

**Military delinquency in Okey Ndibe's *Arrows of rain***

**KOUAKOU N'guessan**  
**Enseignant-chercheur**  
**Ecole Normale Supérieure (ENS)**  
**Abidjan, Côte d'Ivoire**  
**docbeniansou@yahoo.fr**

**Abstract**

Researches often linger on the issue of juvenile delinquency. Okey Ndibe offers a new avenue to researchers in *Arrows of Rain* that flashes angry eyes on the behavior of militaries who have swapped their trellis for political power. The deviationist attitude of armed forces is much more dangerous and destructive -than that of the youth- because it is that of people officially armed to protect the population and struggle against delinquency and organized crime. The deviant behavior of armed forces who do not care about righteously living is one of the boiling issues of this novel that opens like a crime thriller. This study identifies three major forms of military delinquency which are first sexual deviances, then physical violence and imprisonment and murders at last.

**Key words:** Military delinquency, sexual deviance, rapes, violence, murders, feminicide.

**Résumé**

*Les recherches insistent souvent sur la délinquance juvénile. Okey Ndibe offre une nouvelle piste aux chercheurs dans Arrows of Rain, roman qui porte un furieux regard sur le comportement criminel des militaires qui ont échangé leurs treillis contre le pouvoir politique. Le comportement déviant des forces armées est beaucoup plus dangereux et destructeur –que celui des jeunes- car il est celui de personnes officiellement armées pour protéger la population et lutter contre la délinquance et le grand banditisme. L'attitude déviationniste des forces armées qui ne se soucient guère de vivre vertueusement est l'un des thèmes bouillants de ce roman qui s'ouvre comme un thriller. La présente étude identifie trois principales formes de délinquance qui sont tout d'abord les déviances sexuelles, puis la violence physique et les emprisonnements et enfin les meurtres.*

**Mots clefs :** *Délinquance militaire, déviance sexuelle, viols, violence, meurtres, féminicide.*

**Introduction**

Okey Ndibe is a multi-talented intellectual who comes to international prominence with the publication of *Arrows of Rain* in 2000 followed in 2014 by *Foreign Gods, Inc.*. He mixes

## Military delinquency in Okey Ndibe's *Arrows of rain*

\* \* \* \* \*

KOUAKOU N'guessan

the talents of an accomplished journalist, teacher, critic, poet and novelist in his writing whereby he thrusts his way through the crowd of renowned artists. Even though he has not written as many novels as the immortal Achebe, he can be listed on the narrow list of the figureheads of the new generation of Nigerian writers who, by not shying away from depicting social realities, will continue the painstaking protest and denunciation initiated by Achebe.

*Arrows of Rain*, his first novel, is a courageous account of the Nigerian life from early independence till the 1990s. The author chronicles this period as one which is plagued with the numberless flaws of political leaders who have instituted a regime of corruption, greed, parricide, feminicide, filicide, starvation and sins. As a consequence, the population as a whole is turned into famished people within the petrodollar abundance. Along with the bankrupt political regime, goes unmatched military violence that the author uncovers in a risk-taking way. The failure to build a true nation triggers a military coup that leads straight to the officialization of military delinquency. *Arrows of Rain* uncovers this delinquency under the military junta that dovetails with dictatorship and gluttony that have made Nigeria sink into nameless corruption and political crisis. In terms borrowed from Akingbe, one can say that “the foregrounding of his novel’s political theme on the frustration and dispossession of the Nigerian populace by successive military leaderships is explored against the backdrop of Igbo mythical symbolism”. (Akingbe, 2010: 6)

What does the military delinquency pinpointed by Ndibe consist of? The scrutiny of *Arrows of Rains* reveals a threefold answer to this burning issue. Ndibe makes his readership eyewitness sexual deviance consisting of abuses and rapes, before lingering on physical violence and imprisonment and ending with murders.

### 1. Sexual abuses and rapes

One of the basic characteristics of military delinquency is that it is women-targeted. Ndibe brings this delinquency in the limelight in the form of sexual deviance and violence prior and after the putsch that brings ignorant and perfidious militaries into power. Dressed in their redeeming trellis, they are seen as angels and consequently unsuspected of the least evil till the discovery of waves of abuses and rapes whose responsible are the head of state and soldiers.

