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# Subversion of Post-independence Dreams and Aspirations: Reflections on Okey Ndibe's *Arrows of Rain*

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**Abstract:** The paper attempts to analyze the woeful disappointment and disillusionment occasioned by the betrayal of trust by the Black leaders as presented in the novel *Arrows of Rain* by Okey Ndibe. African people had dreamt of an independent nation where everything will be in line with the nationalistic agenda. Their dreams and aspiration were sabotaged as the colonial status quo continued even after the attainment of independence. The exploitation and oppression perpetrated by those leaders who were meant to help their countrymen enjoy the fruits of freedom they had fought hard for, disenchanting them. In this paper, an effort will be made to highlight various kinds of abuses discussed in the novel including corruption, arbitrary killing, sexual assault, and incarceration which gave rise to an ugly scenario in post-independent Africa.

**Keywords:** Disillusionment, Dreams, Aspirations, Incarceration, post-independence

## INTRODUCTION

African writers have always used their art for the reflection of the socio-political and economic realities of their continent. Earlier, their works dealt with cultural nationalism, then it was used to document the resistance against colonialism and in contemporary times it is being used to depict the widespread disillusionment and disappointment that followed independence. People had fought against the excesses of colonialism with the hope that independence will bring about prosperity and equality. People had believed that the accession to the power of indigenous leaders would lead to the nation's development as the wealth produced by the natural resources would remain in Africa. They were expecting a world of comfort, security, abundance and freedom. But, in the years immediately after independence, the masses were disillusioned as all their hopes and aspiration were dashed to the ground due to the corrupt, selfish and tyrannical

attitudes of those in power. Instead of dismantling, the elites continued all the practices prevalent during colonialism and made the ordinary people victims of unimaginable suffering. Ngugi wa Thiong'o observes, "To the majority of African people the new state, independence did not bring fundamental changes. It was independence with the ruler holding a begging bowl and the ruled holding a shrinking belly. It was independence with question mark". (65). Writers, who are an inseparable part of society couldn't remain unaffected by the confusing harshness of post-independent Africa. From their focus on themes of attack on colonizers, they strived to expose the reality of the new enemy in the form of Black leadership. Contemporary African literature throngs with the themes of disillusionment and disappointment. Gakwandi contends that "the attainment of independence by many African countries in the last decade and the resultant change in the social-political atmosphere of these countries has had discernible influence on fictional themes (67). Okey Ndibe is one such African writer who has used his art of writing to convey the mood of disillusionment. His novel *Arrows of Rain* masterfully fictionalizes the colossal failure of the nation to pursue its nationalistic agenda. His work satirizes the leaders for the appropriation of the country's wealth and perpetuating violence and terror. The novel falls into the category of works that Kehinde says are:

[...] reflections of the realities of post-independence Africa with its inherent cultural contradictions political and economic instability, corruption, sexual promiscuity, rape, the ravaging of HIV/AIDS syndrome, and nepotism. Hence, the contemporary African novel is an amalgam of fact and fiction" (89).

*Arrows of Rain* presents the fictional Madia as a failed state where people live with broken promises and shattered hopes. The leaders govern the country with oppression, tyranny, exploitation and also indulge in corruption. Years

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after independence, Madia continues to remain underdeveloped as it was during colonialism. The wealth of natural resources which was earlier transported to the Western World is now appropriated by Black leaders to fill their own coffers. The corrupt leaders of Madia embezzle public funds and national resources. Ndibe says that “Madia was in a stranglehold of the most vicious kleptocracy anywhere on our continent—a regime in which ministers and other public officials looted whatever was within their rich and much that was not” (117-118). The ordinary people continue to live in an appalling state. Independence has failed to liberate them from their marginalized positions and they continue to live without the basic necessities of life. The community of Madia is deprived of the things like good roads, health infrastructure and safe drinking water. Their hospitals lack competent medical staff and even drugs. Their roads become muddy whenever there is rain and it hampers the smooth movement of traffic. Instead of addressing these issues, the black leaders utilize the nation’s wealth in enhancing their own status by buying new cars for themselves and their wives. The leaders are portrayed as the replica of colonizers who seemed to be trained by them to continue their legacy and perpetuate their values and practices indirectly. Ndibe remarks that “the nation inherited from the English was placed in the hands of politicians who sucked its blood until it became anemic. Overnight cabinet ministers puffed out protruding bellies themselves called, PP, for power punch” (81). They are ruthlessly exploiting the inhabitants of Madia and only serve their greedy instincts.

