Vol. 5, N°19, pp. 734– 749, Septembre 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/SSQP6767
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***

READING AUTHORITARIANISM AND MORAL DECAY IN OKEY NDIBE'S *ARROWS OF RAIN*

****

Koffi Gérard KOUADIO
Université Alassane Ouattara, Bouaké (Côte d'Ivoire)
E.mail : koffigerardkouadio217@gmail.com

****

Abstract: The post-colonial condition within African states diverges significantly from the prognostications of populations who anticipated enhanced social welfare following the withdrawal of colonial administrations. Indeed, the sovereignty attained by African peoples through protracted periods of hardship appears illusory when one considers the contemporary ruling class's exercise of power, which exhibits a profound structural resemblance to internal colonization. Through his novel *Arrows of Rain*, the Nigerian author Okey Ndibe articulates a vehement critique regarding the pervasive authoritarianism and the systemic social disarray orchestrated by the African elite. Consequently, an analysis of this work elucidates the degree to which the misappropriation of authority constitutes a profound impediment to the developmental trajectories of post-independence African states. Focusing on a sociocritical framework, this study underscores the deleterious actions of the emergent ruling class, which are executed to the detriment of the populations they are ostensibly tasked to govern.
Keywords: Authoritarianism, African elite, Colonization, Development, Post-independence

****

Résumé : La réalité postcoloniale au sein des États africains s'avère singulièrement éloignée des aspirations de bien-être social manifestées par les populations au lendemain du retrait des puissances coloniales. En effet, l'indépendance acquise par les peuples africains au prix de multiples années de souffrance semble relever de l'illusion, eu égard à l'exercice abusif du pouvoir par la nouvelle classe dirigeante, lequel présente une analogie frappante avec une colonisation interne. Par le biais de son œuvre de fiction *Arrows of Rain*, l'écrivain nigérian Okey Ndibe livre une critique véhémente de l'autoritarisme excessif ainsi que du désordre social orchestré par l'élite africaine. L'analyse de ce récit élucide la mesure dans laquelle l'abus d'autorité constitue un obstacle structurel majeur entravant le développement des États africains post-indépendance. Sous le prisme de la sociocritique, la présente étude souligne les actions inconsidérées de la nouvelle classe dirigeante, lesquelles s'exercent au détriment des populations qu'elle est censée gouverner.
Mots-clés : Autoritarisme, Élite africaine, Colonisation, Développement, Post-indépendance

****

INTRODUCTION

The cardinal role of the writer has ever been to denounce the vices of society in order to promote justice, equity, and equality amongst humankind. Acting as the voice of the voiceless, the writer emerges as a consciousness-raiser whose main concern is to denounce the injustices that impede the proper functioning of society. As a journalist, poet, and novelist, Okey Ndibe fully embraces this noble mission of the writer, endeavoring to immortalize the recent history of Nigeria, his country of origin. His novel *Arrows of Rain* is a profound satire of Nigeria's sociopolitical turmoil from the time of its attainment of independence up to the 1990s. Indeed, although *Arrows of Rain* is a work of fiction, Okey Ndibe draws on real historical facts to show the extent to which the abuse of power lies at the core of governance strategies employed by the emergent Nigerian ruling class. This emergent ruling class, be it civilian or military, pursues as its main objective the perpetuation of power so as to extract the utmost advantage from the nation's economic resources for private ends.

In *Arrows of Rain,* Ndibe pinpoints the military dictatorship in Nigeria fictionalized as 'Madia' following the civilian regime's inability to improve the living conditions of Nigerians. It is widely known that the place of the military has always been in barracks, since soldiers are trained and organized to defend their country in the event of potential external or internal conflicts. The military's unbridled thirst for power precipitates a profound social degeneration, thereby rendering the populations of Madia impotent in the face of their actions. Under the authoritarian regime of Life-President General Isa Palat Bello, Madia devolves into an autocratic state where deviant conducts such as rapes, murders, arbitrary imprisonments, intimidations, and social oppressions prevail. What matters most to the military is the preservation of their dictatorial regime with a view to consolidating their authority and public prominence among the populations they are supposed to lead. In this respect, they are prepared to confront those who dare to openly criticize the current regime, while disregarding concrete measures that could contribute to the essential well-being of the populations. These actions entail moral decay as a consequence, since certain individuals are compelled to turn to prostitution in the hope of obtaining the bare minimum for survival.