### **1.1 rapes by the head of state**

By the medium of flashbacks the author starts recording rapes which are testimonies of the violation of women's basic rights. Through this technique, we learn that twenty years back Isa Palat Bello, the now powerful head of state, has raped and later killed Iyesse.

Major Bello meets Maria, a former teacher now turned prostitute and renamed Eyesse for the sake of prostitution in his youth. Their first night remains unforgettable for Iyesse who undergoes Bello's sexual assaults. In lieu of love, Bello who is seriously drunk rapes her twice. Yet, following the rapes, he initiates a sex-based relationship with her. Despite the numerous presents that he provides her with, she does not love him because in addition to being a raw man, he views her as spare wheel that is only useful when a tyre is flat. In the military slang, she is a standby to warm his bed whenever his wife travels. As stated by Aboh, "standby refers to a sexual act that happens at calculated intervals, thereby reducing Iyese to a mere object that is used to satisfy a man's sexual urge" (Aboh 2015: 94). According to Aboh, Eyesse's refusal to get married to Bello is an attempt to get rid of patriarchal conventions: "There is a strong urge to reconstruct self, and to be free from the oppressive masculinity worldview" (Aboh, 2015: 94). Apart from warming Bello's icy bed, the latter views Iyesse as a commodity that can be swapped anytime a man needs to satisfy his libido. Worse, he establishes a master-slave relation whereby she must live and behave according to his whims. Differently put, Bello tries to encapsulate Iyesse's freedom. As a prostitute and a woman who needs to enjoy her freedom, she yields to other men in order to earn the necessary money for her daily survival and also enjoy a true love affair. That is how she meets Ogugua who will indirectly be the root of her sufferings and premature death.

The very day Bello finds out that Iyesse has a true love affair with Ogugua, he gets enraged and leaves Iyesse's room frustrated. To overcome his frustration, he comes back a few days later and behaves punitively toward her. To show her that she is a mere defenseless whore at the mercy of a powerful master who has the power of life and death over her and who can consequently rightfully get her killed without the slightest social upheaval, Bello pins her to the bed with the help of three of his watchdogs. As he is a real raw devoid of the slightest humanity, he stabs her vagina with a dagger. The sight of her bleeding intimate parts gets him excited and as usual, he rapes her. Nobody but rogue militaries under the influence of drug and alcohol can cultivate such a baseness. Even though Bello does not suck Iyesse's flowing blood, his attitude

## Military delinquency in Okey Ndibe's *Arrows of rain*

\* \* \* \* \*

KOUAKOU N'guessan

is very much like that of an enraged cannibal because no one in their right mind would do such a thing.

Bello has somehow turned into a coldblooded colonialist who respects no human rights, even less those of women that he looks down as mere tradable goods. Bello is thus a key actor in the chain of indigenous reification inherited from colonization. In this view, Bello's cannibal-like attitude can be construed as a metaphor of the numberless misappropriation and grasping that characterize all the Nigerian governments. Indeed, successive Government members are so greedy and selfish that they all become blood-suckers who feed on the population that they reduce to mere anemic people. Bello is "the mirror or the arrowhead through whom the reader sees the greed, aggrandizement and self-centeredness of the ruling class" (Etiowo 2014: 61). In Ndibe's wordings, "the nation inherited from the English was placed in the hands of politicians who sucked its blood until it became anaemic. Overnight cabinet ministers puffed out protruding bellies they themselves called, PP, for power paunch" (Okey, 2000, 81). The paradise of communal ownership touted by politicians thus proves to be a well-orchestrated lie to doze the vigilance of the people to better suck their blood. In addition to their disdainful power paunches, leaders concern themselves with degenerated sexual activities which, together with countless vices, trigger the putsch. Actually, before being toppled, the elected government has turned Madia into a Sodom and Gomorrah-like city where corruption, depravity and deviant sexual activities have taken ascendance over morals. Ministers and officials are so money-centered and businesslike that dysfunction is observed everywhere. The situation leads to social upheavals following the reassignment of a minister dozing at a summit of the African Union whereas the population has been requiring his removal from the government. The crisis peppers and triggers the overthrowing of the elected government. When the government is ousted, the head of state is found in his bunker having sex with a girl who is the age of his grand-daughter. Yet, despite their being young, girls go with civilians by their own will. Even though civilian leaders proceed to a collection of sugar girls, they are not guilty of the least rape.

