teach the true way of our ancestors. Thorne: Princess Sangoi..."

the dialogue between characters illustrates the concentration of power within the family, specifically highlighting the patriarchal authority of Kutula XV. The exchange reveals a hierarchical structure where Kutula XV holds significant influence, as evidenced by his dismissive attitude towards Thorne's attempt to introduce christianity to his people. Kutula XV's assertion that his daughter, Sangoi, would have been a priestess teaching the "true way of our ancestors" underscores his control over religious and cultural practices within the family domain. This concentration of power within the family unit perpetuates a dynastic rule, wherein decisions and beliefs are dictated by the patriarch, potentially leading to the misuse of power as individuals are subject to his authority without question.

The portrayal of Sangoi as obedient and deferential underscores the generational transmission of power within the family, where individuals are socialized to adhere to established norms and hierarchies. This portrayal suggests a cycle of power perpetuation that can lead to the exploitation and manipulation of authority for personal gain or to maintain the status quo. Thus, through this dialogue, Mulwa effectively illustrates how power consolidation within a family unit can foster autocracy and the potential for misuse of power, contributing to the broader thematic exploration of familial dynamics and societal control in the text.

Additionally, Lacuna ascends to the throne after killing his father.

"...Lacuna: He took long to die.. He loved me, Daniel, and I killed him.."

Lacuna: Yes, my father loves me but I love my people more, Goldstein. That's why he had to die, isn't it so, Daniel? Kutula must catch up with your people, eh? Trade as partners..."

Lacuna's admission of the act, stating, "He took long to die... He loved me, Daniel, and I killed him," underscores the ruthless nature of his pursuit of power. This act of regicide signifies a stark example of autocracy and the misuse of power, as Lacuna eliminates his own father to secure his position of authority. Furthermore, Lacuna's justification for his actions by claiming to prioritize the welfare of his people over personal relationships demonstrates a distorted sense of duty and moral justification, further emphasizing the depths of his autocratic tendencies. The dialogue between Lacuna and Goldstein serves to illustrate Lacuna's disregard for familial ties and the extent to which he is willing to manipulate others to maintain his grip on power.

Lacuna's assertion that his father's death was necessary for the betterment of his people reflects a dangerous justification for authoritarian rule. By equating his actions with serving the interests of the populace, Lacuna attempts to legitimize his autocratic rule under the guise of benevolence. However, the underlying motive of consolidating power and suppressing dissent becomes evident through Lacuna's subsequent remarks about economic partnerships and maintaining control over neighboring regions. This dialogue exposes Lacuna's true intentions and highlights the inherent dangers of unchecked power, as individuals like Lacuna exploit notions of duty and sacrifice to perpetuate their authoritarian rule.

According to Bierria (2014), this concept embodies the struggle for dominance and control within hierarchical structures, whether it be within a royal dynasty, a familial lineage, or a broader societal framework. The character who commits patricide and subsequently ascends to power is typically portrayed as ambitious, ruthless, and willing to defy conventional morality to achieve their goals. The act of killing one's father symbolizes a violent rupture with the past and a decisive assertion of individual agency and authority.

Lacuna openly acknowledges using his position for personal benefit, showing a lack of concern for ethical leadership and responsibility.

"...Lacuna: ..well, I'll confess..yes, I well, that balance, my ministers surrendered thirty percent to me..only as a gesture of loyalty you realize..got to keep their jobs..well, I er.. I banked it abroad..."

When Lacuna demands that his ministers surrender thirty percent of their wealth to him as a show of loyalty, he exposes a corrupt system where loyalty is rewarded with money, rather than based on skill or ability. Additionally, his choice to store this wealth in foreign banks suggests a lack of honesty and responsibility, hinting at a deliberate effort to avoid being questioned or facing consequences for his actions. Through this depiction, the playwright presents Lacuna as a symbol of dishonest leadership, whose behavior worsens inequality and damages the trust of those under his rule.

Through the character of Lacuna, "Inheritance" offers a critical examination of the consequences of autocracy and the need for ethical leadership to address systemic issues of inequality and injustice.

Central to Marxist analysis is the concept of class struggle, wherein society is divided into distinct social classes based on their relationship to the means of production. The accumulation of wealth by a privileged few, often at the expense of the working class, reflects the inherent inequalities perpetuated by capitalist systems (Wright, 1976). The individual or group seizing wealth and rewarding loyalty is seen as a capitalist or ruling class figure, who exploits their position of power to maintain control over resources and perpetuate their dominance. This process not only widens the gap between the wealthy elite and the working masses but also reinforces existing power structures that serve the interests of the ruling class. Moreover, Macris (2011) argues that Marxist theory emphasizes the role of ideology in legitimizing and perpetuating these unequal power dynamics, whereby loyalty to the ruling class is rewarded through material incentives or social status, further entrenching the existing social order.

