

Vol. 5, N°18, pp. 81– 96, Juin 2026
Copy©right 2024 / licensed under CC BY 4.0
Author(s) retain the copyright of this article
ISSN : 1987-1465
DOI : <https://www.doi.org/10.62197/YBID8908>
Indexation : Copernicus, CrossRef, Mir@bel, Sudoc,
ASCI, Zenodo
Email : RevueKurukanFuga2021@gmail.com
Site : <https://revue-kurukanfuga.net>

*La Revue Africaine des
Lettres, des Sciences
Humaines et Sociales
KURUKAN FUGA*

SELF-SACRIFICING AS A SYMBOLIC TRAIL TOWARDS REVOLUTION IN VÉRONIQUE TADJO'S *THE BLIND KINGDOM*

Fiacre AHO¹

PhD en Littérature Africaine Anglophone
Département d'Anglais, Université d'Abomey-Calavi, République du Bénin
ORCID: 0009-0006-5784-1582
Email: sfiacreaho@gmail.com

Laye Sory CONDE²

PhD en Littérature Africaine Francophone
Département de Langue et Lettres, Université de N'Zerekoré, République de Guinée
Email : condelaysory218@gmail.com

Akinola Monday ALLAGBE³

PhD en Littérature Africaine Anglophone
Département de Langue, Université de N'Zerekoré, République de Guinée
ORCID : 0009-0007-1081-9764
Email : akinolas4u@yahoo.fr

Abstract: Revolutionary struggles against oppression and colonial domination often require leaders to make significant personal sacrifices, including imprisonment or death. However, the extent to which such self-sacrifice contributes to the success of liberation movements and inspires future generations remains a subject of critical inquiry. This study examines the representation and significance of revolutionary self-sacrifice in the selected novel, with the objective of demonstrating that the leader's willingness to suffer for a collective cause serves as a catalyst for genuine freedom and sustained resistance. The research adopts a qualitative methodology based on textual analysis and the review of relevant scholarly literature. It is grounded in postcolonial theory and reader-response theory. Postcolonial theory is employed to decode the manifestations of colonial domination and the strategies of resistance depicted in the text, while reader-response theory allows for an interpretation of the novel in relation to contemporary sociopolitical concerns. The findings reveal that the revolutionary leader's sacrifice functions as a symbolic landmark that strengthens collective consciousness, motivates followers to continue the struggle despite repression, and contributes to the attainment of freedom. The study further shows that such acts of self-sacrifice transcend the individual and become enduring sources of inspiration for future generations engaged in struggles against oppression.

Key words: freedom, landmark, leader, revolutionary struggle, self-sacrificing

Résumé : Les luttes révolutionnaires contre l'oppression et la domination coloniale exigent souvent de leurs dirigeants d'importants sacrifices personnels, pouvant aller jusqu'à l'emprisonnement ou à la mort. Cependant, la mesure dans laquelle ce sacrifice de soi contribue au succès des mouvements de libération et inspire les générations futures demeure une question de recherche essentielle. Cette étude examine la représentation et la portée du sacrifice révolutionnaire dans le roman retenu afin de démontrer que la

volonté du leader de souffrir pour une cause collective constitue un catalyseur de la véritable liberté et de la résistance durable. La recherche adopte une méthodologie qualitative fondée sur l'analyse textuelle et l'exploitation de travaux scientifiques pertinents. Elle s'appuie sur la théorie postcoloniale et la théorie de la réception du lecteur. La théorie postcoloniale est convoquée pour décoder les manifestations de la domination coloniale ainsi que les stratégies de résistance représentées dans le texte, tandis que la théorie de la réception du lecteur permet une interprétation du roman en lien avec les préoccupations sociopolitiques contemporaines. Les résultats montrent que le sacrifice du leader révolutionnaire fonctionne comme un repère symbolique qui renforce la conscience collective, motive les partisans à poursuivre la lutte malgré la répression et contribue à l'obtention de la liberté. L'étude révèle en outre que de tels actes de sacrifice transcendent l'individu pour devenir des sources durables d'inspiration pour les générations futures engagées dans des combats contre l'oppression.

Mots-clés : liberté, repère, leader, lutte révolutionnaire, sacrifice de soi.

Introduction

To dismantle and defeat autocracy, someone must commit to epitomise the lead and challenge evil. If dashed into martyrdom, they become a symbol of freedom fighter in whom future generations mirror themselves to continue the struggle and settle things right. Véronique Tadjo has a clear understanding of this. The West-African woman, novelist and poet, formed with Ivorian blood on the paternal side and French distaff, has tried to fictionalise the dehumanising phenomenon called autocracy, which severs in Africa. In her novel *The Blind Kingdom*, she presents the autocrat king Ato IV, whose reign stigmatises the OtherPeople – the marginalised masses of the Great North – and favours the BlindPeople – the privileged handful of people of the South. With a narrative diction, the author screens regionalism and ethnic segregation, which tears African nations apart and freezes their peace and development.