Rapes by the head of state are numberless and seem to be the hallmarks of militaries. To back up such a viewpoint, the author brings to the fore rapes by soldiers that verge on parricide and filicide.

### 1.2 rapes of girls by soldiers

Like the head of state, soldiers are deeply involved in deviant sexual practices that testify to a misogynous attitude. Furtherance to the murder of a prostitute, Bukuru, a man supposed to

**Horizons Littéraires**  
**Revue du Centre de Recherche sur la Critique Littéraire Africaine**  
**N° 5 - Décembre - 2021**

\* \* \* \* \*

be mentally insane, is falsely accused. The supposed culprit's attempt to clear himself off reveals that militaries, including top officials such as the head of state, are the main responsible for the different sexual abuses and rapes that target prostitutes and which have started a quarter of century earlier.

When militaries ousted the corrupt and bankrupt civilian government, they see rapes as a way to satisfy their frustrated masculinity. And their main targets are prostitutes. As a matter of fact, their political incompetence which makes them terrorize the population equates their inability to entice girls into yielding to them. Each night, they drive in the city and fill their trucks with girls, whether they are prostitutes or not. These girls are taken to the beach where they undergo the sexual assaults of militaries till dawn. Raping thus becomes a well-structured activity led by militaries who act under the control of alcohol and wee whose consumption is forbidden. On the eve of the day a prostitute drowns and Bukuru is falsely accused of being the murderer, soldiers park their truck and pick up seven girls on the fallacious pretext that they are purists waging a moral war against prostitution. And yet, when one of the arrested girl protests by telling them that she is not a prostitute, the commander of the troops slaps her and tells her that he will turn her into prostitute for his degenerated sexuality. Like highway criminals, the soldiers take the unfortunate girls to the beach and rape them by turn, each girl being the "fresh meat" of many soldiers. Of course, the protesting girl is also raped. As it can be seen, soldiers do not prey only on prostitutes. Any girl found on the roadside when their trucks are passing is an easy prey who suffers from the tyranny of the junta. One can thus opine that girls are just scapegoated for the numberless flaws of society. Since Madia is a failed country, there is a shocking "lack of adequate sanction mechanisms regarding abuse" (Antai, 2015: 3) and military rogues daily resume such women-targeted crimes.

The rape of the girls who are supposed to be prostitutes equates that of the country by indigenous rulers who have betrayed people, dashed their hopes, and raped their manhood and dignity before subjugating everybody like in colonial times. Even though *Arrows of Rain* is a fictional work that is set in an imaginary country called Madia, it contains clues indicating that the author is depicting Nigeria. We consequently go along with Akingbe who posits that "Ndibe in *Arrows of Rain* depicts Nigeria as a country experiencing internal colonization under the military ruler, Sani Abacha, who is grotesquely portrayed as General Bello, a vicious, psychotic military ruler whose preoccupation with brutality and repression leads inevitably to the killing of intellectuals, journalists and other watchdogs of society in the fictionalized country known

## Military delinquency in Okey Ndibe's *Arrows of rain*

\* \* \* \* \*

KOUAKOU N'guessan

as Madia" (Akingbe, 2010, 9). By lingering on the rapes and non-respects of women's rights, Ndibe denounces the barbarity lorded on women and thus takes position for feminism. As a male feminist, he denounces the exploitation and reification of women whose rights are daily scoffed by hellish armed forces operating under the cover of patriarchy.

In a few words, the sexual abuses and rapes that start as a humanitarian nightmare under the civilian regime quickly develop and take the form of a humanitarian catastrophe with the irruption of irresponsible militaries in the political arena. Some of the practices constituting this humanitarian disaster consist in inflicting physical violence to people and imprisoning them.