Ndibe has also depicted the incursion of the military in the political arena of the country. They took over power with the aim of sanitizing the nation from corrupt officials and to right the wrongs of civilian government. For instance, in order to justify the ousting of civilian government, Major James Rada enunciates their failure by saying:

Fellow citizens, we have all been witnesses to the escalating acts of irresponsibility and corruption exhibited by political classes. The ordinary citizen has lost all confidence in the institution of governances; the state and national treasuries have been bankrupted by politicians for their own profit; and the moral fabric of this nation has been torn apart” (191).

But soon, it becomes evident that the military government did more harm than good to the nation. They adopt an autocratic attitude and people have to encounter new sorts of misfortunes in the form of abuse of power, violation of freedom of speech, imprisonment, molestation etc. They rule the people with intimidation, suppression and victimization and brutalize and silence those who attempt to speak against their atrocities. They impose the most tyrant clampdown on the freedom press and the media felt forced to work from underground. They try to block all the means of information that could acquaint people with their evil deeds. One of the photographers of *Dail Magazine* gets killed in the state’s violence against the press. This incident intimidates and terrorizes the protagonist Ougua so much so that he chooses to adopt a new name Bukuru to evade arrest by military forces and thereby avoid his victimization. He even chooses to remain silent in face of injustice and cruelty and retreat from society. Okey Nidbe delves into the psychological disposition of Bukuru to capture the traumatic effect of the intimidation by the military. Narrating his mental torment due to the fear of military General he says:

Isa Palat Bello continued to hunt my mind. He was present in every soldier’s face, eyes peering out at me, lustful and ugly. I began to dread the approach of night, for his face would loom up out of dark. Whenever I heard footsteps behind me I whirled around (185).

The savagery of the military is further highlighted with the depiction of molestation and rape of women by soldiers. The Military is portrayed as sex maniac who ruin women’s lives for the gratification of animal desire. General Bello repeatedly rapes and eventually murders the prostitute, Iyese for her refusal to marry him. It is ultimately Bukuru, the eyewitness of the Iyese’s murder, who is wrongfully accused of the crime of murder and arrested. He is then imprisoned in the Bande maximum security prison. Ndibe utilizes the incident of Bukuru’s imprisonment to throw light on the various tactics military adopt to suppress and weaken its enemy. He also satirizes the postcolonial leaders for carrying on the legacy of colonialism in the post-colonial era in the form of incarceration of natives. It was the Europeans who introduced the prison system in Africa for subjugating dissent. They used it to crush the rebellious spirit of those freedom fighters who challenged the colonizer’s government head-on. In Post-independent

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Africa, the same tactic is adopted by indigenous leadership to victimize its critics.

When Bukuru is taken to prison he describes it thus:

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

Such a description of prison gives rise to the feeling of fright and disgust. In the prison, he is made to suffer harsh treatment and torture in various ways. Bukuru's harassment and intimidation are revealed when he further describes the cell he is confined into by saying:

The four walls seemed to draw imperceptibly closer, threatening in time to meet in an embrace to crush me...Death entered and stayed in my thoughts...at night different sounds intruded on my solitude: the swaying of trees, the chirr of insects, the croaking of frogs, the shabby shuffle roaches, the low requiem of mosquitoes and the terrible braying of demented prisoners (67-68).

The inhuman treatment meted out to Bukuru and the deplorable condition of prison shows the insensitivity of

military rulers to the inmates. They lack compassion and pity and are hell-bent on annihilating opposition or anyone who they feel is a threat to their rule. Their despotism has increased the woes of common people who find themselves constantly under the shadow of death.

## CONCLUSION

The paper has brought to the limelight the theme of the subversion of people's post-independence dreams as presented in the novel *Arrows of Rain*. The Black leaders have betrayed people's trust by perpetuating the exploitative and tyrannical practices present during colonialism. Ndibe has laid bare the fact that the military incursion has doubled the suffering and misfortune of natives and made the state a hell instead of a heaven people had dreamt of during the anti-colonial struggle.

## REFERENCES

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