Malipoa and Chipinde, followers of Lacuna, exploit the citizens by seizing their land, imposing taxes, and paying low wages.

“...Tamina: ..Where are the cars I used to drive? The good government house we lived in? My coffee farm in Bukelenge mountains? All gone. Now I must pick coffee for Chipande on the farm that he has made me sell to him for peanuts...”

Tamina is now made to work on her own old farm for Chipinde, who pays her very little. This highlights how people in power exploit and force the population to work for them. This situation demonstrates how autocratic leaders use their power to gather wealth and control resources, hurting the vulnerable and making economic inequality worse. Through their oppressive tactics, Malipoa and Chipinde maintain their dominance and reinforce the hierarchical power structures that enable their autocratic rule. This depiction serves as a critique of governance systems characterized by unchecked authority and underscores the need for accountability and equitable distribution of power to prevent the exploitation of the marginalized by the privileged few.

In addition, Lulu is detained in the palace against her will, and this shows how Lacuna is using his position as the ruling leader to exploit people and fulfill his carnal desires. She wants to go back to her mother's home from the palace, showing she doesn't agree to stay with Lacuna. However, Lacuna ignores her feelings and tries to justify keeping her there by saying his seat is the most important place in the country, using his position to control Lulu. He doesn't respect her freedom to choose and puts his own wants over hers, suggesting she should appreciate his attention because of her attractiveness. Lacuna's manipulation of power reflects Marx's critique of capitalism, where those in positions of privilege exploit the labor and agency of the working class for their own gain. His objectification of Lulu and his insistence on her compliance underscore Marx's assertion that under capitalism, individuals are reduced to commodities, valued only for their utility to the ruling class. Rofel (2007) posits that objectification extends beyond economic realms to encompass various facets of social life, including interactions driven by sexual and selfish desires. Within this framework, individuals in positions of power, such as capitalists or political elites, may objectify others to fulfill their personal gratification, disregarding their humanity and autonomy in the process. This exploitation mirrors broader power dynamics inherent in capitalism, where the bourgeoisie exercise control over the proletariat's labor and resources for profit, perpetuating inequality and alienation.

When Bengo challenges Lacuna's leadership, Judah Zen Melo is commanded to assassinate him. However, as Bengo is his brother, Judah refuses, resulting in his punishment through physical assault and abandonment. This instance illustrates Lacuna's utilization of power to instill fear and suppress opposition. Even though Judah refuses to obey Lacuna's requests, stating his loyalty to his family, Lacuna responds with severe violence. This demonstrates his readiness to use intimidation and force to silence opposition and stay in control. This incident highlights Lacuna's authoritarian behavior, showing how he values his own interests over the well-being of those around him. The consequences of defying Lacuna's authority are starkly illustrated through Judah Zen Melo's tragic fate. Despite his efforts to reconcile with the party and mend any perceived rifts, Lacuna's regime ultimately chooses to eliminate him as a warning to others who may contemplate dissent.

Marxist analysis emphasizes the struggle between the ruling class, who control the means of production and wield significant economic and political power, and the working class, who are exploited and marginalized by this dominant elite (Wright, 1988). When individuals challenge the oppressive structures perpetuated by bad leadership, they threaten the status quo and the interests of those in power. Consequently, the ruling class, driven by their desire to maintain their privileged position, may resort to extreme measures to suppress dissent and preserve their authority. This often results in the victimization of dissenters, who are subjected to coercion, violence, or even elimination. From a Marxist perspective, such acts of repression serve to reinforce the dominance of the ruling class and perpetuate the exploitation of the working class, highlighting the systemic injustices inherent in capitalist societies.

Lacuna Kasoo constructs a dam 15 kilometers away from his people, hence causing problems to the citizens.

“...Tamina: The water. Only the mountains have water in this drought...two weeks after you left, the chief rounded up all our men, women and children. We were to receive unlimited water from one source, he said..all the brooks and springs would be led to one large dam at the foot of the mountains..the valley has been dry ever since. Only the dam has water, and it is fifteen kilometers away, Bengo. We walk from sunrise to midday. And from midday, we are back here at sunset...”

Through the character of Tamina, the narrative reveals the detrimental consequences of this decision on the local community, particularly during a period of drought. Tamina's narration emphasizes the hardship faced by the people, who are forced to endure long and arduous journeys to access water, while the dam remains distant and inaccessible. This portrayal underscores Lacuna Kasoo's unilateral exercise of power, wherein he prioritizes his own interests or agenda without considering the welfare of those affected by his decisions. Lacuna Kasoo's ability to dictate the distribution of resources, such as water, exemplifies the autocratic nature of his rule and the resultant oppression experienced by the community. The disparity between the privileged access enjoyed by Kasoo and the hardships endured by his people underscores the inherent injustice and imbalance of power within the society depicted in the play.