Drawing upon his journalistic background, Ndibe authored *Arrows of Rain* to elucidate the mechanisms through which authoritarian leaders in Africa precipitate national anarchy for the purpose of personal enrichment, thereby emphasizing his lived experiences within the

oppressive regime of Nigeria. The present study endeavors to address the following research questions: How does Okey Ndibe portray authoritarianism as a prevailing governing strategy within *Arrows of Rain*? Furthermore, what factors underpin the moral decay of characters situated under military dictatorial rule? The resolution of these inquiries necessitates the application of sociocriticism as a critical analytical framework. This investigation initially underscores military authoritarianism not merely as a defensive instrument, but as a mechanism utilized to sustain an oppressive regime. Subsequently, it analyzes the psychological impact that this abuse of authority exerts upon the lives of the characters in *Arrows of Rain*. Finally, the study examines the recourse to murder as the ultimate strategy deployed by the military regime against its opponents.

1. Militarized Authoritarianism: A Strategy of State Control

Militarized authoritarianism is nothing but a regime wherein the military succeed in wielding the power of arms to impose their supremacy upon the people. In Ndibe's *Arrows of Rain*, this authoritarianism functions as a ruling strategy implemented by the military junta against the civilians living in the fictional state of Madia. Convinced that no literary work arises *ex nihilo*, Madia, as described by Ndibe in the novel, is inexorably akin to Nigeria. Evidence in the novel is Ndibe's claim that ''On 1 October 1960 our country had groped its way through the dark waters of the British womb and emerged into the world as a nation in its own right'' (O. Ndibe, 2000, p. 80). This statement demonstrates that Ndibe chronicles Nigeria's sociopolitical history through *Arrows of Rain*. The advent of military actors on the political stage, as depicted by Ndibe in the novel, is intended to condemn the abuse of power and the violation of human rights by men in uniform. This unexpected military presence is appreciated very early on, to the point that Ademoyega describes it as a ''painless surgical operation designed to heal a sick Nigeria'' (A. Ademoyega, 1981, p. 126). Ndibe acknowledges that exposing the failings of Nigerian society in his work of fiction is intended to enable his people to aspire to improved social conditions. In this regard, John Elerius is right when claiming that

> In apprehending observable reality and reflecting the findings in his literary creation, the African writer is not unaware of the real nature and objectives of good literature which he sees as being largely determined by the need of the society (J. Elerius, 2000, p.195).

Through this quote, it is safe to admit that African writers base their literary creation on social realities they face. In that case, their works function as a mirror that record and preserve lived experience. *Arrows of Rain* emphasizes that the military junta, masterfully led by General Isa Palat Bello, comes to power following a military coup against Madia's first prime minister Askia Amin, accusing his government of mismanagement and political instability. Initially, most of the inhabitants of Madia welcome the coup, hoping the military regime will restore order and prosperity. Regrettably, Isa Palat Bello's exaggerated thirst for power compels him to promptly disregard development initiatives intended for his fellow citizens, by issuing a statement that resembles warnings as reported in the press:

> His Excellency proclaims self president for life. […] Wishes Madians to know that he is still the sun, rising and setting with unfailing regularity. That he steadily sees all the traitors; all the patriots, too. All saboteurs and colluders with imperialist agents working to undermine the Madian nation will be fished out and thoroughly dealt with. (O. Ndibe, 2000, p.17)

The above-mentioned warnings indicate the extent to which Isa Palat Bello intends to perpetuate his hold on power. By proclaiming himself president for life on the one hand and likening himself to the sun on the other, Isa Palat Bello conveys a powerful message to his fellow citizens, intended to deter anyone harboring presidential ambitions. Military authoritarianism is also evident in the exaggeration of facts, such as a dissemination of false information proclaiming Isa Palat Bello as an elected president with 99.5 per cent of the vote of the Madian people during a referendum organized by the regime. What matters most through this referendum is to give the impression in the press that the military regime controls and masters the entire territory of the fictional state of Madia. At the core of this erroneous information and the Soviet-like outcome of the referendum lies the subversion of democracy, which stipulates free and fair elections. In this perspective, ‘‘the unavowed aim of such a strategy is to snooze any rebellious mood and bring everybody under control’’ (N. Kouakou, 2018, p. 21).

