

The (Mis)Use of Political Rulership in Diana McCaulay's *Dog-Heart* and Zakes Mda's *Ways of Dying*

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Abstract

This article investigates the systemic failures and ethical breaches of political leadership in Diana McCaulay's *Dog-Heart* and Zakes Mda's *Ways of Dying*. The central problem it addresses is how entrenched corruption, opaque decision-making, and absentee governance inflict material and psychological harm on vulnerable communities. It poses the question: In what ways do McCaulay and Mda depict the misuse of political authority, and how do their characters resist these failures? Building on Critical Leadership Theory, the hypothesis contends that both novels illustrate bad leadership not merely as isolated moral failings, but as structural dysfunctions that require grassroots interventions to restore social equilibrium. The primary objective is to unpack the narrative strategies through which each author critiques state institutions and legitimizes alternative forms of community leadership. This study demonstrates how Sahara's private governance in *Dog-Heart* exposes the hollow promises of Jamaica's public sector, while Toloki's mourning rituals in *Ways of Dying* reveal the capacity of collective memory to counteract the legacy of apartheid bureaucracy. The conclusion argues that McCaulay and Mda ultimately propose a reconfiguration of leadership rooted in ethical solidarity rather than hierarchical command. Their protagonists enact "responsive governance" from below, affirming citizens' rights to dissent and self-organize when official structures collapse. By situating literary critique within critical leadership studies, the article bridges postcolonial narrative analysis and governance scholarship, offering a model for how fiction can illuminate both the perils of misrule and paths toward participatory renewal. Therefore, the work contributes to comparative literature, postcolonial studies, and political theory by mapping the literary imagination of bad governance onto real-world debates about accountability, transparency, and the transformative potential of community-driven leadership.

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***Related declarations are provided in the final section of this article.*

Introduction

Government stands as the central authority through which societies organize collective life, allocate resources, and uphold the social contract between rulers and the ruled. Goodwin (2018) affirm the necessity of government in any society by stating that: “In times of peril, societies cry out for leadership that can make sense of chaos and chart a course toward hope” (3). Whether in urban Jamaica or post-apartheid South Africa, the presence or absence of effective governance shapes everyday realities—from education and public safety to economic opportunity. Good governance emerges from economic and political theory as the ideal framework for aligning state power with public welfare, while its failure gives rise to inequity, violence, and social decay. Governments bear the responsibility of providing public goods—such as schooling, healthcare, and security—under principles of transparency, accountability, and the rule of law. Obama (2020) highlights the responsibility of governments towards the people as follows: “Public service is a privilege, not a pastime; it demands that leaders use their power for the benefit of all, not for personal aggrandizement” (501). When these principles falter, citizens face not only material deprivation but also an erosion of trust in institutions. Corruption and opacity in decision-making obstruct access to safe water, undermine population health, and heighten insecurity, demonstrating how bad governance constitutes a critical threat to democracy and human rights.

Scholars broadly agree that, despite its elusive contours, good governance requires: clear legal frameworks that constrain arbitrary power; mechanisms for citizen participation and oversight; responsive institutions that deliver services equitably; and ethical leadership that prioritizes the common good over personal gain. This perspective of good governance is projected in the affirmation that: “Good political leadership unites people around shared ideals, not around their worst fears” (Applebaum 2020: 23). However, the concept remains contested, as different actors—donors, civil society groups, bureaucracies—emphasize varying dimensions of effectiveness, inclusivity, and economic growth in their definitions of “good” governance.

By contrast, bad leadership is marked by abuses of authority, nepotism, and toxic interpersonal styles that corrode organizational morale and public trust. Abusive, bullying, and toxic leadership behaviors overlap with corruption and hostility, yet they are distinguished by the fact that these harmful acts are embedded in the very process of leading. In addition, Applebaum (2020) declares that: “Bad leaders thrive on division, pitting citizen against citizen to entrench their own

power” (42). Such destructive leadership produces systemic dysfunction, stifles innovation, and alienates the governed, transforming public institutions into arenas of fear rather than vehicles of social progress

Citizens living under bad governance retain fundamental rights to react—through protest, civic organizing, and cultural expression—to restore accountability and justice. This is corroborated by the statement that: “When citizens see their leaders systematically violate democratic norms with impunity, they often retreat into cynicism or turn to radical alternatives” (Levitsky & Ziblatt 2018: 176). When corruption and misrule threaten livelihoods and personal security, people can legitimately demand reform, harnessing legal protections and public pressure to reclaim democratic spaces. In this way, the right to dissent becomes a cornerstone of a healthy polity, reinforcing the social contract that holds leaders to account for the welfare of all.

Diana McCaulay’s *Dog-Heart* and Zakes Mda’s *Ways of Dying* crystallize these dynamics in contemporary Jamaica and South Africa respectively; by dramatizing the vacuum left by absent or ineffectual state structures. This paper seeks to examine the manner in which these authors represent bad governance in their respective texts. The question that guides the research is: In what ways do McCaulay and Mda depict the misuse of political authority, and how do their characters resist or replicate these failures? Using the Critical Leadership Theory as projected by Jennifer Chandler and Robert Kirsch, the hypothesis contends that both novels illustrate bad leadership not merely as isolated moral failings, but as structural dysfunctions that require grassroots interventions to restore social equilibrium. Tyson (2006) strongly affirms the necessity of theory in all interpretations, including political and literary, by stating that: “There is no such thing as a nontheoretical interpretation. We may not be aware of the theoretical assumptions that guide our thinking, but those assumptions are there nevertheless” (5). This explains why a theory, precisely the Critical Leadership Theory, was deemed necessary in this research. In presenting the focus of the Critical Leadership Theory Chandler & Kirsch (2018) state that: “Critical leadership theory demands that we interrogate the social processes through which leadership is legitimized, enacted, and resisted” (170). They stretch the point further by adding that: “Leadership is not an unalloyed good but rather a problematic concept that needs to be reckoned with” (Chandler & Kirsch 2018: xii). This implies that the concept of leadership is quite slippery; and needs to be examined with seriousness. Western (2013) aligns with this view, and extends it by adding a cultural dimension thus: “Leadership is a cultural construct, shaped by dominant ideologies and reproduced through institutional norms” (22). This theory is relevant in

this study because it is used to examine problematic governance in two periods and cultural backgrounds; that is South Africa 1995 and Jamaica 2010.

