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in selected novels by Nuruddin Farah and Ngugi wa
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Komi Akakpo

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POSTCOLONIAL MADNESS: THE REPRESENTATION OF DICTATORSHIP IN SELECTED NOVELS BY NURUDDIN FARAH AND NGUGI WA THIONG'O

Sous la direction du Prof. Samuel LUDWIG

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Abstract

Nuruddin Farah's realist-modernist depictions of Somalia's society under Siad Barre and Ngugi wa Thiong'o's satirical and hyperbolic allegorizations of Kenyan postcolonial society project an African realism on decades of postcolonial history when dictators reigned supreme. In their novels, both Farah and Ngugi do not stop at presenting the scourge of dictatorship in its most heart-wrenching aspects, but they equally manage to expose their even more ludicrous real-life spectacles. In Farah's *Sweet and Sour Milk*, *Sardines*, and *Close Sesame*, and Ngugi's *Matigari* and *Wizard of the Crow*, the postcolonial world is governed by contradictions and paradoxes resulting from dictators' abusive reliance on force, wealth, and persuasion, the three basic ways of obtaining consent and obedience according to American historian Carroll Quigley. That people tend to remain silent in the face of the stick or that they often repeat lies when presented with the carrot is common knowledge that both Farah and Ngugi demonstrate in the novels. However, their depictions also show that there is no place for persuasion in the context of a dictatorship. Instead, the dictator's use of violence and wealth is supported by propaganda and indoctrination, which produce obedience that ultimately ends in madness.

On the one hand, Farah and Ngugi show that silence and distortion are considered normal behavior in dictatorships because they produce obedience. On the other hand, several scenes and characters in their novels further suggest that this obedience is also insanity when

an authoritarian government's use of force, wealth, and propaganda compel the postcolonial subject to either deny the uncomfortable reality in silence, distort it by lying, or lose touch with it by believing in the delusions of the dictator. When considered in this specific order, silence, distortion, and madness will represent a gradual descent into a circle of madness, which can turn into a spiral where sanity and insanity are the same when the authoritarian regime uses false accusations against sane individuals who resist their tyranny, by speaking when the masses are frightened into silence, by telling the truth when the elites distort reality, and ultimately by remaining sane when others fall victim to the dictator's delusions. The paradoxical relationships between obedience, resistance, and madness engender what D. R. Ewen would describe as "a situation that bears much the same relation to any reasonably sane society as Milton's Hell does to Heaven: a post-colonial Pandaemonium." Indeed, the postcolonial world that Farah and Ngugi sketch is anything but sane. Insanity seems to be an intrinsic characteristic of the postcolonial world, whether in characters alienated from their ancestral traditions or bloodthirsty and delusional rulers.

The study shall commence with a methodological and contextual discussion to give us background knowledge about the novels under discussion. First, I will explain my methodological approach, which draws insight from fiction, history, and theory. I will then present some critical concepts in postcolonial theory and offer a literature review of the secondary literature on Farah and Ngugi, highlighting how various conclusions proposed by other critics are suited for the kind of study I conduct. After talking about what others have said about the authors and the novels I discuss, I will start my own investigation with an analysis of silence in *Matigari* and *Sweet and Sour Milk* to show that silence can be submission, resistance, and insanity in the context of repression, surveillance, and torture.

Following this, I will argue that Farah and Ngugi's characterization of this type of silence also suggests the notion of denial of reality, which is only one step away from

distortion of reality, which is the second element I investigate in my corpus. Farah and Ngugi portray various forms of falsehoods in their works, prompting inquiries into ethical soundness when the lies appear intentional, and into the mental wellness of political figures when distortion seems unconscious or pathological. While Farah's novels take us into the complexities of political spoils and tribal politics, Ngugi's *Wizard of the Crow* uses hyperbole and focuses on pathological distortions to demonstrate the destructive threat rumors pose to totalitarian regimes that thrive on lies. Again, there is just one step from distorting reality to losing contact with it, leading to insanity, which I first explore indirectly through the notion of alienation regarding the postcolonial individual's inferiority complex inherited from the colonial period. Secondly, I will discuss the folly of postcolonial dictators and their abnormal behavior in *Sweet and Sour Milk* and *Wizard of the Crow* through the notion of derangement and personality disorders. I will then suggest that propaganda and indoctrination, as depicted by Farah and Ngugi, are not only tactics employed by dictators to propagate false narratives but also endeavors to contaminate the masses with their delusions.

Furthermore, I will discuss how Farah's portrayal of propaganda and indoctrination indicates that the subordination of the means of subsistence to participation in the personality cult of the dictators creates a world in which some wholeheartedly believe in the delusions of the dictators, while many others only feign loyalty. Yet, there is another category of characters that reject the dictator's call to be part of the mass madness of authoritarian rule. Paradoxically, however, the scenes and characters discussed in the novels reveal that the characters who resist tyranny are called mad by society. They offer a pluralistic view of madness, suggesting that while some forms of insanity are medically substantiated, other cases are social constructions intended to control the individual's behavior. Lastly, I discuss how political actors and subjects exploit common misconceptions between real and false cases of insanity to their advantage.