The projection of the degrading portrayal of Africa's socio-political condition is shaped by denunciation and uprising, leading to the demise of autocracy and segregation. Indirectly, Tadjo teaches that self-sacrificing action to liberate the masses from tyranny and injustice is, without a doubt, the panacea to awaken and rise the masses against their tormentors. This novel is the actual guide that the masses must gulp in African societies to be possessed by the spirit of revolution to break through the dictatorial and autocratic barriers. In this vein, the actual research work seeks to scrutinise the novel and highlight the main theme – sacrificial revolution – and make it digestible for mere neophytes and laymen of fiction reading. To attain the goal, the research is structured in three points, which are Invasion of Sightless Leaders with Autocratic Rule, Social Discrepancy due to Dictatorial Segregation, Self-Sacrificing to Revolution and the Collapse of Autocracy.

1- Invasion of Sightless Leaders with Autocratic Rule

African countries are under the yoke of underdevelopment and socio-political instability because of blind autocratic leadership that restricts liberties. This theme is highlighted by Tadjó in her novel *The Blind Kingdom*. His Majesty Ato IV – the leader of the BlindPeople – invades the native empire – the OtherPeople –, conquers the land and builds his kingdom: “Within a short while, they invaded the empire and installed their kingdom” (Tadjó, 1990, p.4).

The landowners are reduced to mere slaves by strangers. This fact is observed in many contemporary African countries with non-native rulers imposed. While reading advertently the novel and considering the political history of the narrator’s country, Côte d’Ivoire, one may, without any doubt, infer that the content of this literary genre, is the imaginary representation of her Côte d’Ivoire. In fact, the rule of King Ato IV seems the fictional shaping of African leaders whose origins are either European, American, Asiatic, Oceanic or African but nationalised by the African countries where they settle. This may be due to migrations whose factors include, according to Joseph Robert Bassey, “... trade and trade routes, gold mines, wars, agricultural activities, Islam, European imperialism and availability of statesmen” (2014, p.153) in his scientific article titled “An assessment of impact of neglect of history on political stability in African countries: The case of Côte d’Ivoire”.

The screening of Africa’s history and precisely Côte d’Ivoire’s history as explained by Bassey “... some of the kingdoms and chiefdoms in Ivory Coast were founded by these immigrants” (2014, p.151), can lead to the analysis that the novel, partly, alludes to Alassane Dramane Ouattara’s arrival to power. Accused of having a Burkinabe origin and naturalised Ivorian “... son of so-called immigrants...” (Bassey, 2014, p.157), Ouattara installs a difficultly-vincible autocracy and rules Côte d’Ivoire since 2010 in total violation of the country’s constitution. In light of this palpable example, the imaginary immigrant BlindPeople invade the OtherPeople and dominate them politically.

King Ato IV establishes a powerful kingdom symbolised by a bat, “Built on a gigantic hill, the palace spread its wings over the city like a monstrous bat” (Tadjó, 1990, p.5), which muzzles the masses. The choice of building the kingdom in bat form is significant: “Because the bat with its mysterious cries is the possessor of infinite powers” (Tadjó, 1990, p.5). It is all the same important to specify that the bat is a blind animal which develops an aversion to daytime. Its power manifests in the night: “Because darkness is the bat’s force” (Tadjó, 1990, p.5).

In fact, the preference for shaping the kingdom's palace in bat is a metaphor which clearly erects an analogy between the king's nature and the roadmap of governance. For having chosen to invoke and embody bat's nature, he announces the promotion of vices rather than virtues. This is indeed observed throughout the novel.

In the quest for the reason that justifies the adoption of autocracy with absolute power, one may assume that Ato IV needs to camouflage his weakness, which can be exposed if light should prevail. The darkness permits him to rule the kingdom in total opacity without the possibility for anyone to rebel. As weak as he is, only autocracy can empower him. Metaphorically, Tadjó uses the word 'darkness' deliberately to show that dictators erect it in their abode and repel light because they are weak and vulnerable.

Similarly, as blind, the bat has learnt to master its world of obscurity. It is characterised by a kind of photophobia which turns his potency into impotency when light is. The daytime is not its world. To exist without being crushed, it must avoid playing with light. Like a bat, the king Ato IV is a blind person who warfully and viciously conquers the OtherPeople's territory. He is blind to virtue, love and justice. His nature has never been featured with righteousness and benignity. His self has never resided in goodness. His governance is characterised by injustice and oppression. Like the blind bat which "inhabits the night and masters the sky..." (Tadjó, 1990, p.5), His Majesty Ato IV is powerful by repulsing and taming good.