The military authoritarianism in *Arrows of Rain* is expressed abusively over the people of Madia. Convinced that they can obtain anything through the power of weapons, the soldiers use brutal violence and intimidation to maintain their dominance. A case in point is the arbitrary imprisonment of Bukuru by the military regime, as he directly revealed the true identity of the perpetrators who murdered a young prostitute on the beach. On the one hand, Bukuru decides to confess the facts regarding the young woman's murder so that justice may be served and to

prevent such atrocities from happening again. On the other hand, the ruling junta regards Bukuru as a genuine threat to the regime in light of his testimony before the judge at his trial. What should be noted is that the military regime regards Bukuru's statements as an affront to the integrity of President Isa Palat Bello. In that case, finding strategies to silence him forever and allow the regime to exercise its full authority would be the ideal solution. Through Bukuru's testimony before the judge, Ndibe intends to show how speaking against the regime becomes dangerous in Madia. The judge Justice Kayode's final decision against Bukuru illustrates this point: ''My first instinct was to sentence you to jail for eternity – lock you up and throw the key in the Atlantic! – as a lesson that you cannot come to court and scandalise the good name and immaculate reputation of His Excellency'' (O. Ndibe, 2000, p. 40). The judge Justice Kayode's reaction against Bukuru enables the reader to understand that Madia's state institutions are at the service of the military regime. The judge is only protecting President Bello's physical integrity instead of saying what the law is. Otherwise, how can one consider life imprisonment for an innocent person who only spoke the truth about the acts he is accused of ? Moreover, the intent to incarcerate Bukuru and throw the key in the Atlantic underscores the extent to which injustice and the law of the strongest prevail in Madia. As Bukuru later described it, that prison was nothing but a true hell on earth:

> The prison compound was deadly quiet, bare and barren. Grass lay about the surface like sun-dried algae churned out by the sea. A criss-cross of concrete paths led to small detached buildings, each containing ten cell units. The cells were sunk in darkness. A horrible stench flowed out of each door we passed, the stink of unwashed bodies mingled with the foulness of things that come from within them: faeces, urine, vomit, blood. (O. Ndibe, 2000, p. 47)

The prison's description reveals the extent to which the ruling regime intends to punish any Madians who dare to denounce the injustices perpetrated by men in uniform. In reality, this prison is built to incarcerate civilians who openly criticize the regime. Rather than serving as a place of moral rehabilitation for those who break established laws, the prison, as described by Bukuru, becomes a place of endless suffering. Therefore, its ultimate objective is to silence any attempts that could jeopardize the proper functioning of the political system established by the regime. In so doing, no national project likely to improve the living conditions of Madians appears to be a priority of the incumbent regime. What matters most is doing everything possible to unjustly benefit from a prolonged military rule that Christopher Okigbo describes as ''a going and coming that goes on forever'' (C. Okigbo, 1971, p. 72). By contrast, atrocities committed abusively by the military are regarded as social norms. The excessive thirst for

power leads them to believe that they are above the law. In this respect, no social group is spared by the actions of the military, as illustrated by prostitutes, who are viewed as objects created solely for sexual pleasure. More often than not, these regrettable actions are perpetrated by President Bello, who is supposed to set an example for his people as a model of leadership. The death threat directed at the sex worker Iyese by His Excellency Bello demonstrates the extent to which women are devalued in the eyes of the military:

> I will kill you without consequence! I will show you that you're nothing but a common filthy prostitute! Because I brought myself low to sleep with you, you open your dirty trap and tell me you're not interested. I will show you who is who in this city […] 'Who are you to insult me? Talk before I slap lightning into your eyes! (O. Ndibe, 2000, pp.158-159).

The above-mentioned threat by Isa Palat Bello against Iyese is fraught with meaning. From a sociocritical perspective, this threat can be analyzed as a mere social exclusion that expresses the ideology of impunity under the rule of the military regime in *Arrows of Rain*. Suggesting ''I will kill you without consequence'', His Excellency Bello shows a social order in which only his regime is above the law and must therefore resort to physical and verbal violence as a ruling strategy against the masses. Furthermore, Bello's insult, calling Iyese ''a common filthy prostitute'' reveals how the regime devalues women by and large. Sociocritically, this insult is not only directed to Iyese. Rather, it is directed to a stigmatized social group, and more specifically prostitutes who have entered this profession because of social hardships and inequalities. Bello's remark that he ''brought [him]self low'' to sleep with Iyese is another point worth mentioning. This remark sheds light on Bello's behavior as that of a leader who claims social superiority, while Iyese, being a prostitute, is seen as socially and morally inferior. In this framework, it is safe to aver that ''Bello sees Iyese as a mere sexual object whose existence is tied to its function'' (M. Okolie and N. Akaji, 2024, p.9). In other words, as a prostitute, Iyese's body is merely considered as a tool for sexual gratification for His Excellency Bello.