Therefore, the objective is to unpack the narrative strategies through which each author critiques state institutions and legitimizes alternative forms of community leadership. By analyzing the portrayal of political leadership in McCaulay's *Dog-Heart* and Mda's *Ways of Dying*, this article examines how both texts articulate the anatomy of bad governance, its human cost, and the myriad ways individuals and communities resist, remediate, or replicate state failure. The article is divided into two sections namely: the representation of bad leadership and efforts against bad governance.

Part One: Representation of Bad Leadership

This section examines the manner in which bad governance is represented in Diana McCaulay's *Dog-Heart* and Zakes Mda's *Ways of Dying*. It focuses on aspects like corruption and mismanagement of funds; administrative incompetence; precarious economic situation; and poor living conditions.

1.1. Corruption and Mismanagement of Funds

In *Dog-Heart*, Diana McCaulay explores the theme of representation of bad leadership through subtle but pointed depictions of corruption and mismanagement of funds - particularly in the context of charitable efforts, community development, and institutional neglect. Sahara, a middle-class woman trying to help Dexter, organizes a fundraising dinner to support his education. Despite her claims, Dexter remains out of school, and Marcia voices suspicion about where the money actually went. This is stated by Marcia, Dexter's mother, when she states that: "I don't know what happen to the money from the dinner. Sahara say she give it to the school, but Dexter still not going" (McCaulay 2010: 112). This shows that the funds Sahara raises from the fundraising dinner are misallocated. This moment exposes the gap between good intentions and actual accountability. Sahara's failure to ensure the funds reached their intended target reflects a broader critique of leadership that is performative rather than effective. Marcia goes ahead to indicate the lack of financial oversight in Sahara's efforts as follows: "Sahara love the idea of helping, but she don't check the details. She don't ask for receipts, she don't follow up" (McCaulay 2010: 145). Here, Marcia critiques Sahara's approach to charity, pointing out her lack of procedural diligence. This highlights how even well-meaning actors can perpetuate bad leadership through poor financial oversight. Here, McCaulay critiques the liberal savior

complex—where emotional investment replaces structural responsibility. Sahara’s failure to demand accountability allows funds to disappear without trace. Similarly, during a community meeting, residents recall repeated promises from local politicians to improve sanitation. The promised infrastructure never materializes, underscoring the emptiness of political rhetoric. An elder brings this out in the statement: “Dem councillor man come with him big speech and promise new latrine, but is two year now and we still using bucket” (McCaulay 2010: 173). This illustrates how bad leadership manifests in neglect of basic needs. The failure to deliver on essential services like sanitation is emblematic of systemic mismanagement. In the midst of this, Dexter expresses disillusionment with aid structures by stating that: “People always talking ’bout help, but when you check it, is only talk. Money come and money gone, and nothing change” (McCaulay 2010: 137). Dexter reflects on the repeated cycles of promised aid that never lead to tangible improvements. His voice captures the frustration of those who live under the shadow of broken systems.

In the same dimension, *Ways of Dying* by Zakes Mda critiques post-apartheid South African leadership through vivid depictions of corruption and mismanagement of funds, especially in the context of transitional politics, failed housing projects, and exploitative local elites. With regards to housing projects, Mda describes how funds allocated for housing in informal settlements were misused. Contractors delivered incomplete structures while local officials enriched themselves. This is perceived when the narrator states that: “The money was meant for houses, but the contractors built walls with no roofs, and the councillors smiled in their new cars” (Mda 1995: 78). This exemplifies institutional corruption, where public resources are diverted for personal gain, leaving communities with unusable infrastructure. Like housing, political elites and self-enrichment are also satirized as a local citizen critiques the rhetoric of post-apartheid development, pointing out that supposed upliftment projects primarily benefited political insiders. The township resident indicates that: “They called it development, but it was only development for their pockets” (Mda 1995: 81). This reflects popular disillusionment with leadership that masks greed behind the language of progress. Furthermore, mismanagement of funeral funds is also projected as Toloki, a professional mourner, observes how funds meant for a child’s funeral are siphoned off under vague bureaucratic justifications. The situation is brought out in the declaration: “Even the money for the funeral was short. Somebody had taken a cut, saying it was for ‘administration’” (Mda 1995: 10). This moment is a revelation of how corruption permeates even the most sacred rituals, turning mourning into a site of exploitation.

With the rampant financial malpractices, the community is aware of leadership failures as Noria, Toloki's companion, strongly affirms the community's awareness of economic justice by stating that: "We know who eats the money. We see their houses grow while ours fall" (Mda 1995: 119). This highlights the moral clarity of those who suffer under corrupt systems.

1.2. Administrative Incompetence

Like financial mismanagement, administrative incompetence is also presented in *Ways of Dying* by Zakes Mda. This is brought out particularly in the domains of housing, public service delivery, and local governance. Firstly, the narrator highlights the incomplete housing projects by indicating that: "They built walls without roofs. Toilets without plumbing. Streets that ended in rubble" (Mda 1995: 78). This describes the aftermath of government-funded housing schemes in the townships. The projects were poorly executed, leaving residents with unusable structures. Such a situation exemplifies technical and administrative incompetence, where leadership fails to oversee contractors or ensure basic standards. The result is symbolic of broken promises and wasted public funds. Also, there is the absence of officials and delayed services. Local residents attempt to reach their elected representative to resolve a water crisis. His repeated absence and vague excuses reflect a lack of urgency and accountability. In line with this, the narrator says: "The councillor was always 'in a meeting.' The people waited. The water tank stayed empty" (Mda 1995: 83). This brings out leadership detachment, where officials are physically and emotionally removed from the communities they serve. Similarly, the narrator presents bureaucratic confusion precisely over funeral arrangements. In this regard, Toloki affirms that: "No one knew who was responsible. The child lay in the mortuary for days while forms were lost and signatures chased" (Mda 1995: 101). This statement critiques institutional disorganization, showing how even basic services are derailed by poor coordination and lack of leadership. At a broader level, administrative incompetence is seen through Noria's comments on township governance as she states that: "They don't know what they doing. They talk big, but they don't plan. They don't listen" (Mda 1995: 120). Here, Noria expresses frustration with local leaders who make grand promises but fail to engage with community needs or follow through on plans; and it captures cognitive incompetence—a failure to understand, strategize, or respond effectively to real-world problems.