The choice of bat is a symbolic representation of evil in political governance. It symbolises a dictator and the masses' wealth devourer. The king not only erects the palace in bat-form but also breeds the beast: "Bats lived freely in the gardens of the palace" (Tadjó, 1990, p.5). He cares for those animals so well and knows their simplest and particular desire: "He knew, exactly, the special way they sounded if they liked the mixture of ripe fruit, fresh vegetables and insects he threw to them" (Tadjó, 1990, p.5). Yet, he despises the vital needs of the slum-dwellers: "There are some people who are subdued and already beaten by death. They have a pitiful look in their eyes and sad faces" (Tadjó, 1990, p.25).

This is the actual portrait of post-independence African leaders. They develop some phobias defined in *The Encyclopedia of Phobias, Fears, and Anxieties* as dikephobia "Fear of JUSTICE..." (Doctor and Ada, 1989, p.152), cherophobia "Fear of being happy or of gaiety" (Doctor and Ada, 1989, p.96) and eleutherophobia "Fear of freedom ..." (Doctor and Ada, 1989, p.197). His Majesty Ato IV grants happiness to the minority and abandon the majority in

total misery without any possibility for the marginalised to voice and claim for justice. Authoritarian rule muzzles them to the extent that they lose hope.

The sightlessness of the minority – those who make the most of the nation’s wealth – hampers them from beholding the afflictions of the OtherPeople: “Clouds of loneliness and despair colored the days – the tears – the distress” (Tadjo, 1990, p.4). The afflictions and sorrows are so burning and obnoxious that the marginalised start deeply delving into despondency and wonder how long the crossing of the desert will endure: “How many more days? Time stood still” (Tadjo, 1990, p.4).

Unscrupulous politicians, totally ignorant of the real sense of good governance, claim to be messiahs and invade the political arena with the deceitful view to acquire wealth and use the authority they are empowered with to submit the people to misery. In fact, they develop such an insensitiveness regarding the lamentations of the hunger-devoured populations that they lead. Their eyes are widely open. Yet, they refuse to see the sufferings that their mismanagement imposes on their populations. Their coming to power generates sacrifices deployed by the people, either through coup d’état or crooked elections with contestations of the results, which make many casualties. Then, they reduce their peoples to useless lambs whose baaing need no emergency. That is exactly the way King Ato IV treat the OtherPeople in the country.

In the novel of Véronique Tadjo the invasion by the army of King Ato IV for the conquest of the land of the OtherPeople sounds like, under the umbrella of reader-response theory, the colonial invasion and its rule in Africa. Though invasion and conquest of neighbouring tribes are part of Africa’s precolonial history, this fiction, produced during Africa’s post-independent era, seems to portray the manifestations of colonial entrance and rule in Africa.

When one recollects the manifestations of colonial presence in Africa which consist, in the quest for survival, in imposing dominion on African colonies by resorting to “... military conquest and the extinguishment of their kingdoms” (Gümplová, 2019, p.6), one does quite understand the role of consciousness-raising that the novelist chooses to play. Tadjo engages in this role to make the masses understand that “... the European intrusion had profound effects on Africa...” (2007, p.193) as stated by John Iliffe in his book *Africans: the History of a Continent*.

African kingdoms are dispirited in a way that their existence is conditioned to align with the invader's authority. This fact is exposed in the novel with Karim's role in the palace as "... the King's new secretary" (Tadjo, 1990, p.16). The young man is an aboriginal of the land. In former days, the empire of his own tribesmen cares for them with a parental or motherly love. But things have changed since their empire has collapsed due to being no match for the invasion of the army of King Ato IV. Then, survival instinct obliges him and his countrymen to accept the multiracial colouration of their territory. They – the OtherPeople – are from then supposed to be one people in mixture with the BlindPeople. But this expected oneness results in tough times for the new ruler, making room for social discrepancy.

2- Social Discrepancy under Dictatorial Segregation

The invader King Ato IV prioritises the handful of settlers and disfavours the great number of autochthons "... who are in despair from their life of misery and brutality" (Tadjo, 1990, p.37). The masses are objectified in a way that misery gnaw them to the core: "The life of the forgotten, of the downtrodden, scratched from history, and whose unique privilege is that of sight" (Tadjo, 1990, p.37). The BlindPeople adopt a paradisiacal life and impose hell on the OtherPeople: "Seeing the madness of these BlindPeople who are making their life miserable and playing a hellish game" (Tadjo, 1990, p.38).

The OtherPeople are living a peaceful life before they are invaded by the BlindPeople. Their history "... profound traditions and mystical societies" (Tadjo, 1990, p.14) is erased through the sudden mixture with the invasion of a foreign race: "... a great past that the BlindPeople had destroyed" (Tadjo, 1990, p.14). This sudden change inflicts a famishing and slaving stroke "Ahhh, if only the empire had not known injustice, slavery!" (Tadjo, 1990, p.14) to the life of the landowners. The settlers are now masters, reducing the autochthons to mere slaves with no right to dignity and justice.