In light of the above, it is crystal clear that Iyese's refusal to have sexual intercourse with Bello is the root cause of the latter's anger. As the leader of Madia, Bello views this refusal as both a humiliation and a direct challenge to his authority. Refusing his advances is to belittle his social status as head of state. Thus, raping Iyese, is for Bello, the sine qua non solution to prove his masculinity and his superiority as head of state. The account of the circumstances of

this rape that Iyese tries to tell Bukuru shows that military authoritarianism has reached its peak:

> 'He [Bello] came with three men. They had daggers.' […] 'The men pinned me to the bed. Then Isa stabbed my vagina with a dagger. I started bleeding. That's when he entered me with his penis.' A sensation of horror swelled inside my head. 'Oh!' I cried. 'It was like the stab of the knife, but more painful.' […] They pushed me down on the bed and forced apart my legs. Isa brought out his dagger and said he wanted to teach my vagina a lesson' (O. Ndibe, 2000, pp. 166-167).

As recounted, the circumstances surrounding Iyese's rape demonstrate that military authoritarianism tramples the fundamental values of society. Through this emotionally charged description, Iyese enables the reader to understand that under the military regime the woman's body is regarded as a sexual object that may be used in any circumstance, whether voluntarily or by force. Iyese's pain in this description reveals a glimpse of the suffering women endured under the military dictatorship. Moreover, the phrase 'he wanted to teach my vagina a lesson' is an authoritarian language exemplifying women's rape as a political domination of the incumbent regime. Broadly speaking, the description of Iyese's rape functions as a mechanism of humiliation and dehumanization of women within the society of Madia. In short, the foregoing analysis elucidates how the advent of the military on the political scene quickly ruined the hopes of the people of Madia, who fervently hoped for social betterment. It is now appropriate to analyse how military authoritarianism engendered moral decay in Madia.

2. Moral Decay: Corruption and Alienation as Psychological Symptoms

In Ndibe's *Arrows of Rain*, moral decay functions as both a social and psychological crisis that compels the Madians to live in fear under the military regime. The analysis of the novel shows that Ndibe presents corruption and alienation as two interconnected realities produced by a diseased society in which the excessive thirst for power distorts human behavior. The characters' emotional and psychological suffering illustrates how dangerous life is under the military dictatorial regime. It is important to emphasize that corruption and alienation are caused by poor governance in *Arrows of Rain*. Indeed, the military regime, as depicted in the novel, demonstrates its inability to provide a better life for civilians. Ndibe's depiction of the corrupt military regime gives the impression that corruption is deeply rooted in African societies or ''the African is corrupt through and through'' (C. Achebe, 1960, p.3) if reference is made to Achebe's phraseology. In *Arrows of Rain* moral decay is portrayed as a

psychological symptom that grips society as a whole when the governance exercised by the military regime is institutionalized as a lawful mechanism of control and personal enrichment. Corruption is normalized under this regime and compel the people to feel alienated as freedom of expression and individual liberties are curtailed by military authoritarianism. The normalisation of corruption is one of the causes of moral decay, since it is not confined to the misappropriation of public funds but extends to all sectors of activity, ultimately benefiting soldiers who are formally mandated to denounce and put an end to it. Owing to pervasive corruption, impunity has become a social norm, compelling the masses to remain passive in the face of certain social injustices. Through a vivid description, Ndibe attempts to explain where this widespread corruption in Madia began:

> Newborn Madia was welcomed with a swell of hope and expectation. […] We madians thrust out our chests and crowned ourselves the giant of the continent. […] On the eve of the British withdrawal, crude oil, this country's gold, had been discovered in Madia in vast reserves. We could dream, we assured ourselves, and transform our dream into reality. Instead, something went wrong early and never let up. The nation we inherited from the English was placed in the hands of politicians who sucked its blood until it became dry and anaemic. Overnight cabinet ministers puffed out protruding bellies they themselves called PP, for Power Paunch (O. Ndibe, 2000, p.81).