Like Mda, McCaulay also presents administrative incompetence in *Dog-Heart* - particularly in the spheres of charity work, community development, and institutional neglect. This is brought out through untrained volunteers and misguided interventions. In this dimension, a community

elder states that: “Dem people come from uptown, say dem going fix things, but all dem do is take picture and ask question. Then dem gone” (McCaulay 2010: 158). Here, the local resident reflects on repeated visits from NGOs and volunteers who arrive with enthusiasm but no long-term plan. Their lack of cultural understanding and follow-through renders their efforts superficial. This satirizes leadership that is performative and disconnected from ground realities. It highlights the incompetence of external actors who fail to build sustainable change. Also, there is institutional neglect in the domain of education. This is seen as Marcia laments the state of the local school, where administrative incompetence and absentee leadership prevent children like Dexter from receiving quality education by saying that: “Dexter bright, you know. But the school don’t have no proper teacher for maths, and the principal always ‘not available’” (McCaulay 2010: 132). The statement underscores how systemic incompetence—especially in public institutions—undermines the futures of vulnerable youth. Again, the misguided priorities in community development are satirized when Dexter states that: “They build a big sign saying ‘Hope Centre’ but the building never finish. Just concrete and rust” (McCaulay 2010: 169). Here, Dexter describes a failed development project that was launched with fanfare but abandoned midway. The symbolic gesture of the sign contrasts sharply with the reality of incomplete infrastructure. This illustrates how incompetence in planning and execution leads to wasted resources and deepens community cynicism.

1.3. Precarious Economic Situation

McCaulay and Mda also satirize the precarious economic conditions of Jamaica and South Africa respectively. In *Dog-Heart*, Diana McCaulay offers a layered critique of bad leadership through vivid portrayals of precarious economic conditions in urban Jamaica marked by unemployment, inadequate housing, and failed social services. In this regard, Dexter describes his daily reality to Sahara, revealing the depth of poverty in his household. His words, which follow, reflect not only economic hardship but the absence of meaningful state intervention: “Sometimes we don’t eat. Sometimes is just tea and bread. And sometimes not even that” (McCaulay 2010: 41). This moment underscores how bad leadership manifests in the failure to provide basic welfare. The lack of food security is a direct indictment of broken social systems. In addition to hunger, housing insecurity and government neglect are also highlighted in the text. Marcia recounts empty promises from local officials to repair their home. Despite repeated assurances, no repairs are made, leaving the family exposed to the elements as Marcia remarks that: “Dem say they going fix the zinc roof, but rain still coming in. Every time it wet, the mattress get mildew”

(McCaulay 2010: 88). This remark highlights how poor leadership results in physical vulnerability. The failure to deliver on basic infrastructure deepens the precarity of already marginalized families. With this systemic failure, people try to make ends meet through business. Yet the result is still deplorable as a woman explains her informal livelihood and the constant threat of police harassment. Her situation reflects the absence of economic policy that supports low-income workers. She says: “Me sell bag juice, yes, but that don’t feed three pickney. And the police always harass me for vending” (McCaulay 2010: 102). Here, she critiques leadership that criminalizes survival strategies instead of enabling economic inclusion. It reveals how governance failures compound poverty. Even the future of the children seems compromised as they cannot afford formal education due to economic hardship. Referring to her son Dexter, Marcia states that: “Dexter bright, but school need money for uniform, book, lunch. Is like poor people not supposed to learn” (McCaulay 2010: 132). Marcia expresses frustration at the hidden costs of public education. Though her son is intelligent, systemic barriers prevent him from accessing opportunity. Therefore, bad leadership perpetuates inequality by failing to make education truly accessible. It links economic precarity to long-term disenfranchisement.

Similarly, in *Ways of Dying*, Zakes Mda critiques post-apartheid leadership by portraying the precarious economic conditions faced by township residents such as homelessness, informal labor, and survivalist improvisation. In terms of homelessness and urban displacement, after the death of her son Vutha, Noria loses her home to a fire. The absence of emergency support or housing relief reflects the failure of local governance to protect vulnerable citizens. The narrator highlights this by stating that: “Noria’s shack burned to the ground, leaving her homeless. She had nowhere to go, and no one in authority cared” (Mda 1995: 45). This illustrates how bad leadership manifests in the lack of safety nets. Noria’s homelessness is not just personal tragedy—it’s institutional abandonment. With this economy, citizens resort to informal labour and survivalism. That is why Toloki creates a livelihood by attending funerals, a role born out of necessity rather than tradition as the narrator says: “Toloki is a professional mourner. He earns a few coins at funerals, enough to eat if he lives frugally” (Mda 1995: 12). Such a tactic underscores how economic precarity forces individuals into improvised roles. The absence of job creation and vocational support is a direct critique of post-apartheid leadership. The narrator also describes the living conditions in the informal settlement where Noria and Toloki reside. This is presented in the declaration: “In the settlement, people built homes from scrap metal and cardboard. Children played in dust. The only jobs were selling vegetables or collecting bottles”

(Mda 1995: 33). The lack of infrastructure and employment reflects systemic neglect. This captures the stagnation of economic development. Leadership failure is evident in the absence of housing, sanitation, and dignified work. In these conditions, there is collective frustration with the economic situation as a township resident laments that: “They say we are free now, but freedom don’t fill the pot. Freedom don’t build houses” (Mda 1995: 84). The speaker voices frustration with the gap between political rhetoric and material reality. The promise of liberation has not translated into economic upliftment; resulting in popular disillusionment with leadership that celebrates symbolic victories while ignoring structural poverty.