### 2. Physical violence and imprisonment

*Arrows of Rain* bears testament of the use of violence and imprisonment as a ruling strategy. Indeed, dysfunctional states are hallmarked by the fact of inflicting violence to the population. The unavowed aim of such a strategy is to snooze any rebellious mood and bring everybody under control. When meting out violence proves inefficient rulers resort to imprisonment. In *Arrows of Rain*, violence is the trademark of military ruffians who have traded their protecting and securing mission with state power for which they neither have training nor competence. To hide their crying weaknesses, they assault and massively send citizens viewed as troublemakers to prison. This section scrutinizes these two ruling strategies as instruments of subjugation under the rule of untrustworthy tyrannical militaries.

#### 2.1 Physical violence

An insight of physical violence is spotlighted on the occasion of the rape of prostitutes. Indeed, before raping them, militaries inflict them physical violence. As if they were adepts of a secret society or sect practicing modern form of human sacrifice, militaries shed the blood of innocent people on a daily basis. Their raw behavior tallies with that of the Gestapo, a highly noxious force of subjugation.

In addition to the brutality meted out to the population to subjugate them, the common stimulus of militaries are drug and alcohol whose consumption is viewed as an act of delinquency. Militaries' unmatched drug-addiction and drunkenness often dictate their behavior. Under the influence of alcohol and drug that first serve as warm-ups to curb their lack of self-confidence in front of girls, militaries lose all humanity left in them and behave violently by slapping them. It is helpful to note that militaries' behavior is driven by patriarchy that has all rights over women. In this system, violence against women is advised to reduce them to

**Horizons Littéraires**  
**Revue du Centre de Recherche sur la Critique Littéraire Africaine**  
**N° 5 - Décembre - 2021**

\* \* \* \* \*

mere objects or second-class citizens. Furtherance to slapping, the girls bleed a lot and seeing their victims' blood is a source of erection for militaries. As will testify one of the raped girls, rapists stink of drug and alcohol. And there is no doubt that rapists are militaries and not a serial killer waging a moral war against prostitutes as put forwards by armed forces to hide their crimes and by extension those of the head of state. The testimony of Bukuru who eyewitnesses the rape is clear enough:

Drunken male voices wove in and out of the women's cries. The men shouted, threatened, cajoled, laughed. In time the female voices quietened to muffled moans, but the men kept up their lascivious energy. Two hours later, finally sated, the men put their clothes back on and made off in a military truck (Ndibe, 2000: 214).

Bello, for example, cannot spend a single day without being drunk. A quick glance at his personal history reveals that in lieu of blood, it is rather alcohol that runs in his veins. And yet, Islam, his supposed religion, forbids the drinking of alcohol.

As a moslem and the son of an emir Isa was supposed to abhor alcohol. ...he began to drink, first in small quantities, relishing the wave of calmness that washed over him after a swig or two of whisky, then less moderately. The liquor did things to him, made him prone to mood swings and bouts of excess, of both niceness and nastiness (Ndibe, 2000: 162).

One of the consequences of Bello's drunkenness is his limitless love for rows. He pays his propensity for rows by the loss of one eye. Nonetheless, even after becoming a one-eyed man, he goes on behaving violently toward people. The inborn row that characterizes Bello ultimately pushes him to murder Eyesse that he is somehow losing at the profit of the man who fathers her a boy. And this is a too bitter pill to swallow for Bello who sees Iyese as his private property. The killing impetus that makes him murder Iyese also pushes his cynicism as further as stabbing the innocent baby whose sin is to be the son of another man. The same instruments of power that Bello uses against Iyese, is what the Commander and other soldiers of the Vice Task Force employ in humiliating and denigrating others - prostitutes and non-prostitutes. So in *Arrows of Rain*, "female subjugation is operated through the machinery of power, through the wielding of public positions" (Etiowo, 2014: 63). Bello's totalitarian penchant seems to be a colonial legacy to smother any social upheaval: "Since Nigeria's political independence in 1960, ensuing administrations have virtually towed the path of violence – as ensconced by the colonialists in order to contain people's dissatisfaction as well as to muscle opposition arising from the masses" (Nwagbara, 2009: 123).