Briefly put, this study demonstrates, through interacting strands of story, history, and theory, how Farah and Ngugi's thematic treatment of the tropes of silence, distortion, madness, and resistance in their novels reveals the intricacies of an African political scene where fear of repression becomes second nature, where rumors contradict both private truths and public lies, where dictators use propaganda and indoctrination to sell their delusions to the masses, and where resistance to tyranny is as much an act of courage as it is one of madness. Though they approach these subjects each in their own fashion through realism, sarcasm, satire, and hyperbole, both Farah and Ngugi depict postcolonial individuals, ruler and the ruled, as being entrapped in an inescapable spiral in which both resisting tyranny and surrendering to it can be seen as madness.

Résumé

Les descriptions réalistes et modernistes de la société somalienne sous Siad Barre par Nuruddin Farah et les allégorisations satiriques et hyperboliques par Ngugi wa Thiong'o de la société kenyane dépeignent avec un certain réalisme les décennies de l'histoire postcoloniale africaine où les dictateurs régnaient en maîtres absolus. Dans leurs romans, Farah et Ngugi ne se contentent pas de présenter le fléau de la dictature sous ses aspects les plus déchirants, mais ils parviennent également à en exposer les spectacles les plus grotesques. Dans *Sweet and Sour Milk*, *Sardines*, et *Close Sesame* de Farah, *Matigari* et *Wizard of the Crow* de Ngugi, le monde postcolonial est régi par des contradictions et des paradoxes résultant du recours abusif des dictateurs à la force, à la richesse et à la persuasion, les trois moyens fondamentaux d'obtention du consentement et de l'obéissance selon l'historien américain Carroll Quigley. Que les gens aient tendance à rester silencieux face au bâton ou qu'ils répètent souvent des mensonges lorsqu'on leur présente la carotte sont des faits bien connus que Farah et Ngugi démontrent dans leurs romans. Cependant, leurs descriptions montrent également que la persuasion n'a pas sa place dans le contexte d'une dictature. Au contraire, le dictateur complète son recours à la violence et à la richesse par la propagande et l'endoctrinement, qui produisent une obéissance qui finit par se manifester sous forme de folie.

D'une part, Farah et Ngugi montrent que le silence et la distorsion sont considérés comme des comportements normaux dans les dictatures parce qu'ils engendrent l'obéissance.

Mais d'autre part, plusieurs scènes et personnages de leurs romans suggèrent davantage que cette obéissance est aussi de la folie dès lors que l'utilisation de la force, de la richesse et de la propagande par un gouvernement autoritaire contraint le sujet postcolonial à nier la réalité gênante en silence, à la distordre par le mensonge ou à perdre le sens des réalités en croyant aux illusions du dictateur. Considérés dans cet ordre précis, le silence, la distorsion et la folie représentent une descente progressive dans un cercle de folie, qui peut se transformer en une spirale où santé mentale et folie se confondent à partir du moment où le régime autoritaire utilise de fausses accusations contre des individus sains d'esprit qui résistent à sa tyrannie, soit en parlant lorsque les masses sont effrayées et réduites au silence, en disant la vérité lorsque les élites déforment la réalité, et finalement en restant sain d'esprit là où d'autres sont victimes des délires du dictateur. Les relations paradoxales entre l'obéissance, la résistance et la folie engendrent alors ce que D. R. Ewen décrirait comme "une situation qui a, avec toute société raisonnablement saine, à peu près le même rapport que l'enfer de Milton entretient avec le paradis : un *pandaemonium* post-colonial." En effet, le monde postcolonial esquissé par Farah et Ngugi est tout sauf sain d'esprit. La folie semble en être une caractéristique intrinsèque, que ce soit chez les personnages aliénés de leurs traditions ancestrales ou les dirigeants sanguinaires et délirants.

Je commencerai cette étude par une discussion méthodologique et contextuelle destinée à nous fournir des connaissances de base sur les romans étudiés. J'expliquerai d'abord mon approche méthodologique, qui s'inspire de la fiction, de l'histoire et de la théorie. Je présenterai ensuite certains concepts clés de la théorie postcoloniale ainsi qu'une revue de la littérature secondaire sur Farah et Ngugi, en soulignant en quoi les différents éléments analysés sont adaptés au type d'étude que je mène. Après avoir parlé de ce que les critiques ont dit sur les auteurs et les romans étudiés, je commencerai ma propre enquête par une analyse du silence dans *Matigari* et *Sweet and Sour Milk* pour montrer que le silence peut

être à la fois soumission, résistance et folie dans le contexte de la répression, de la surveillance et de la torture.