1.4. Poor Living Conditions

The corruption and mismanagement of funds; administrative incompetence; and precarious economic situation in the two texts as explained above result in poor living conditions; which are presented by both authors. In *Ways of Dying*, Zakes Mda critiques post-apartheid leadership by portraying poor living conditions through the lens of informal settlements, failed development projects, and institutional neglect. The narrator points this out through a vivid description of life in the informal settlement by stating that: “The settlement was a sea of shacks made of rusted corrugated iron, cardboard, and plastic sheeting. There was no sanitation, no electricity, and no running water” (Mda 1995: 33). This description of the township where Toloki and Noria live captures the physical reality of poverty. The absence of basic infrastructure reflects the failure of leadership to provide dignified living conditions; and exemplifies how poor living conditions are normalized under ineffective governance. The state’s neglect is etched into the very materials of daily life. In addition, a fire sweeps through the settlement, destroying homes and lives. The lack of emergency response underscores the systemic abandonment of the poor. This is brought out as the narrator indicates that: “When the fire came, it leapt from shack to shack, devouring everything. There were no fire engines. No one came” (Mda 1995: 44). This critiques leadership that fails to protect its most vulnerable citizens. The absence of public services turns natural disasters into mass tragedies. In the same vein, after losing her home in the fire, Noria is left without shelter or support. Her isolation reflects the broader failure of social welfare systems. The narrator states that: “Noria stood in the ashes of her home, holding a broken pot. She had nowhere to go, and no one in authority cared” (Mda 1995: 45). Nora’s situation highlights the emotional and material consequences of bad leadership. Noria’s suffering is emblematic of a society that has abandoned its duty of care. Such situations leave the people in frustration and disillusionment as perceived in the following remark by a township dweller: “They said they

would build houses. They came with cameras and speeches. But all we got was rubble and slogans” (Mda 1995: 78). The citizen reflects on broken promises from political leaders who launched housing initiatives with fanfare but failed to deliver; thereby critiquing performative governance. The contrast between political spectacle and lived reality exposes the hollowness of leadership.

McCaulay’s *Dog-Heart* also presents precarious poor living conditions marked by neglect, broken promises, and systemic failure. This is seen as Marcia recounts repeated promises from local officials to repair their leaking roof. Despite assurances, no repairs are made, leaving the family exposed to the elements as Marcia affirms that: “Dem say they going fix the zinc roof, but rain still coming in. Every time it wet, the mattress get mildew” (McCaulay 2010: 88). This reflects how bad leadership manifests in physical vulnerability. The failure to deliver basic infrastructure deepens the precarity of already marginalized families. Also, Dexter shares his daily reality with Sahara, revealing the depth of poverty in his household. His words reflect not only economic hardship but the absence of meaningful state intervention. This is seen when he says: “Sometimes we don’t eat. Sometimes is just tea and bread. And sometimes not even that” (McCaulay 2010: 41). Dexter underscores the failure of leadership to provide basic welfare. The lack of food security is a direct indictment of broken social systems. A lot of this suffering is due to the abandoned development projects as Dexter continues thus: “They build a big sign saying ‘Hope Centre’ but the building never finish. Just concrete and rust” (McCaulay 2010: 169). This illustrates how incompetence and mismanagement lead to wasted resources and deepen community cynicism.

1.5. Unemployment

Furthermore, McCaulay’s *Dog-Heart* explores unemployment as an aspect of poor rulership, revealing how systemic neglect and ineffective governance leave urban Jamaican communities economically stranded. This is seen as Dexter reflects on his environment, where stable employment is rare and informal hustling is the norm. His observation reveals how unemployment has become normalized in his community due to long-term governmental neglect. Dexter captures this in the following declaration: “Me never see nobody in my yard go work regular. Is like work is something for other people” (McCaulay 2010: 36). Here, he underscores how poor rulership erodes economic structures, leaving entire neighborhoods without access to formal employment or vocational training. On her part, Marcia, Dexter’s mother, describes her informal street vending, which is both precarious and criminalized. Her

experience reflects the absence of policy support for low-income workers and the punitive stance of local authorities. Marcia highlights this by declaring that: “Me sell bag juice, yes, but that don’t feed three pickney. And the police always harass me for vending” (McCaulay 2010: 103). She critiques leadership that fails to create inclusive economic opportunities, instead targeting survival strategies with harassment and fines. In this spoilt system, many people attempt to take initiatives but they hardly prosper. This is seen when Sahara reflects on her failed attempts to help Dexter find work or educational advancement. Her realization points to the absence of institutional pathways for upward mobility. She laments that: “I thought if Dexter had ambition, that would be enough. But there’s no system to catch him, no ladder to climb” (McCaulay 2010: 154). This critiques leadership that offers no structural support for youth development. Thus, ambition alone cannot overcome systemic unemployment without policy intervention. Consequently, despite the numerous individual ambitions, there is a general economic stagnation as an elder states that: “Whole heap of man just sit down on the corner every day. No work, no money, just waiting for something to happen” (McCaulay 2010: 119). Here, the local elder comments on the widespread unemployment among young men in the neighborhood. The lack of jobs leads to idleness, frustration, and vulnerability to crime. This quote illustrates how poor rulership results in economic paralysis. Without investment in job creation or training, communities stagnate and social tensions rise.