In his review of *Arrows of rain*, Enweze writes that "the novel's opening pages limn the poignantly detailed story of oppression, corruption, egregious human right abuses, brutal

## Military delinquency in Okey Ndibe's *Arrows of rain*

\* \* \* \* \*

KOUAKOU N'guessan

killings and other ills visited on the Madian populace by the higher echelon of the military” (Enweze, 2013). Militaries who cannot get rid of their inborn violence turn Madia into a land of violence and imprisonment, thus showing armed forces as degenerated persons whose perverted actions sound the death knell of human civilization. Put differently, the intrusion of militaries into the political arena and its subsequent barbarity is a raw error synonymous with apocalypse. This fictional apocalypse parallels real apocalypse in the history of Nigeria as Akingbe opines: “Repression in the text is a signification of a wave of the political apocalypse which engulfed Nigeria’s socio-political landscape between 1994 and 1998, greedily fuelled by the military’s penchant for power” (Akingbe, 2010: 12). As soon as they grab the power for which they have no experience, they overtly show their bullying nature in the form of the reproachful deeds the narrator tries to recollect and reveal to the world so that everybody can get an insight of the plight of Madia. This idea is summed up by Akingbe who avers that “the novel aligns with Ougua’s need to talk about the rape, killing, torture, and dehumanization of the generality of the citizenry by the military under the command of General Isa Pallat Bello, in order to portray the military as an institution which distils and perpetrates violence on its people in Third World countries” (Akingbe, 2013: 161). The fictional Madian case is not an isolated one.

### 2.2 Imprisonment of innocent people

In real life there is no single country without prison. Yet, whereas prisons are built to host highway criminals and thieves or people supposed to have defrauded, in *Arrows of Rain*, their main hosts are innocent intellectuals and those who dare to caricature the junta.

Under the junta, imprisonment is a ruling policy. As would say Akingbe, “imprisonment constitutes one of the methods usually adopted by the military to weaken and dehumanise its critics who are usually academics, lawyers, journalists and civil rights activists in the postcolonial Africa” (Akingbe, 2013: 164). Sending intellectuals to prison is a perfidious way of hushing them up and preventing them from sparking the fire of social upheavals. Any citizen who eyewitnesses a crime by militaries is also sent to prison without trial. The rationale behind such a dictatorial attitude is to make people live in seclusion and thus make them contemplate the lies turned into sugarcoated truths of life. If intellectuals and journalists are considered guilty of betrayal, this is not the case for Bukuru. He is a mere scapegoat to hide the murder that is the core of the book, but also the numberless murders and rapes by militaries. When he is accused on the basis of falsehoods, he courageously names the culprits and by the same token

reveals the identity of the responsible for past crimes. Despite this revelation, he is charged for the crime and imprisoned. The description of the prison by Bukuru who is sent there because he is supposed to be the murderer of a prostitute reveals that it is a sort of large underground shithole:

The prison compound was deadly quiet, bare and barren. Grass lay about the surface like sun-dried algae churned out by the sea .... 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. (Ndibe, 2000: 47)

The prison is an epitome of Nigeria reduced to a mere prison under the successive military regimes. Its sordid state is a metaphor of the corruption that characterizes Nigeria which is regularly found on the list of the most corrupt countries in the world. Massive imprisonment is not particular to the junta. Successive governments view it as a means of hushing up the people in order to better achieve their tyrannical goals. The background of the above-described prison shows that it has been built by the previous Prime Minister Askia Amin who has ordered a replica of a high security prison he has seen during an official visit to Latin America. Ironically, only a few weeks after the completion of the prison, militaries stage the first coup and as a consequence, Amin and a great number of his ministers are the first inmates. During their arrest prior to their sojourn in prison, the then prime minister tastes the inhumanity of his own militaries who slap him twice on the face (Ndibe, 2000: 199) before threatening to castrate him for his guilt.