As a matter of fact, the oppressed OtherPeople "... felt withered by life" (Tadjo, 1990, p.15) just because "... there was no peace and there was no hope either" (Tadjo, 1990, p.15). This injustice makes Princess Akissi – the only daughter of King Ato IV – boldly tell her father: "For too long you have reigned with fury" (Tadjo, 1990, p.21). The injustice in the privilege allotted to the BlindPeople does not catch the fancy of all the beneficiaries. Some of the BlindPeople – though an insignificant number – live in this unjust luxury in spite of themselves. Akissi reveals this to her father: "You have fashioned the kingdom in a way that pleased you.

You have spoken on behalf of everyone and the voices were made quiet so that each one of us could hear you” (Tadjo, 1990, p.21).

The OtherPeople do not exaggerate when they daily mumble that “Everything was grey. Everything was sad” (Tadjo, 1990, p.15) and they live in a condition where there is “No electricity” (Tadjo, 1990, p.15). The autocrat Ato IV, boastfully, shamelessly and unscrupulously, somehow recognises during a wedding-party that he is a segregationist ruler: “The slum-dwellers must be kept in awe by the splendour and luxuriousness of the festivities” (Tadjo, 1990, p.7). He goes on and specifies, “One must proclaim to the world and to the slum-dwellers that the kingdom has never before been this prosperous! I am going to show them, I, Ato IV, what power is! And one day, it will be my daughter’s turn. Then, I will make the entire world tremble with envy!” (Tadjo, 1990, p.7).

It is clear that King Ato IV rules for his ethnic folk. The slum-dwellers – the OtherPeople – are mere slaves who deserve no care and human dignity. Ato’s words clearly portray him as a coloniser. The features of colonisation are vivid in his mind in a way that they pitilessly, heartlessly, unscrupulously and cruelly manifest at each of his heartbeat. While the landowners are lacking the minimum of vital decency, Ato IV belches pride and arrogance in a financial mess for one of his relatives’ wedding. That is how many African rulers behave. The masses are objectified and considered as non-humans. Some scholars agree that “... fall on a continuum between two types of ruling strategies: inclusionary and exclusionary” (Neundorf et al, 2020, p.1893). But King Ato IV is a dictator who, unfortunately has chosen to adopt an exclusionary strategy by famishing and making suffer the great numbers of the people.

In the exclusionary regime “... a regime with a narrow societal basis that excludes from power most social, religious, and ethnic groups. Its power stems from a narrow set of actors that obtain exclusive benefits.” (Neundorf et al, 2020, p.1893) established by King Ato IV, the OtherPeople are deprived of all privileges. They are treated like hungry dogs fed on bones while watching their masters eat the fleshy part of the meat. This kind of injustice makes the OtherPeople gradually dim out. Though Akissi points out this injustice and its consequences to her father, “If we don’t want to construct war, we must build peace” (Tadjo, 1990, p.21) and calls for a change, “You must change” (Tadjo, 1990, p.21), the autocratic King turns a deaf ear.

Like King Ato IV, contemporary rulers in Africa famish and oppress the masses. Their exclusionary governance is unethical to inclusionary rule, which is objectively recommended. Those post-independence political leaders put in place exclusionary regimes which enrich only

the members of the circle: “Exclusionary regimes rely more on redistributing particularistic goods to the members of the ruling elite, while actively restricting the access to power and economic redistribution to other groups from within society” (Neundorf et al, 2020, p.1893). Political leaders develop an abhorrence of inclusionary governance. Some researchers define an inclusionary regime as:

... a regime that relies on a broad public support base.⁴ These regimes incorporate various social, economic, and ethnic groups into their power structure by ensuring a wider redistribution of political and socioeconomic benefits to the population. This strategy aims at minimizing the threats that can emanate from within the society by buying off the opposition with political and economic concessions that are available only if they support the regime (Neundorf et al, 2020, p.1893).

The adoption of the exclusionary rule leads to segregation, which is defined in *Dictionary of Politics and Government* as “the practice of keeping ethnic, racial, religious, or gender groups separate, especially by enforcing the use of separate facilities such as schools and usually discriminating against a minority group” (Collin, 2004, p.224). Two researchers explain in one of their work that “Segregation is the nonrandom allocation of people who belong to different groups into social positions and the associated social and physical distances between groups” (Bruch & Mare, 2007, p.2). King Ato IV rules the state with segregation processes, an expression which means “... the actions that create and sustain segregation” (Bruch & Mare, 2007, p.2).

The OtherPeople are out of the core of his governance. Only the ethnic people of Ato IV are in the heart of his rule. He deforms the harmonious life that has once characterised the nation. He cuts the bond of fraternity and institutes regionalism, bisects the oneness of the nation and duplicates clanship in a way to oppose one clan to the other. The following passage clearly shows that the king rules to oppose one faction against the other: “The slum-dwellers must be kept in awe by the splendour and luxuriousness of the festivities” (Tadjo, 1990, p.7). The governance of His Majesty Ato IV is starving the slum-dwellers while the city-dwellers, composed in the majority of his tribesmen, are living in luxury. It is then in the logic of good sense to wonder which crime the slum-dwellers have committed to be kept off happiness and peace.