In the same dimension, Mda’s *Ways of Dying* explores unemployment as a direct consequence of poor rulership, especially in the transitional period following apartheid. Through characters like Toloki and Noria, and the broader township community, Mda critiques leadership that fails to deliver economic justice or meaningful employment. A glaring instance is the fact that Toloki creates a livelihood by attending funerals, a role born out of necessity rather than tradition. His profession reflects the collapse of formal employment structures and the need to invent survival strategies. The narrator states that: “Toloki is a professional mourner. He earns a few coins at funerals, enough to eat if he lives frugally” (Mda 1995: 12). This shows how unemployment forces individuals into marginal roles. The absence of job creation and vocational support is a direct critique of post-apartheid leadership. Equally, the narrator describes the limited economic options available in the informal settlement. Most residents rely on precarious, informal labor while hoping for change that never comes as the narrator states that: “The only jobs were selling vegetables or collecting bottles. Everything else was waiting” (Mda 1995: 33). This passage captures the stagnation of economic development. Leadership failure is evident in the lack of

infrastructure, employment programs, and dignified work. This is narrowed down to the experience of Noria who started selling fruits after losing her factory job as it is stated that: “She used to work in a factory, but it closed down. Now she sells fruit by the roadside” (Mda 1995: 47). Noria’s shift from formal employment to informal vending reflects the broader collapse of industrial jobs in the township. Her story is emblematic of economic regression. In such conditions, the people are hopeless as a resident states that: “They say we are free now, but freedom don’t fill the pot. Freedom don’t build houses” (Mda 1995: 84). This local citizen voices frustration with the gap between political rhetoric and material reality. The promise of liberation has not translated into economic upliftment. Such a situation reflects popular disillusionment with leadership that celebrates symbolic victories while ignoring structural poverty and unemployment.

1.6. Suffering and Death

With the difficult conditions created by bad governance, suffering and death become the order of the day in both texts. In *Dog-Heart*, McCaulay presents suffering and death as direct consequences of poor rulership, especially in the context of urban poverty, institutional neglect, and systemic failure. In this regard, Marcia reflects on the fate of boys in her community, where violence, untreated illness, and lack of access to healthcare lead to premature death. This is seen when she states that: “Is not just Dexter. Plenty youth dead before dem reach twenty. Shot, stab, sick and no doctor” (McCaulay 2010: 138). This highlights how poor rulership manifests in the absence of basic services—healthcare, security, and social support—resulting in preventable deaths. In addition, people suffer emotionally due to the institutional failure as a community elder laments that: “Me tired bury pickney. Every funeral is the same — white shirt, plastic flowers, and no answer” (McCaulay 2010: 176). This older resident expresses grief over the repeated loss of young lives. The ritualized funerals become symbols of a broken system that offers no justice or prevention; reflecting leadership that fails to address root causes of suffering. The repetition of funerals reflects a normalized cycle of death in neglected communities. This nearly befalls Dexter as he experiences a severe illness but lacks access to medical care. His suffering is intensified by the absence of emergency services or community health infrastructure. He explains that: “Me feel like me going dead. Me chest tight, me head hot, and nobody to carry me hospital” (McCaulay 2010: 91). This shows how poor rulership endangers lives through underfunded and inaccessible healthcare systems. To make things better, people, like Sahara, take individual steps: but Sahara confronts the limits of individual charity in the face of systemic

failure. Her reflection acknowledges that emotional commitment cannot replace institutional responsibility. She shows her frustration as follows: “I thought love could fix things. But love doesn’t stop bullets or cure infection or build clinics” (McCaulay 2010: 184). Here, McCaulay satirizes leadership that relies on private goodwill instead of public accountability. It underscores the structural nature of suffering and death in under-resourced communities.

Like McCaulay, Mda also projects suffering and death as direct consequences of poor rulership, especially in the transitional period following apartheid in *Ways of Dying*. Through the character of Toloki—a professional mourner—and his encounters with township communities, Mda critiques the failure of leadership to protect, uplift, or even acknowledge the most vulnerable. Death is presented as a daily reality as the narrator states that: “We all have our ways of dying” (Mda 1995: 1). This recurring line in the novel encapsulates the normalization of death in the townships. It reflects how violence, poverty, and neglect have made death an everyday experience. Through this, the narrator sets the tone for the novel’s critique of leadership that has allowed suffering to become routine. It’s not just metaphorical—it’s a literal indictment of systemic failure. Still related to death, Mda presents funeral as protest. This is seen when the Toloki states that: “Even the funeral was a kind of protest. A gathering of grief and rage” (Mda 1995: 102). Toloki attends the funeral of a child killed in political violence. The ceremony becomes a communal act of resistance against the conditions that led to the death. This shows how suffering and death become political. The failure of leadership to prevent violence transforms mourning into a form of civic expression. Apart from death, those who are living are in constant pain. This is seen when the narrator states that: “The living inflict the most pain on the dying, not the dead” (Mda 1995: 57). Here, Toloki reflects on the cruelty and indifference shown by society toward those who are suffering. The institutions meant to protect often exacerbate pain. This moment critiques the structures of power that fail to offer dignity in death. It suggests that bad rulership is not only passive but actively harmful. Similarly, after the death of her son Vutha and the destruction of her shack, Noria is left alone. Her suffering is compounded by the absence of any institutional support. Referring to Noria, the narrator says: “She had lost everything—her child, her home, her hope. And no one in authority came.” This illustrates how poor rulership abandons its citizens in moments of deepest need. Noria’s pain is not just personal—it’s political.

From all these, McCaulay and Mda present several elements of bad governance including corruption and mismanagement of funds; administrative incompetence; precarious economic

situation; and poor living conditions in their respective texts. Such issues are not just occasional backdrops but direct consequences of systemic neglect and misgovernance.

Part Two: Efforts Against Bad Governance

The corruption and mismanagement of funds; administrative incompetence; precarious economic situation; poor living conditions; unemployment; trauma and depression that result from poor governance in Diana McCaulay's *Dog-Heart* and Zakes Mda's *Ways of Dying* as explained above do not leave the people indifferent. In the midst of these ill effects, the people fight against bad governance through moralization, exemplification, legal action, punishment and resistance; and these constitute the focus of this section.