#### 4.2 *An Enemy of the People*

The concept of power sharing is examined through the lens of political and economic influence, as well as the manipulation of public opinion by those in positions of authority. The author, Henrik Ibsen, presents tensions between individual conscience and societal norms, with a focus on the clash between a lone whistle blower, Dr. Stockmann, and the authorities representing vested interests.

The mayor uses intimidation to thwart Dr Stockman's efforts. Dr. Stockman confronts the mayor about the problems with the construction of the Baths and water conduits, blaming the mayor's decisions for the project's failures. However, instead of admitting fault or addressing Dr. Stockman's concerns, the mayor tries to intimidate him to keep the truth hidden and maintain control. He ignores Dr. Stockman's accusations and shows his power by highlighting his role in managing public affairs. The

mayor's refusal to admit the truth and his attempt to stop Dr. Stockman's report show autocratic behavior, where those in power care more about their own interests and keeping control than being honest or accountable.

Cohen (1989) argues that leaders within a Marxist framework frequently employ manipulation, such as propaganda, censorship, and false consciousness, to deceive and coerce the proletariat into accepting their subordinate position. These leaders, representing the bourgeoisie, exploit their economic and political influence to distort perceptions, suppress dissent, and obscure the systemic inequalities inherent in capitalist societies. Through manipulation, they not only reinforce existing power structures but also undermine the collective consciousness and solidarity necessary for revolutionary action. Thus, within the Marxist framework, manipulation by leaders serves as a mechanism for upholding class interests and perpetuating the exploitation of the working class by the ruling elite.

Additionally, Mortein Kiil, Dr Stockman's father in law, goes ahead to buy shares in the baths, hoping to blackmail Dr stockman in retracting his discovery, and making the baths profitable.

"...Peter Stockmann: Yes, but that is just exactly what you are not. Mr. Kiil can alter his will any day he likes... These violent, reckless attacks that you have made against the leading men of the town, under the pretence that it was in the name of truth..."

By attempting to blackmail Dr. Stockman, Kiil demonstrates a disregard for truth and ethical conduct, prioritizing his own financial interests over public health and safety. This abuse of power not only undermines Dr. Stockman's integrity but also threatens the welfare of the community, highlighting the destructive consequences of autocratic behavior within the narrative. This exchange reveals a broader pattern of coercion and suppression of dissent within the town's power structure, where those in positions of authority exploit their influence to maintain control and silence opposition. The portrayal of Kiil's actions and the manipulation of familial ties to enforce compliance underscore the pervasive nature of autocracy and misuse of power within the narrative, reflecting broader societal issues surrounding corruption and the prioritization of self-interest over communal welfare.

The town's powerful ensure that Dr. Stockman does not address the issue of the Dr. Stockmann's attempts to address the issue of contaminated water baths are met with resistance and suppression by the town's powerful figures, thereby declaring the doctor an enemy of the people. Aslaksen, representing the voice of the establishment, emphasizes the need to protect the town's reputation and dismisses Dr. Stockmann's concerns as a grave accusation against the community. This response highlights the entrenched interests of the elite in maintaining the status quo and avoiding accountability for the public health hazard posed by the contaminated water. Furthermore, a citizen quickly moves to silence Dr. Stockmann, reflecting the collective unwillingness to confront uncomfortable truths and the readiness to suppress dissenting voices. The swift rejection of Dr. Stockmann's attempts to raise awareness underscores the autocratic tendencies within the town's leadership, who prioritize self-preservation over the welfare of the community. Dr. Stockmann's outburst symbolizes the proletariat's collective frustration and disillusionment with the corrupt capitalist system, where the ruling class exploits and manipulates the working masses for their own gain. Dr. Stockmann's plan to spread his message to other towns and newspapers shows his support for the ideas of Marxism, which promote unity among working-class people regardless of where they live. He believes in making those in power answer for their actions, which matches Marxism's goal of replacing the wealthy ruling class with a fairer society where everyone has equal rights and fairness. The powerful elite use their influence to silence opposition and keep things the same, even if it means using force or controlling what people believe.

## 5.0 CONCLUSION

In conclusion, through contrasting characterizations and interactions, authors demonstrate the consequences of unchecked power and the complexities of navigating systems of oppression. Characters like Lacuna in "Inheritance" exemplify corrupt leadership through their exploitation of authority for personal gain, highlighting the detrimental effects of autocracy and corruption within society. Similarly, in "An Enemy of the People," characters like Dr. Stockmann confront autocracy and the misuse of power through their unwavering commitment to truth and justice, underscoring the importance of individual agency and moral courage in effecting positive change within society.

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