In a handful of words, bullying and sending people to prison is a threatening and subjugating strategy that is efficient for some people. *Arrows of Rain* snapshots the daily life of uncontrollable detainees and the firebrand people who are murdered by the junta because they refuse to be mere bootlickers.

### **3. Murders, a way of hushing up opposition**

The irruption of the military junta into politics turns Nigeria into a sort of concentration camp with a veiled holocaust. To hush up opposition and subsequent protests, people are daily sacrificed under the reign of the military junta. The junta has instituted a limitless state terrorism with never-ending murders in their will to appear as redeemers. These murders are twofold: political murders and civilians slaughters.

## Military delinquency in Okey Ndibe's *Arrows of rain*

\* \* \* \* \*

KOUAKOU N'guessan

### 3.1 murders of politicians and army officials

Successive Nigerian governments have claimed hundreds of lives and the situation has worsened with the junta that turns the country into a slaughtering house. When Bello grabs state power, he somehow instils his inborn violence and tyranny to soldiers and grants them the green light to terrorize and kill citizens according to their whims. As if they have received orders from Bello with whom they are in cahoots they tighten the throttlehold of the civilian government.

The first murder Ndibe reports when the army takes political power is that of the Army Chief of Staff. The Army chief is executed on the basis of false accusations. To the prime minister who wants to phone him, the officer charged to arrest him after the coup heartlessly replies: "he was court-martialled two hours ago for colluding with your government against the interests of the Madian people'. He was found guilty and was executed along with other corrupt officers in the Navy and Air Force" (Ndibe, 2000: 198). Many other officials, including Major James Rada, the very one who announces the coup and later hands the power to Bello, are executed, together with nine officers, for treason. By telling the story of officials who are merely sacrificed, the author wants the world to understand the heartlessness of militaries whose chief Bello is a remorseless and a more than violent man who is naturally inclined to murder.

Bello makes no distinction among his victims. Even his close collaborators such as ministers are found on the list of murdered people. Ministers are not murdered because they are guilty of subversion or whatever act that can threaten the junta. Their crimes reside in the fact of having beautiful spouses that Bello wants in his bed. Bello can be compared with King David in the Holy Bible. After having sex with the spouse of his military chief, namely Urie, King David made him killed. However, after his horrible crime, he knelt and begged God's forgiveness. As a sex-centered man, Bello proceeds to a collection of women. In his will to satisfy his degenerated masculinity, he launches himself in sexual harassment worthy of any despot. With no distinction, he ensnares and has sex with all the women he happens to encounter. He thus has sex with the spouses of his ministers and officers. To quell his forfeiture, the dictator even gets his collaborators murdered just like he does for anonymous people. Contrary to King David who is overwhelmed with guilt, Bello feels no remorse. Such a heartless attitude indicates how far the country is enmeshed in tyranny. While clinging to power tyrants strive to clobber opposition and dissenting views. Tyrannical Nigerian militaries employ murders as a ruling strategy that kills the slightest democratic spirit and ideals. In addition to seeing "might as right and coercion as a substitute for democratic principles" (Nwagbara 2011: 90), the junta sees murders as the safest way to protect their nauseating and decaying power.

Borrowing from Nwagbara, one can aver that “the events leading to the grabbing of state power by militaries are enameled with bloodshed. Nigerian history since colonial incursion is awash with political violence, crude use of power and deepening socio-economic crises” (Nwagbara 2009:122). This parricidal attitude is extended to civilians.

### **3.2 murders of civilians**

According to Nwagbara: ‘all the military governments in Nigeria have ruled with Gestapo force, cruelty and intense violence against the subaltern and human rights activists; this is also true of civilian dispensations, which are mere cloning of militarized governments (Nwagbara, 2009: 128). One of the basic characteristics of Gestapo is the murder of embarrassing people, including civilians.