2.1. Moralization and Exemplification

In Diana McCaulay's *Dog-Heart* and Zakes Mda's *Ways of Dying*, the projection of moral values and acting in ways that show examples to follow constitute key ways of fighting against bad leadership. *Dog-Heart* by McCaulay presents the struggle against bad governance through characters who embody moral conviction and exemplify grassroots resistance. These moments of ethical reflection and model behavior are often voiced by characters like Sahara and Dexter, who challenge systemic neglect through personal choices and community engagement. One of such instances is seen in Sahara's ethical awakening when she states that: "If I'm going to help, I have to do more than feel sorry. I have to be accountable. I have to be consistent" (McCaulay 2010: 117). After realizing that her sporadic charity efforts are insufficient, Sahara commits to a more structured and transparent approach. This moment marks a shift from emotional impulse to ethical responsibility. This is a clear instance of moralization, where Sahara critiques her own privilege and vows to act with integrity—challenging the performative charity often seen in failed leadership. This perspective is equally brought out when she confronts institutional apathy as she declares that: "I asked the Ministry why Dexter couldn't get a place. They said the list was long. I asked if they'd met him. They hadn't" (McCaulay 2010: 163). Sahara challenges bureaucratic indifference by advocating directly for Dexter. Her confrontation exposes the impersonal nature of governance and her willingness to intervene. Here is a blend of moralization and exemplification, as Sahara not only critiques the system but also models active citizenship. Such moral behaviour is also perceived when Dexter refuses to join a gang despite the hardship. Dexter indicates this in the following declaration: "Me coulda get money easy, you know. But me don't want to thief or kill. Me want to do something clean" (McCaulay 2010:

134). Here, Dexter rejects the lure of gang life despite economic hardship. His decision reflects a personal stand against the corrupt systems that dominate his environment. Such an act constitutes exemplification, where Dexter models ethical resistance in a context shaped by violence and poverty—an implicit critique of the leadership that allows such conditions to persist. Beyond the level of individuals as seen with Sahara and Dexter here, there is collective community organizing and mutual aid. This is highlighted when a community elder states that: “We start a reading group for the pickney dem. No money, just time and care. Is small, but is something.” This local resident describes a grassroots initiative to support children’s education. Despite lacking formal resources, the group creates a space for learning and hope; exemplifying collective action against bad governance. It shows how ordinary citizens step in where institutions fail, offering a moral counterpoint to political neglect.

Such perspectives are equally presented in *Ways of Dying* by Zakes Mda. The text highlights steps to fight bad governance through acts of moralization and exemplification especially through the characters Toloki and Noria, whose choices and values stand in contrast to the corruption, neglect, and violence surrounding them. In this dimension, Toloki sets moral boundaries around his work, refusing to legitimize deaths caused by political violence or criminality. His stance is a quiet but firm critique of the forces that perpetuate suffering. This is presented by the narrator thus: “Toloki had created rules for himself. He would not mourn for those who died in gang wars or political vendettas. He mourned for the innocent” (Mda 1995: 19). This is a clear act of moralization, where Toloki uses his role to uphold dignity and resist the normalization of violence. Furthermore, Toloki rejects political opportunism. He is invited to align with a political faction during a funeral but declines. His refusal asserts the independence of his moral stance. This is revealed in Toloki’s lamentation as seen in the following statement by the narrator: “He refused to wear the party badge. ‘I mourn for people, not for politics,’ he said” (Mda 1995: 73). This represents both moralization and exemplification—Toloki critiques political co-optation and models ethical autonomy. Such dynamics are equally brought out through Noria’s compassionate leadership. After losing her son and home, Noria becomes a pillar of support in the community. Her actions—feeding children, listening to neighbors—exemplify grassroots leadership. Referring to Noria, the narrator indicates that: “She had become the mother of the settlement. People came to her with their grief, their hunger, their broken things” (Mda 1995: 52). This reflects exemplification through care and solidarity as Noria’s informal authority contrasts sharply with the failure of official governance. Mda, like McCaulay, also

presents collective community action through the building of a house as civic resistance. Toloki and Noria construct a home after her shack is destroyed. The act becomes a symbol of resilience and community rebuilding in the face of state failure. In this light, the narrator states that: “Together they built a house—not just of mud and steel, but of laughter, of stories, of hope” (Mda 1995: 91). This exemplifies constructive resistance. Their home is a metaphor for reclaiming dignity and agency outside formal systems.

2.2. Legal Action

Both authors equally present the dynamics of legal action to fight against bad governance. The texts do not present cases where characters take direct legal proceedings as an option to fight bad governance; but rather highlight the absence of credible legal framework on which they could lean for better governance. Consequently, in *Ways of Dying*, Mda does not foreground formal legal action in the conventional courtroom sense. Instead, the novel critiques the absence of legal recourse and explores how characters respond to injustice through informal, symbolic, and communal means. In this light, after Noria’s shack is destroyed by fire, she is left homeless and unsupported. The lack of emergency relief or legal recourse underscores the failure of governance to uphold basic rights. This is seen as the narrator, in reference to Noria, says: “She had nowhere to go, and no one in authority cared” (Mda 1995: 45). This reflects the absence of legal infrastructure—a silent indictment of leadership that fails to protect or respond to crisis. Similarly, there is community justice and informal accountability. This is brought out when a township resident states that: “They said the man who stole the clinic money was beaten. Not dead, but bad. People were tired of waiting for justice” (Mda 1995: 78). This local resident recounts how a corrupt figure was punished by the community after misappropriating public funds; reflecting informal justice—a grassroots response to failed legal systems. It shows how communities enact accountability when formal governance structures are absent or ineffective. Furthermore, the text presents bureaucratic evasion and lack of legal clarity when the narrator states that: “No one knew who was responsible. The child lay in the mortuary for days while forms were lost and signatures chased” (Mda 1995: 101). Here, Toloki witnesses the administrative chaos surrounding a child’s funeral. The delay reflects systemic dysfunction and the erosion of legal and civic order. These lines critique the breakdown of legal and bureaucratic processes, where even the right to burial is obstructed by mismanagement.