The sociocritical analysis of the above passage suggests that Okey Ndibe uses history as an essential element in denouncing corruption in *Arrows of Rain*. By evoking the euphoria surrounding the attainment of independence after the departure of the British colonizer and the discovery of oil, the reader can reasonably allude to Nigeria, which from the time of its independence, was considered a nation poised for development due to its petroleum and mineral resources. This development was unfortunately cut short by the misconduct of the political leaders, who swiftly seized power and appropriated the nation's resources for their own selfish ends. Although the passage does not explicitly denounce the military regime, it nevertheless alludes to all the regimes that came to power after independence. In this respect, sociocriticism enables a transition between historical reality and Ndibe's *Arrows of Rain*. The passage also emphasizes the metaphor of a country rendered 'anaemic' to show how thoroughly the leaders have plundered the nation's resources for their own selfish interests. This image of an 'anaemic' country may also refer to a weakened, impoverished nation that is collapsing from a lack of vitality. In other words, the country is compared to a living organism being drained of its substance by rulers who feel no remorse toward the people they claim to serve. Moreover, the passage underscores the ministers' distended bellies due to the looting of

the resources ironically termed ‘PP or Power Paunch’ to illustrate that, once in office, political leaders prioritise their own interests and forget about the suffering of the people they are supposed to serve. Accordingly, power no longer appears as a public good but becomes the property of a certain elite.

Corruption is practiced on a daily basis by political leaders in *Arrows of Rain*. It confers substantial advantages upon these rulers and their families, to such an extent that some individuals seek to justify it rather than openly condemn it. The remarks made by Pa Ata, father of Minister Ruben Ata, who is responsible for social affairs, indicate that corruption deserves to be perpetuated in Madia: ‘‘They [white administrators] taught our present leaders all the tactics of stealing. The only difference is that the whiteman stole for his country, our people steal for their pocket’’ (O. Ndibe, 2000, p.121). These remarks by Pa Ata illustrate that corruption functions as a food chain, in which each individual awaits his turn to appropriate Madia’s resources for personal gain. In this way, no civilian or military regime, however, would consider putting an end to it given the numerous benefits it confers. What should be emphasized is that the practice of corruption has reached an exponential level with the advent of the military rule. Discussing this rise of corruption in Nigeria, Ottuh Peter and John Onimhawo contend that it became institutionalized under the military regimes:

> General Sani Abacha’s regime also marked the height of official corruption in the nation. His death revealed the global nature of corruption. General Abubakar Abdusalami who succeeded Abacha primarily focused on returning the country to civil rule but he was faced with so many challenges including corruption which he too partook in like the free ‘Holy Communion’. (P. Ottuh and J. Onimhawo, 2023, p.187).

The explanation of this quotation shows that corruption reached its peak in Nigeria under Sani Abacha’s military regime. The numerous advantages it conferred upon the military is the main reason that justify their refusal to transfer power to a civilian regime. *Arrows of Rain* reflects this historical reality mentioned above, since General Isa Palat Bello’s regime has no intention of handing power over to a new generation.

The consequences of corruption as a ruling strategy are enormous in *Arrows of Rain*. In a report published by the Stockholm-based Hunger Institute, it is clearly established that

> The Institute found that food production in the country had declined by 30 per cent; the birth rate was increasing exponentially, and life expectancy had shrunk from 57, five years earlier, to 52. In an even bleaker prognosis, the

> report projected that within a decade two-thirds of the children born in Madia would live in 'excruciating poverty' and people would literally drop dead in the streets from acute malnutrition (O. Ndibe, 2000, p.187).