The first civilian victim of the military terrorism furtherance to the coup is a journalist who deems it his responsibility to take pictures of these rogues for his journal. Considering he has contravened national security, they destroy his equipment and beat him to blood. Despite medical treatment, the photographer dies in his sleep and his death goes unpunished. The particular brutality larded on the photographer is a forerunner that true devils are hidden behind the angel faces of militaries. They turn Langa into a dead city following the putsch and their so-called salutary mission quickly becomes a plague for the country. Only within a few years, militarism has brought to naught all Madia has achieved in its efforts to build a nation. The death of the journalist is later followed by that of numberless people considered as betrayers of the national cause. Any person who criticizes the junta is executed. Innocent people who are so unlucky that they are at the wrong place at the wrong time are also slaughtered.

There is no single day when the cover pages of journals do not mention the assassination of people whose honesty and moral rectitude threaten the military government. One of the sins that Bello can by no means stand is to criticize him and his corrupt government. Thus, a Madian writer who dares to disparage him is hanged. To avoid making a faithful replica of the Nigerian history, Ndibe does not reveal the hanged writer’s name. A furtive glance at the history of Nigeria reveals that the unnamed writer is no doubt Ken Saro Wiwa who was hanged together with eight Ogoni activists under the tyrannical Abacha despite world campaign for his release. Like Ndibe, they dare to sternly refuse to side with the military despot and rather stand with the oil sector workers who have been claiming for an equitable distribution of the petrodollar and the respect of their environment.

## Military delinquency in Okey Ndibe's *Arrows of rain*

\* \* \* \* \*

KOUAKOU N'guessan

In the 1990s, students are the firebrands of protests that result in the reinstatement of democracy in Africa. In Madia, the tyrannical Bello is not ready to discuss democracy and as a consequence, students are massively arrested and slaughtered. A total of 120 student protesters have been reported killed by the services of Bello. This filicidal attitude testifies to Ndibe's strong will to behead patriarchy and military powers that choose to sacrifice their would-be heirs. Bello's close collaborators are publicly canned. Under the fire of international criticism, the despot changes his way of dealing with troublemakers. Instead of publicly murdering his opponents, Bello sees to it that they disappear. Even though their disappearance equals death, their corpses are never found because they are given as fresh meat to feed lions whose rapaciousness tallies with the dictator's. Fortunately enough, in the history of human societies, nobody, whatever his power, can stop or alter the march of history. Despotic states cannot definitely hush up opposition which always finds strategies to survive. In the case of Madia, the only alternative left to the opposition is to openly cease its activities and operate underground for the sake of its members. Acting underground allows the opposition to reveal how horrifying is the power of Bello who has turned the country as a whole into an orphanage and slaughtering house.

The underground opposition press painted a picture that was even more grim: countless men picked up and tortured for saying a bad word about Bello in an unguarded moment in some bar; women, too, detained and tortured; children orphaned by assassins. Bello's rapaciousness had catapulted him to the front ranks of the world's wealthiest potentates, behind the Emir of Brunei, but ahead of Zaire's quick-fingered man-god (Ndibe, 2000, 213).

The above quoted passage lingers on Bello's rapaciousness which has made him one of the wealthiest world leaders whereas the people is suffering in sordid prisons. It by the same token sturdily pushes to the fore Bello's gluttony and greed. How can a simple official be ahead of Mobutu only within months spent at the prime ministerial palace? The only plausible answer is through corruption. Indeed, as the strong man of the country, Bello is responsible to nobody and thus the money generated by the oil of the country is diverted to land into his personal accounts. And yet, one of the reasons behind the putsch is the militaries' strong will to end up with economic delinquency that characterizes the civilian government. The collective ownership and equitable sharing of the Nigerian petrodollar thus proves to be a mere blinding argument to justify their coup which is a delinquent act in its nature.

All in all, the junta has turned the nation into a land of yes-men where any refusal to play the bootlicker is punished by death. Instead of being visionary enough to be ranked as an

**Horizons Littéraires**  
**Revue du Centre de Recherche sur la Critique Littéraire Africaine**  
**N° 5 - Décembre - 2021**

\* \* \* \* \*

enlightened despot, Bello sinks into all sorts of delinquency. The unprecedented dictatorship lorded on the people definitely makes the population who acclaims him as their redeemer regret and yearn for the corrupt civilian government. Differently put, the putsch that is acclaimed by some as the long-awaited rains which will wet the soil and favor a good harvest turns out to be poisoned arrows in the hands of hooligans in trellis. And it is the imagery of this killing taken from the Nigerian folklore that gives the novel its title.