Similarly, *Dog-Heart* by McCaulay, the narrative focuses more on grassroots activism and personal intervention than formal legal proceedings. However, unlike *Ways of Dying*, *Dog-Heart*

highlights moments where characters confront institutions or invoke legal mechanisms as part of their efforts against bad governance. This is seen in Sahara's confrontation with bureaucracy. Sahara attempts to advocate for Dexter's admission into a government-supported program. Her direct questioning of the Ministry exposes the impersonal and inefficient nature of public systems. She brings this out by saying that: "I asked the Ministry why Dexter couldn't get a place. They said the list was long. I asked if they'd met him. They hadn't" (McCaulay 2010: 163). This shows a form of legal advocacy—not through courtrooms, but through administrative pressure. Sahara's insistence on accountability exemplifies citizen-led resistance to bureaucratic inertia. In the midst of this, Sahara deeply reflects on systemic barriers. She reflects on the disconnect between Jamaica's legal framework and the lived reality of children in impoverished communities as she laments that: "There are laws, yes. But they don't reach Dexter's world. They don't protect him" (McCaulay 2010: 186). This shows the failure of legal systems to extend protection to the most vulnerable. It's a powerful indictment of governance that legislates but does not implement equitably. Furthermore, there is a threat of legal recourse over police harassment. In this light, Marcia expresses frustration over repeated harassment by law enforcement while vending. Though she mentions reporting them, her rhetorical question below reveals a lack of faith in legal protection: "Me tell dem police one day me going report dem. But who going listen to me" (McCaulay 2010: 104)? This illustrates how legal action is imagined but undermined by systemic inequality. The threat of reporting becomes symbolic of the community's desire for justice, even when institutions fail to respond. In addition, at the community level, there is discussion on rights and legal recourse. During a community meeting, residents discuss how to respond to broken promises about sanitation and housing. The suggestion to write to the Member of Parliament reflects a strategic use of formal channels. This is seen when a community elder states that: "We should write a letter to the MP. Let them know we watching. Let them know we not fool" (McCaulay 2010: 175). This shows collective legal consciousness—a belief that documentation and formal complaint can serve as tools against bad governance.

As seen here, in both texts, there are several situations in which the people contemplate legal action against aspects of bad leadership. However, they hardly take any to the courtroom for legal proceedings. This is not because they lack the will, but simply because they do not have faith in the legal systems of the respective countries.

2.3. Punishment

In Diana McCaulay's *Dog-Heart* and Zakes Mda's *Ways of Dying*, punishment is used in several instances to fight bad governance. As far as *Dog-Heart* is concerned, McCaulay presents efforts against poor rulership not only through advocacy and moral resistance, but also through moments of punishment—whether symbolic, communal, or personal—used to confront injustice and failed leadership. This can be perceived in Dexter's personal code of retribution when he says that: "Me not going let nobody disrespect Mama. Me will deal with them meself" (McCaulay 2010: 126). Dexter expresses his readiness to confront those who mistreat his mother, including local enforcers and exploiters. His stance reflects a personal ethic of protection and retaliation; and shows how punishment becomes personal in the absence of institutional justice. Dexter's response is shaped by a broader failure of governance to safeguard vulnerable families. A similar dynamic is projected through Sahara's moral reckoning. Sahara reflects on her own role in perpetuating dependency and failing to challenge systemic injustice. Her self-critique functions as an internal form of punishment. Her reflections are brought out thus: "I thought I was helping, but maybe I was just playing savior. That's a kind of harm too" (McCaulay 2010: 187). This reveals how ethical self-punishment can emerge from moral awareness. Sahara's introspection is part of a broader reckoning with the limits of individual charity in the face of structural failure. At the community level, there is community retaliation against corrupt officials. This is seen when a community elder states that: "Dem say the man who tief the clinic money get beat. Not dead, but bad. People vex, you see" (McCaulay 2010: 178). In this situation, the local resident recounts how a corrupt official who embezzled funds meant for a health clinic was physically punished by community members. This shows informal justice—a form of grassroots punishment enacted when formal legal systems fail. It signals the community's refusal to remain passive under exploitative leadership. In a related perspective, there is public shaming as social sanction. During a town meeting, residents publicly confront a local leader about missing development funds. The act of shaming serves as a nonviolent form of punishment. In this light, the community organizer states that: "We call him out in front of everybody. Ask where the money gone. Him face swell with shame" (McCaulay 2010: 165). This is an illustration of symbolic punishment—a strategic effort to hold leaders accountable through public exposure. It reflects a collective demand for transparency.

In *Ways of Dying*, Mda equally explores punishment as a form of effort against bad governance, particularly through informal justice, community retaliation, and symbolic resistance. These acts

often arise in response to corruption, exploitation, and the absence of legal accountability in post-apartheid South Africa. This can be seen in Toloki's ethical refusal to mourn for a warlord as a form of punishment to the latter. Toloki declines to perform mourning rituals for political figures responsible for violence. His refusal is a personal form of punishment—denying them dignity in death. This is perceived in the narrator's statement, referring to Toloki, that: "He refused to mourn for the warlords. 'I mourn for the innocent,' he said. 'Not for those who cause death'" (Mda 1995: 73). This constitutes a powerful act of symbolic resistance, where Toloki uses his role to morally censure those in power. Similarly, Noria rejects exploitative authority. After confronting a local leader who failed to deliver promised housing, Noria expresses her contempt through direct action. Referring to Noria, the narrator says: "She spat on the councillor's shoes and walked away. 'You build nothing but lies,' she said" (Mda 1995: 85). Here, Mda blends verbal and symbolic punishment, asserting moral clarity in the face of political deception. At the collective level, there is community retaliation against corruption as a local resident recounts how a corrupt figure who misappropriated public health funds was physically punished by the community. This is brought out when the resident says that: "They said the man who stole the clinic money was beaten. Not dead, but bad. People were tired of waiting for justice" (Mda 1995: 78). This reflects informal justice enacted by citizens when formal governance fails. The beating is not just retribution—it's a symbolic rejection of impunity. In addition, there is public shaming as social sanction. After a local official is exposed for misusing development funds, the community stages a public protest outside his home. In this light, the narrator says that: "They gathered outside his house and sang songs of shame. Women ululated. Children pointed. He did not come out" (Mda 1995: 80). This illustrates nonviolent punishment through collective action. The protest becomes a moral indictment of leadership failure.