When his Majesty Ato IV says, “I am the one who created this country. I, who built it with my own hands, shaped it according to my own will” (Tadjo, 1990, p.7), it is clear that he somehow recognises that he has dislocated the reigning peace of that land before he invades it. As dictators often do, he insufflates a glorious sense to his criminal acts through these poetic blank verses:

Without me, there would be nothing here.
Without me, everyone would have starved.
I am the rock on which the kingdom is built.
I am the king of steel whose power generates the future.
I am the one whose voice makes the mountains tremble (Tadjo, 1990, p.7).

In this vein of social inequalities provoked by the dictatorial regime, the following passage emphasises the image of the two opposed blocks created by His Majesty Ato IV within the same nation. A researcher's definition of class-based social inequality describes it as those "... enduring and systematic differences in access to and control over resources for provisioning and survival" (Acker, 2006, p.444). The king's preferred clan lives in "An immense mural of hills surrounded the city, and one could also believe that they marked its borders" (Tadjo, 1990, p.13). The second block lives in "Wooden shanties in clusters..." (Tadjo, 1990, p.13). Still in the vein of describing the living conditions of the marginalised block, the narrator specifies that "A dirty layer of dust hung over the roofs and stopped the sun from piercing through. It seemed that night was always ready to fall. All the walls appeared to be faded" (Tadjo, 1990, p.13). But, "The BlindPeople were detached from all of that" (Tadjo, 1990, p.13). In the kingdom of His Majesty Ato IV, the OtherPeople are "... the only ones to go around town on foot, coughed, spat, choked" (Tadjo, 1990, p.13).

Under a circumstance where a nation is divided into two social classes with a tiny privileged class and a mass marginalised class, nothing can stop chaos from seeking abode sooner or later. In the nation ruled by his majesty Ato IV and in many African countries, "...current levels of poverty are maintained and uphold^[sic] by social inequalities which exclude certain groups defined by class or by status (ethnic, race, age, gender, etc.) from human development" (Schorr, 2018, p.16). Such inequalities give rise to the drift of frustrations in a way that the mass marginalised group consider the tiny privileged group as enemies responsible for their misfortune.

Consequently, the innocent beneficiaries of the handful privileged group are targeted too in the murmurs and mumbling which clothe and set up rebellion: "Seeing the madness of these BlindPeople who are making their life miserable and playing a hellish game" (Tadjo, 1990, p.38). Their silence makes them guilty. Their inaction, motionlessness and speechlessness may be interpreted as complicity with the dictatorial rule. They may be accused of siding with tribal segregation that their tribesman King Ato IV is using as a ruling weapon. Karim blames them as "People whose unique privilege is their ability to see chaos and madness..." (Tadjo, 1990, p.38) without raising the tiniest finger to denounce injustice.

King Ato IV brings doom with his rule. The OtherPeople are torn by despair and despondency. The poet – a persona character in the novel – rightly argues “A country without hope is a country that is collapsing” (Tadjo, 1990, p.39). This collapse of the country is related to the incapacity of the frustrations to continuously restrain themselves. The poet warns:

When entire generations cannot succeed and when life dies a little more each day, of a death without burial, without rest, without yesterday,
When columns of men and women find themselves in front of closed doors,
When the day does not exist,
When the sun fades,
Then, they unearth the war hatchet and invoke the Spirit of Thunder.
When those who cultivate the land turn in circles on the arid soil and when the women give birth without joy,
When the rains no longer fall and when the livestock die,
Then, they all rush to the city’s gate and curse injustice.
When life is poorly sketched-out, broken down and harsh,
Then, revolt fires up. And the stakes start burning (Tadjo, 1990, p.39).

With the chaotic rule of such political corrupt rulers devoid of moral values and good sense who shatter hopes unendingly and unreasonably, the mass marginalised class ends up inuring the purport of revolt: “People consider revolting when they suffer from systematic, social, economic or political inequality, like the lack of political rights, relative poverty, social injustice, or poor working and living conditions” (Camacho & Hassan, 2023, p.2). Fed up with social inequalities by daily muttering that “life is rotten and the future dead” (Tadjo, 1990, p.57), the marginalised falls out of line with the view to restore the dignity of their nation by “... imprisoning injustice” (Tadjo, 1990, p.78) through revolution which “... is the successful end of a powerful social movement” (Camacho & Hassan, 2023, p.2).