The escalation of corruption has immediate repercussions on the lives of the people of Madia. While political leaders accumulate Madia's wealth, the population starves. As a result, Madia looks like a kleptocratic state, where the use of public resources for private purposes is systematic, organized, and institutionalized. This is what Bukuru is attempting to explain as follows : ''Madia was in the stranglehold of the most vicious kleptocracy anywhere on our continent - a regime in which ministers and other public officials looted whatever was within their reach, and much that wasn't'' (O. Ndibe, 2000, pp.117-118). The term 'kleptocracy' used by Bukuru refers to the autocratic regime that claims to govern Madia for people's welfare but quickly prioritized the misappropriation of the state resources. Through Bukuru, Ndibe denounces this corruption of the African elite, which has become an entrenched system of political domination and continues to perpetuate the poverty of the masses. Ndibe also aims to convey a message of denunciation and a call for collective awareness in order to put an end to this corruption, which is mostly practiced through violence. Within this framework, it is reasonable to assert that there is a close relationship between the writer and the society since he draws on real events, prevailing social values, and the norms of his time to produce his work. Consequently, *Arrows of Rain* should be understood in light of the social, cultural, and historical context in which it was produced. Wellek and Warren subscribe to this view when they state that ''literature is therefore created with conventions, norms and values of the society in mind. Literature acts as a tool to represent life and also to make life a social reality and easier to comprehend'' (R. Wellek and A. Warren, 1968, p. 94). In this perspective, *Arrows of Rain* should not be read merely as fiction but understood as a critical representation of Nigerian society, insofar as Ndibe draws upon specific socio-historical realities of his country to construct a fictional space characterized by military repression and corruption. Claude Duchet's sociocritical conception fits into this logic, when in *Sociocritique* (1979) he contends that every literary work is situated within a historical context and embedded in a network of social relations.

In *Arrows of Rain*, the consequences of corruption under the military regime affect all social strata but are felt most acutely by vulnerable populations, who are reduced to silence and fear because they have no means of denouncing it. Regarded as the marginalized and left behind, these populations remain voiceless in the face of the misappropriation of public funds

and the plundering of resources by political leaders. Bukuru's account of the villagers' precarious living conditions illustrates how difficult it is to eradicate this corruption:

> You hear all these stories about ministers using public funds to buy cars for their mistresses. Or acquiring European castles for themselves. […] You go to any village and you're shocked by the squalid life there. The dust roads. Hospitals that have neither drugs nor doctors. The polluted stream water the people drink. The lack of electricity. Then, as you're trying to come to grips with a reality that seems to belong in the Middle Ages, up comes a Rolls Royce carrying some minister to remind you that you're not in the sixteenth century after all but in the twentieth. Then you're faced with the pathetic irony of the villagers lining to hail the nabob in the Royce – the very man who plunder their country (O. Ndibe, 2000, p.120).

Bukuru's comments underscores the stark contrast between the lifestyles of political leaders and the villagers in Madia. While villagers endure precarious conditions, lacking electricity, safe drinking water, well-maintained roads and adequate medical care, the ministers enjoy lives of luxury, buying expensive cars and even castles in Europe. Corruption is thus regarded as a systemic expropriation of society. The stolen wealth is displayed before the public because the authority fear neither the law, prison, nor any popular uprising from vulnerable populations. From a sociocritical standpoint, Bukuru's statement may be interpreted as a miniature representation of Nigerian society in *Arrows of Rain*, insofar as it foregrounds the pervasive corruption that has long impeded Nigeria's development under successive military regime. As depicted in the novel, enjoying the status of a minister means being beyond reproach and untouchable regardless of any financial wrongdoing committed. In such circumstances, the alienated villagers feel compelled to praise their ministers rather than to expose or hold them accountable for wrongdoing.

Beyond the villagers, alienation is perceived as the consequence of a corrupt social and political system that compels characters into silence. Bukuru's alienation is a typical example since Ndibe presents him in *Arrows of Rain* as an eyewitness to the military's autocratic and brutal regime, yet compelled by fear and enforced silence to escape any form of oppression.

3. Resorting to Murder: The Ultimate Strategy of the Dictatorial Regime

The resort to murder is part of the military's ultimate strategy used against the people of Madia in Ndibe's *Arrows of Rain*. After episodes of physical violence, intimidations, arbitrary detentions and the institutionalisation of corruption, the military initiated actions to consolidate their hegemony by killing law-abiding citizens who oppose their autocratic regime. These

killings aim to silence all dissent, suppress any form of criticism, and enforce the military order established by General Bello. The challenges to the military's authority are perceived as threats capable of overthrowing the power tightly held by General Bello. Primarily directed against political opponents, the killings also aimed to erase the collective memory of the crimes committed so that impunity can continue to prevail in Madia. To prevent any attempts at rebellion within the military regime, senior officers are not spared from assassinations when taking into account those perpetrated against a dozen officers shortly after General Bello assumed power: ''Six months after Bello's ascension to power, newspapers reported that ten army officers, including Major-General James Rada, had been found guilty of treason and executed'' (O. Ndibe, 2000, p.212). These killings can be explained by the fact that, within military regimes, no one is safe from suspicion. It should be noted that James Rada is one of the senior officers who led the coup that brought General Bello to power. His killing stems from General Bello's intent to eliminate potential rival contenders, thereby safeguarding himself against a possible coup.