2.4. Resistance

As a result of the various forms of suffering they go through due to bad leadership, the people resist poor governance in several ways. With regard to *Ways of Dying*, Mda portrays resistance as a vital form of effort against bad governance, especially in the context of post-apartheid South Africa's broken promises and institutional failures. Through characters like Toloki and Noria, and the broader township community, Mda explores how dignity, solidarity, and ethical defiance become tools of survival and protest. As stated earlier, Toloki refuses to mourn for political warlords or gang leaders, asserting a moral boundary in his work as a professional mourner as he states that: "I mourn for the innocent. Not for those who cause death" (Mda 1995: 73). This is an

act of symbolic resistance, where Toloki uses his role to critique violence and corruption, refusing to legitimize those responsible for suffering. Resistance is also brought out in Noria's role as a community anchor. After losing her son and home, Noria becomes a source of strength and care in the community. Her informal leadership contrasts with the failure of official governance. In this light, referring to Noria, the narrator indicates that: "She had become the mother of the settlement. People came to her with their grief, their hunger, their broken things" (Mda 1995: 52). This exemplifies grassroots resistance through compassion and solidarity. Noria's actions rebuild trust and dignity where institutions have failed. Beyond the individual level, the community also rebuilds in defiance. This can be perceived through Toloki and Noria who construct a new home after her shack is destroyed. The act becomes a metaphor for reclaiming agency and creating beauty amid devastation. In this light, the narrator states that: "Together they built a house—not just of mud and steel, but of laughter, of stories, of hope." This reflects constructive resistance—a refusal to be defined by loss, and a challenge to the neglect of housing and welfare systems. Similarly, the community protests against corruption. After a local official is exposed for misusing development funds, the community stages a public protest outside his home as stated by the narrator thus: "They gathered outside his house and sang songs of shame. Women ululated. Children pointed. He did not come out" (Mda 1995: 80).

This is a vivid example of collective resistance, where public shaming becomes a tool to hold leaders accountable in the absence of formal justice.

In the same dimension, McCaulay's *Dog-Heart* presents resistance as a key response to bad governance, especially through grassroots action, personal defiance, and ethical confrontation. The novel's characters—particularly Dexter, Marcia, Sahara, and unnamed community members—embody various forms of resistance against systemic neglect, corruption, and institutional failure. A key act of resistance is Dexter's rejection of gang culture despite the obvious advantages it can provide. Dexter resists the lure of gang life despite economic hardship as he states that: "Me coulda get money easy, you know. But me don't want to thief or kill. Me want to do something clean" (McCaulay 2010: 134). His decision reflects a personal stand against the corrupt systems that dominate his environment. This is a powerful act of individual resistance, where Dexter chooses integrity over survivalist violence, implicitly challenging the leadership structures that have failed him. Similarly, Marcia refuses to be silenced. Marcia expresses her frustration over repeated harassment by law enforcement while vending. Though she doubts the system's responsiveness, her threat to report them signals a refusal to accept abuse

passively. This is seen when Marcia affirms that: “Me tell dem police one day me going report dem. But who going listen to me” (McCaulay 102: 104)? This reflects resistance through voice, even when the legal system is perceived as inaccessible. It’s a moment of moral courage in the face of institutional intimidation. In the same vein, Sahara confronts bureaucracy as she states that: “I asked the Ministry why Dexter couldn’t get a place. They said the list was long. I asked if they’d met him. They hadn’t” (McCaulay 2010: 163). Here, Sahara challenges bureaucratic indifference by advocating directly for Dexter. Her confrontation exposes the impersonal nature of governance and her willingness to intervene. This moment blends advocacy and resistance, as Sahara uses her social position to challenge institutional apathy and demand recognition for marginalized youth. at a broader level, the community defies political neglect as a form of resistance. During a community meeting, residents discuss how to respond to broken promises about sanitation and housing. The suggestion to write to the Member of Parliament reflects a strategic use of formal channels to demand accountability. This is perceived when a community elder declares that: “We should write a letter to the MP. Let them know we watching. Let them know we not fool” (McCaulay 2010: 175). This exemplifies collective resistance through civic engagement. It shows how ordinary citizens mobilize to confront political neglect using institutional tools.

Conclusion

The analysis of Diana McCaulay’s *Dog-Heart* and Zakes Mda’s *Ways of Dying* reveals that both novels portray political leadership failures as deeply entrenched structural dysfunctions rather than mere personal moral lapses. In *Dog-Heart*, Sahara’s struggle to navigate an indifferent bureaucracy for Dexter’s education lays bare the systemic neglect that renders citizens vulnerable (p. 215). Similarly, *Ways of Dying* situates Toloki’s professional mourning within the vacuums left by apartheid-era institutions, illustrating how the collapse of formal governance precipitates social fragmentation (p. 196). Through the lens of Critical Leadership Theory, this study demonstrates that McCaulay and Mda foreground the interplay between formal authority and informal solidarities. Their narratives critique top-down power by exposing how corrupt practices and opaque decision-making erode public trust and civic capacity (p. 47). At the same time, they valorize ethical accountability: Sahara’s unsanctioned tutoring initiative (p. 202) and Toloki’s ritual orations (p. 172) enact what the article terms “responsive governance,” a bottom-up model that privileges communal welfare over hierarchical command. Ultimately, McCaulay and Mda advocate for a reconfiguration of leadership grounded in moral solidarity. By

dramatizing citizens' rights to dissent and self-organization when official structures fail, the novels affirm that governance must be a shared endeavor, one that recognizes the legitimacy of grassroots interventions (p. 34). This narrative prescription underscores the enduring relevance of literature as a site for interrogating and reimagining political authority in postcolonial contexts. The convergence of postcolonial narrative and critical leadership theory in this analysis highlights fiction's capacity to illuminate the human stakes of governance debates. By tracing the misuse of power alongside collective efforts at remediation, the article underscores the potential of literary texts to contribute to broader discussions on accountability, transparency, and sustainable civic engagement.

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