### **Conclusion**

*Arrows of Rain* is somehow a crime thriller or the report of a hidden journalist who investigates the particular violence meted out to all the Nigerian social layers by rogue militaries who bully the population without the slightest worry. From sexual to physical violence and murders, militaries have demonstrated that they are untrustworthy outlaws whose so-called redeeming mission that has motivated the overthrowing of the elected civilian government is but a pure greedy treachery that foretells socioeconomic and political apocalypse. Indeed, the military piggishness and its stifling practices have pushed closer to the grave an already agonizing society that has lost all its humanity. Furthermore, instead of consolidating the fledgling democracy, they rather bring it to naught. Far from breaking the vicious circle of misrule, mismanagement, corruption, violence, parricide, filicide, femicide, and many other hellish flaws characterizing dysfunctional government, militaries have tightened their grips on the population by pushing repression steps further than the one for which they have ousted the civilian government.

Just like novels decrying the military stranglehold in Nigeria, Ndibe's fiction echoes "theatre of horror and failure of men in uniform to drive positive change after preaching messianic mission as reason for dabbling into politics" (Nwagbara 2011: 88). "Ndibe sees the military as a scavenger which has come to obliterate all pretence to human civilisation left behind by the displaced democratic government" (Akingbe, 2010, 8). By penciling the military regime which blindly rapes, tortures and murders the population it is supposed to save from the trenchant jaws of the civilian government, Ndibe questions militarism in Nigeria and demonstrates that militaries cannot lead a people to the Promised Land. By the same token, he wants the Nigerian community and by extension Africa realize that a bad civilian government elected on a democratic basis is by far better than a military one which is as devilish as Satan. Owing to the particular barbarity deployed by militaries in *Arrows of rain*, "after reading it, one

## Military delinquency in Okey Ndibe's *Arrows of rain*

\* \* \* \* \*

KOUAKOU N'guessan

is left with nightmares of the total evil called militarism in Nigeria, and governance in general” (Enweze, 2013). One is therefore given credence if one states that this novel pricks the collective conscience of its readers.

### Bibliography

- Aboh Romanus “Slang And Multiple Methods Of Interpreting Sex And Sexual Identity In The Nigerian Novel”, *The African Symposium: An online journal of the African Educational Research Network*, Volume 15, No. 1, July 2015, 91-97.
- Akingbe Niyi “Defying armies: Protesting military oppression in *Arrows of Rain*”, *California Linguistic Notes*, Volume XXXV, No. 2, Spring 2010, pp 1-12
- Akingbe Niyi “Rallying against Dehumanization: Repudiating Military Brutality in Okey Ndibe's *Arrows of Rain*”, *Nordic Journal of African Studies* 22(3): 158–176 (2013)
- Antai Diddy “Traumatic physical health consequences of intimate partner violence against women: what is the role of community-level factors?”, *BMC Women's Health*, 2011, 13 pages
- Enweze Obi “*Arrows of Rain* By Okey Ndibe – A Review”, April 24, 2013, <https://www.amazon.com/review/R11Y88QYVYYEBU> [10/10/2021]
- Etiowo Joy M. “Narrative Innovations in Okey Ndibe's *Arrows of Rain*”, *IPEDR*, 2014, Vol. 72. 11, pp 61-64.
- Ndibe Okey *Arrows of Rain*, Heinemann, African Writers Series, 2000, 148 p.
- Nwagbara Uzoechi “State Violence and the Writer: Towards the Dialectics of Intellectual Militancy in Transcending Postcolonial Nigerian Contradictions”, *Nebula* 6.2, June 2009 pp 122-141
- Nwagbara Uzoechi “Intertextuality and the “Truth” of Achebe's Fiction: Militarised Nigerian Postcolony In *Anthills Of The Savannah*”, *The African Symposium: An online journal of the African Educational Research Network*, Volume 11, No. 2, December 2011, pp. 84-98.