The purge within the armed forces is a betrayal of the social contract because the army whose primary purpose is the protection of the population becomes an instrument of its own destruction. Ndibe refrains from explicitly naming prominent political figures on the Nigerian stage when criticizing military authoritarianism in *Arrows of Rain*. The main purpose while writing his fiction is to construct an allegorical representation that allows the reader to refer to Nigeria's sociopolitical situation under military regimes. Niyi Akingbe expresses the same view when he considers *Arrows of Rain* as ''a satirical and allegorical representation of Nigeria in the grip of dictatorship foisted upon it by the military in the last four decades'' (N. Akingbe, 2013, p.159). Here, Akingbe considers *Arrows of Rain* as a direct depiction of Nigeria by alluding to the period of military dictatorships. That period is a dark chapter in Nigeria's history, during which kidnappings and assassinations increased, giving the impression that no law prevailed in the country. Naveen Rao concurs with this view when he writes that ''Okey Ndibe's ''Arrows of Rain'' is an intriguing piece of historiographic metafiction that is set in the fictional [sic] country of Madia and reflects the social and political reality of Nigeria''(N. Rao, 2025, pp. 2666-2667). Through this reflection, the critic aims to highlight an interconnection between *Arrows of Rain* and Nigeria's sociopolitical reality. By describing the novel as a historigraphic metafiction, Naveen Rao conceives it as a work capable of turning fiction into a tool for historical and political analysis. As a result, ''the text contributes to the

production of a social imaginary, of figures of identity for social groups, of representations of the world that have social functions'' (M. Angenot and R. Robin, 1985, p. 53).

Beyond the killings within the army, Okey Ndibe emphasises those perpetrated against civilians in Madia. To set an example, for his troops, General Bello personally killed the prostitute Iyese, after she refused to give his name to the child she has just borne. This murder is initially perceived as an expression of the brutality of military regimes in postcolonial African societies as depicted in *Arrows of Rain*. The fact that Isa Palat Bello personally assassinates Iyese shows that the military regime perceives itself as above the law. Because of his status as head of state, General Bello acts with complete impunity and without remorse. Through this act, he embodies a social order in which the impunity of those in power enshrines violence as a normative practice.

Murders also affect the students in *Arrows of Rain*. Dissatisfied with their social standing, the students, who represent the nation's future leadership, decide to stage a strike to compel the military regime to revise its governance policies. Regrettably, a brutal police crackdown disperses the protesters, with deadly consequences:

> One week later the students of the National University massed in the football field carrying anti-Bato placards. Three lorryloads of anti-riot police arrived and ordered the students to disperse. A few students walked away, but most of them stayed behind, defiant. The police put on their gear and advanced. They threw a few tear-gas at the students. The students gathered the smoking cans and lobbed them back at the police. The police launched an overwhelming arsenal of tear gas which sent the students scattering, eyes streaming. Then the police released a rattle of machine-gun fire. Eyewitness accounts estimated that between twenty and thirty corpses were taken away in two police trucks. But in a short statement, government insisted that only four hooligans posing as students were killed. (O. Ndibe, 2000, pp.190-191).

The violent crackdown on students using tear gas and firearms demonstrates that violence is used as an instrument of social control by the military regime. The university is not simply a place devoted to the acquisition of knowledge. It is also perceived by the regime as site of politicization where a counter-legitimacy to the military dictatorship is forged. For General Bello's regime, students have the capacity of turning university grievances into national movements due to their knowledge on political matters. That several of them were assassinated and their bodies removed in police vehicles is a proof that the military regime intends to deceive the population's vigilance in order to prevent further popular uprisings, or consider those bodies as incriminating evidence against the regime. The government's alleged statement

labeling the murdered students as 'hooligans' is a social discourse that legitimizes state violence. By introducing a witness at the scene of this police atrocity against the students, Ndibe wants the reader to bear in mind that even under a military regime the truth cannot be wholly erased. The witness's account mentioning twenty to thirty students is a narrative piece of evidence that contradicts the government's official version, which reports four 'hooligans' killed.