3- Revolutionary Martyrdom and Autocratic Collapse

Liberating oneself from an autocratic regime is sacrificial. Revolution is required when unreasonable autocracy roots and rejects the common share of the resources. A scholar explains that revolution is “... the only gleam of hope in a present world of darkness” (Yoder, 1926, p.433). This means that when “Bad luck has struck...” (Tadjo, 1990, p.78) public harmony, peace and prosperity, revolution must intervene to set things right. In such circumstances, “... the stories of successful revolutionary changes are the most cherished traditions of our society” (Yoder, 1926, pp.433-434). In this vein, a researcher explains how the masses fix and fit revolution:

When their actions are based on dense social networks and effective connective structures and draw on legitimate, action-oriented cultural frames, they can sustain these actions even in contact with powerful opponents. In such cases – and only in such cases – we are in the presence of a social

movement. When such contention spreads across an entire society – as it sometimes does – we see a cycle of contention. When such a cycle is organized around opposed or multiple sovereignties, the outcome is a revolution (Tarrow, 1994, p.16)

For revolution to take shape, there must be a leader or leaders. The role of the leaders is to prepare the masses psychologically and physically in a way that no impediments interfere and bring failure to their social movements of liberation. That is exactly the role played by the poet while addressing the crowd: “We must keep going. We must resist. We must reverse our roles and create a new life. Don’t talk to me about utopia. Don’t talk to me about being a dreamer. Don’t talk to me about fantasies!” (Tadjo, 1990, p.78). Those revolutionary words sound loud in the heart of the crowd and possess their spirit. The result is that the autocracy of King Ato IV is debilitated by a revolutionary assault on the palace:

The tight mass of slum-dwellers descended the hills like a tidal wave or a downpour of lava. Cries fired the sky and fists cut through the overheated atmosphere: FREE KARIM! FREE THE PRISONERS!” The men tapped empty cans to give more weight to the words they shouted. The women yelled and the children clapped their hands (Tadjo, 1990, p.79).

Karim – the king’s new secretary and tribesman of the OtherPeople originating “From the Great North !? ” (Tadjo, 1990, p.16) as Akissi wonders when she is informed by her governess that “he came from the vast land of the OtherPeople ...” (Tadjo, 1990, p.16), – finds necessary that the ongoing injustice and segregationist rule by King Ato IV must be demystified: “We must bring this to an end! Destroy this cursed kingdom! Burn this wretched city!” (Tadjo, 1990, p.23). He dreams of “... a kingdom where neither palace nor slum would be built” (Tadjo, 1990, p.23).

Considering the misery and injustice inflicted to the OtherPeople, Karim and his companions make theirs this recommendation: “A revolutionary party becomes historically necessary and justified when the contradictions and antagonisms of a particular society have created a mass social force whose felt needs cannot be satisfied by reform but only by a revolution which takes power away from those in power (Boggs & Boggs, 1970, p.8).

The new secretary of Ato IV rejects all types of insensitiveness that favour the turning of a deaf ear to the suffering of the mouthless masses. So much blood has been unjustly shed by the autocrat Ato IV and Akim refuses to accompany the promotion and perpetuation of such atrocities against his tribal kinspeople and his country: “Blood, blood! Never to know the smell of blood! Never to be the one through whom horror would enter into the country, but to be the one to inscribe in white the name of new found freedom! (Tadjo, 1990, p.23). For him, injustice must cease, and the resources of the country must be shared on an equal basis – no more

BlindPeople with a paradisiac life and OtherPeople with hellish life, but only one peaceful, joyful and prosperous people from the South to the Great North.

Contrary to African political leaders who keep their mouth closed and even lend dictators a hand for being part of the leading team with their juicy positions, Akim refuses to be inactive and helpless. He has all the privileges as the King's secretary. But this juicy position does not grant him joy, satisfaction and inner peace while injustice daily flogs the greatest number of the people. Between highly-risk-bearing action for justice to the people and inaction filled with privileges regarding the injustice to the people, he boldly rejects the latter and opts for the former. He then votes for the demystification of the autocracy of King Ato IV with a country where there must be "Freedom without murders, without executions, without courts, nor torture" (Tadjo, 1990, p.23).

In this vein, Karim accepts to bear the risk by taking the lead of the liberation of his country: "He was there to trace new directions with them..." (Tadjo, 1990, p.22). It sounds like self-sacrificing. Yet, he accepts the risk to free his people from the yoke of segregation and autocracy. The people are so tired and withered by the reign of King Ato IV that they want nothing else than the toppling of the ongoing autocracy. They refuse any more patience and Karim under pressure to liberate them: "Hurry up, because our patience is running out. It's today and not tomorrow that we want to live!" (Tadjo, 1990, p.23). This clearly means that they believe in Karim and are ready to obey any of his orders to set things right in a way that smile, joy, happiness and fraternity can be regained.

Meanwhile, the prophet and poet is also at work with good proverbial and poetic speeches and songs to incite revolt and rebellion in the spirit of the mass marginalised people. He warns Karim to be tactical and advises him to make the people adhere massively to his project of liberatory revolution: "You wear your passion like a crown made of thorns. You want to save the world and you think that your crucifixion will change the course of history. Beware! If you fight alone, you will die alone – or, with a few lonely comrades – what difference would it make?" (Tadjo, 1990, pp.25-26). This appeal launched by the prophet at Karim is a mirror that all revolutionaries must consult to prepare their revolution in a milieu where injustice and autocracy prevail.