Apart from the crackdown on students, foreign newspaper headlines reveal several atrocities committed by Bello's regime, indicating that military authority is principally directed against political opponents:

> MADIAN WRITER HANGED – He was a critic of the dictatorship
>
> MADIAN MINISTER'S DEATH SUSPICIOUS – Dictator said to be having an affair with deceased wife. 120 STUDENT PROTESTORS REPPORTED KILLED
>
> DESPOT CANNES VICE CHANCELLOR IN PUBLIC
>
> DIPLOMATS SAY AFRICAN DICTATOR BEHIND
>
> DISAPPEARANCE OF OPPONENTS – Victims may have been fed to lions (O. Ndibe, 2000, p. 213).

These foreign newspaper headlines report on the systemic violence prevailing in Madia under Bello's regime. The fact that revelations of killings come from the foreign press demonstrates the local media's inability to report on the prevailing political issues in Madia. For the reader, these headlines offer lines of reflection that may allude to Nigeria's historical reality under military governments during which violent repression against dissidents were particularly severe.

Conclusion

Ultimately, the reading of Okey Ndibe's *Arrows of Rain* reveals a structural correspondence between authoritarianism and moral decay under General Bello's military regime. This study has shown that, through the use of armed force and institutional mechanisms, the military government succeeded in consolidating its legitimacy and domination at the expense of the people. Drawing upon violence and other forms of intimidation, the regime succeeded in neutralizing its opponents and imposing a new social order committed to its cause. In this new social order, corruption and alienation become psychological symptoms that preclude any individual or collective strategy of resistance. In

doing so, injustice and impunity become normalized, granting the regime full discretionary power to resort to the killing of opponents when silence and fear take hold of vulnerable populations.

Through *Arrows of Rain*, Ndibe does not merely offer a literary critique; he presents a diagnosis of military authoritarianism, urging the reader to understand that a military regime brings neither lasting order nor real progress, but rather violence, dehumanisation of individuals, and the moral deterioration of society.

Bibliography

Achebe, Chinua. *No Longer at Ease*. London: Heinemann, 1960.

Ademoyega, Adewale. *Why We Struck: The Story of the First Nigerian Coup*. Ibadan, Evans Brothers, 1981.

Akingbe, Niyi. ‘‘Rallying against Dehumanization: Repudiating Military Brutality in Okey Ndibe’s *Arrows of Rain.*’’ *Nordic Journal of African Studies*, Vol 22 (3), 2013, pp. 156 - 176.

Angenot, Marc, and Régine Robin, ‘‘L’inscription du discours social dans le texte littéraire.’’ *Sociocriticism*, vol. 1, n° 1, 1985, pp. 53 – 82.

Duchet, Claude. (dir), *Sociocritique.* Paris, Nathan, 1979.

Elerius, John. ‘‘The Radical Perspective in the Early African Novels.’’ *Introduction to Francophone African Literature: A collection of Essays*, Ibadan: Spectrum Books Limited, 2000.

Kouakou, N’guessan. ‘‘Military Delinquency in Okey Ndibe’s *Arrows of Rain*.’’ *International Journal of Multidisciplinary Research and Publications* (IJMRAP), Vol 1, Issue 7, 2018, pp. 19-25.

Ndibe, Okey. *Arrows of Rain*. London: Heinemann, 2000.

Okigbo, Christopher. *Labyrinths*. London: Heinemann, 1971.

Okolie, Mary J. N., and Nkama Obo Akaji, ‘‘Transgressed Spaces: Okey Ndibe and the Dynamics of Class Bordering.’’ *Nsukka Journal of the Humanities* (NJH), Nigeria, 2024, pp. 79-90.

Koffi Gérard

Ottuh, Peter, and Oninhawo John ‘‘A moral evaluation of past military coups and present corruption in Nigeria.’’, *KIU Interdisciplinary Journals of Humanities and Social Services*, 4(1), 2023, pp. 184-200.

Rao, Naveen. ‘‘Historigraphic Metafiction in Okey Ndibe’s *Arrows of Rain.*’’ *International Research Journal on Advanced Engeneering and Management*, Vol 3, 2025, pp. 2666-2669.

Wellek, René, and Warren Austin. *Theory of Literature*. London, Penguin, 1969.