Karim's vision has rallied not only the OtherPeople but also some of the BlindPeople like Princess Akissi. This choice of Akissi to follow Karim is not merely reduced to a love affair. Akissi is fed up with the autocracy of her father and the injustice that daily tear the

OtherPeople to misery and objectify them: “Father! Father! For too long you have reigned with fury” (Tadjo, 1990, p.21). Karim reveals to her his dream:

I had a daydream where I saw the kingdom all stretched out in front of me. This was no longer a kingdom, but a free territory where people were walking in peace. There were no more BlindPeople; nor we, the OtherPeople. There was no longer any opulence nor any misery, but a fair sharing” (Tadjo, 1990, p.34)

Karim sides with the people and defends them by exposing the myths of autocracy, injustice, and segregation. As a result, he earns the appreciation of those who benefit from his commitment. These types of leaders are highly needed in Africa to purify the bedevilled political arena that immoral political illiterates overwhelm with their vacuum of socio-political governance policies. As they lack not only the morality and stature to lead the masses but also the notions of governance, they messily, arrogantly, assertively and full of their own importance lead their nations to chaos. That is why “Sub-Saharan Africa continues to record a rise in autocracies, politically unstable regimes, one-party control and cult of personality – all of which contribute to democratic rollback” (Akinyetun, 2022, pp.94-95).

This engagement to defend his people has taken off his freedom: “We learned, from an unofficial source, that an attempt to destabilize the kingdom orchestrated by a small group of people led by the secretary of His Majesty Ato IV has been thwarted. Security forces have proceeded immediately to make a series of arrests within the palace quarters” (Tadjo, 1990, p.56). Karim is arrested. But what is interesting is that his arrest neither disheartens nor dampens the enthusiasm of the slum-dwellers and the OtherPeople in whole.

They recognise that patience has reached its limit, and that no further peaceful words or actions can persuade King Ato IV to embrace human reason : “Waiting for the Others to understand; those People who are in need of nothing, who talk with their mouths full and belch in public; those People whose lips spurt vulgarities and vomit-words in the ears of the dispossessed” (Tadjo, 1990, p.57). It is clear in their heads that they have embarked on a fight whose midway abandonment can only worsen their situation. They then do not have the choice; they must fight till their last breath to set the whole country free from domineering bondage: “They were ready to the end, those people who had never before had anything to do with the city, until she ate up their children and ignored their distress” (Tadjo, 1990, p.62). Therefore, they pray to their gods to strengthen them: “Give me the courage to combat fear” (Tadjo, 1990, p.58). They no longer want to wait because “Waiting kills slowly like a secret poison. Waiting paralyzes, disfigures and saps energy. It can stomp out a life. It can annihilate a people” (Tadjo,

1990, p.57). They argue that it is not fair that incompetent and liar segregationists "... condemn the truth-sayers" Tadjó, 1990, p.57).

As a matter of fact, "The village was heading in Karim's direction. Everyone was getting ready to rally other villages along the way. Their numbers were going to swell. People took along their gris-gris; amulets; and charms" (Tadjó, 1990, p.62). Under the guidance of Karim and the prophet, the people wake up and realise the power that they have when united. With that uniformed riot, "The city will also cured of its woes. She will purify herself, become more beautiful and even more maternal" (Tadjó, 1990, p.63) as has declared the poet.

Karim has lost his life in this revolution "Without saying one word, they led him to the other side of the prison yard, to the place where hangings were held" (Tadjó, 1990, p.93). In the moment he dies, his wife Akissi gives birth, "And with the came a head, a face, a wrinkled and shrivelled body, moist and covered with blood" (Tadjó, 1990, p.95) of twins "And another head appeared, another face, another wrinkled and shrivelled body, moist and covered with blood" (Tadjó, 1990, p.95). The young revolutionary loses his life for fighting the good fight, and in return, Nature atones for his sacrifice by duplicating his regeneration: "There, on the blood-soaked floor, a girl and a boy cried at the top their voices" (Tadjó, 1990, p.95).

His self-sacrifice for his people's deliverance has not been in vain as the Minister of Armies hints by chanting victory over him: "You stand for nothing and no one" (Tadjó, 1990, p.71). The minister who originates from the tribe of the OtherPeople "... the most feared man of the kingdom, one of the rare members of the OtherPeople in whom the king placed total confidence" (Tadjó, 1990, p.70) considers the seizure of Karim and his companions as a failure of the revolution: "All of you! In your opinion, what would the people do if we let you have your little revolution?" (Tadjó, 1990, p.71). But a moment after the execution of Karim, the people have come in an unsupportable way to destroy the kingdom and the reign of King Ato IV: "Outside, the slum-dwellers had begun the siege of the palace. They came like an angry mass that no guard had dared to confront" (Tadjó, 1990, p.94). The autocracy of King Ato IV has known its peak: "With all its force, the crowd pushed against the bolted doors of the palace" (Tadjó, 1990, p.94). The masses have been prepared for the liberation of their country, and despite the hanging of their leader, they have left no room for fear. On the contrary, the assassination of their leader has bitterly touched them and enraged them. That is how they have fought until the collapse of the reign of King Ato IV.

Conclusion

The study undertakes the scrutiny of *The Blind Kingdom* by Véronique Tadjo. Titled “Self-Sacrificing as a Symbolic Trail towards Revolution in *The Blind Kingdom* by Véronique Tadjo”, the study has embraced three points.

First, the study highlights the Invasion of Sightless Leaders with Autocratic Rule in contemporary Africa with the symbolic fictive role played by the imaginary antagonist King Ato IV. The article shows that *The Blind Kingdom* stages rulers blind morally and politically. In the novel, King Ato IV, whose power reposes on autocracy, opacity and violence, incarnates them. Through the metaphor of blindness and a bat, Véronique Tadjo speaks on the post-independence African regimes with rulers who reject the light of justice, truth and responsibility. Ato IV and his ethnic group – the BlindPeople – invade the territory of the OtherPeople by subjugating them to segregationist rule. It is a kind of invasion which symbolises colonisation and some forms of contemporary political domination where governance excludes aboriginal populations.

The second point – Social Discrepancy due to Dictatorial Segregation – examines the profound inequality that the regime of King Ato IV has engendered. The kingdom is divided between the BlindPeople – a privileged minority – and the OtherPeople – a marginalised majority reduced to misery. This institutionalised segregation crushes national cohesion, stokes poverty, frustration and despair, and reduces citizens to mere slaves who have no rights. Tadjo snitches here on an ostracising governance which favours an ethnic or clannish elite by depriving the majority of dignity, hope and political inclusiveness.

The third and last point – Self-Sacrificing to Revolution and the Collapse of Autocracy – highlights that liberation from autocracy and dictatorship requires sacrifice. Karim incarnates the revolutionary leader who accepts the risk of his life for justice and equality. His arrest and execution have not slowed down the revolution. On the contrary, his sacrifice becomes a symbol of mobilisation that galvanises the people, and consequently, it hurls the collapse of the regime. The study concludes that in *The Blind Kingdom*, the sacrifice of each individual paves the way to collective freedom and inspires future generations in the pursuit of the struggle against tyranny.

References

Acker, J. (2006). Inequality regimes: Gender, class, and race in organizations. *Gender & Society*, 20(4), 441–464.

- Akinyetun, T. S. (2022). The state of democracy in Africa: Democratic decline or autocracy? *Political Perspectives: Journal for Political Research*, 12(2), 89–115. <https://doi.org/10.20901/pp.12.2.04>
- Bassey, J. R. (2014). An assessment of the impact of neglect of history on political stability in African countries: The case of Côte d'Ivoire. *Journal of African Studies and Development*, 6(7), 149–160.
- Boggs, J., & Boggs, G. L. (1970). *The awesome responsibilities of revolutionary leadership*. Committee for Political Development.
- Bruch, E. E., & Mare, R. D. (2007). *Segregation processes*. California Center for Population Research.
- Camacho, C., & Hassan, W. (2023). People get ready: Optimal timing of revolution. *HAL Open Science*, 1–20.
- Collin, P. (2004). *Dictionary of politics and government*. Bloomsbury Publishing.
- Coulibaly, A. S. (2019). *Defining African literature in the era of globalization*. Lambert Academic Publishing.
- Doctor, R. M., & Ada, K. P. (1989). *The encyclopedia of phobias, fears, and anxieties* (3rd ed.). Facts On File.
- Gümplová, P. (2019). Rights of conquest, discovery and occupation, and the freedom of the seas: A genealogy of natural resource injustice. *European Journal of Political Theory*, 18(3), 389–410.
- Iiffe, J. (2007). *Africans: The history of a continent*. Cambridge University Press.
- Minkailou, M. (2016). Exploring euphemism in Standard Songhai. *Recherches Africaines*, 16, 31–39.
- Neundorf, A., Gerschewski, J., & Olar, R.-G. (2020). How do inclusionary and exclusionary autocracies affect ordinary people? *Comparative Political Studies*, 53(12), 1890–1925.
- Ofori, K. (2009). A preliminary phonology of Anum. *Gumaga International Journal of Language and Literature*, 3, 51–78.
- Schorr, B. (2018). How social inequalities affect sustainable development: Five causal mechanisms underlying the nexus. *trAndeS Working Paper Series*, 1, 1–43.
- Tadjo, V. (1990). *The blind kingdom* (J. A. Mayes, Trans.). Ayebia Clarke Publishing.
- Tarrow, S. (1994). *Power in movement: Social movements and contentious politics*. Cambridge University Press.
- Yoder, D. (1926). Current definitions of revolution. *American Journal of Sociology*, 32(3), 433–441.