Ensuite, je démontrerai que la caractérisation de ce type de silence par Farah et Ngugi suggère également la notion de déni de la réalité, qui n'est qu'à un pas de la distorsion de la réalité, le deuxième élément que j'étudie dans mon corpus. Les nombreuses facettes du mensonge que Farah et Ngugi montrent dans leurs romans posent des questions concernant l'intégrité morale lorsque les mensonges semblent délibérés et soulèvent des interrogations sur la santé mentale des sujets politiques lorsque la distorsion semble inconsciente ou pathologique. Alors que les romans de Farah nous plongent dans les complexités du système des dépouilles politiques et de la politique tribale, *Wizard of the Crow* de Ngugi utilise l'hyperbole et se concentre sur les distorsions pathologiques pour démontrer la menace destructrice que les rumeurs font peser sur les régimes totalitaires qui se maintiennent à travers le mensonge. Là encore, il n'y a qu'un pas entre la distorsion de la réalité et la folie, c'est-à-dire, la perte de contact avec la réalité. Dans un premier temps, j'aborderai ce thème indirectement à travers la notion d'aliénation concernant le complexe d'infériorité que l'individu postcolonial a hérité de l'époque coloniale. Deuxièmement, j'explorerai la folie des dictateurs postcoloniaux et de leur comportement anormal dans *Sweet and Sour Milk* et *Wizard of the Crow* à travers les notions de dérangement et de trouble de personnalité. Je suggérerai ensuite que la propagande et l'endoctrinement, tels que dépeints par Farah et Ngugi, ne sont pas seulement des méthodes utilisées par les dictateurs pour véhiculer de faux narratifs, mais des tentatives de contagion mentale.

En outre, j'exposerai la manière dont Farah décrit la propagande et l'endoctrinement, indiquant que l'assujettissement des moyens de subsistance à la participation au culte de la personnalité des dictateurs crée un monde dans lequel certains croient de tout cœur aux illusions des dictateurs, tandis que beaucoup d'autres ne font que semblant d'y croire. Il existe

cependant une autre catégorie de personnages qui rejettent l'appel du dictateur à participer à la folie collective du régime autoritaire. Paradoxalement, les scènes et les personnages évoqués dans les romans révèlent que les personnages qui résistent à la tyrannie sont traités de fous par la société. Ces scènes offrent une vision pluraliste de la folie, suggérant que si certaines formes de folie sont médicalement fondées, d'autres sont des constructions sociales visant à contrôler le comportement de l'individu. Enfin, j'évoquerai la manière dont les acteurs politiques et les sujets exploitent, à leur avantage, les malentendus courants entre les vrais et les faux cas de folie.

En bref, cette étude démontre, en alliant récit, histoire et théorie, comment les traitements thématiques des tropes du silence, de la distorsion, de la folie et de la résistance par Farah et Ngugi dans leurs romans révèle les subtilités d'une scène politique africaine où la peur de la répression est une seconde nature, où les rumeurs contredisent à la fois les vérités privées et les mensonges publics, où les dictateurs utilisent la propagande et l'endoctrinement pour vendre leurs illusions aux masses, et où la résistance à la tyrannie est autant un acte de courage que de folie. Bien qu'ils abordent ces sujets chacun à leur manière, par le réalisme, le sarcasme, la satire et l'hyperbole, Farah et Ngugi dépeignent tous deux les individus postcoloniaux, dirigeants et dirigés, pris dans une spirale inéluctable dans laquelle cela relève autant de la folie de résister à la tyrannie que de s'y soumettre.

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To my parents,

And to seekers of truth and justice,
the truly sane in this mad world.

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Last but not least, I am indebted to my family and friends for their support and for helping me remain sane throughout this journey into the world of madness.

Note to the reader

I would like to bring to the reader's attention the following technical details that may facilitate the reading and comprehension of this work:

- First, the name Ngugi wa Thiong'o can also be spelled Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o. This study uses the first version without accents. Throughout this study, the same rule applies to other names with similar accents.
- Second, Regarding Ngugi wa Thiong'o's last name, this study employs the more common "Ngugi" although some prefer Thiong'o.
- Third, English titles are systematically capitalized. As regards French titles, I stick to the French rule, which only capitalizes the first word. Foreign words are italicized, unless they are in a quotation.
- Lastly, I provide general reference (see Author) instead of a page number when an author discusses a topic throughout much of his work.

PART ONE

INTRODUCTION: PUTTING POSTCOLONIAL THEORY, THE WRITER, AND THE DICTATOR IN CONTEXT

Books and all forms of writing have always been objects of terror to those who seek to
suppress truth.

Wole Soyinka—*The Man Died*

Introduction

Synonymous with hope at its inception, the independence of African countries turned, within a decade, into a living nightmare for the inhabitants of the new nation-states as a wave of military dictatorships swept across the continent. Since then, the theme of dictatorship has become the hobbyhorse of many African intellectuals and writers. The present study explores the representation of certain aspects of dictatorship in selected novels by Ngugi wa Thiong'o and Nuruddin Farah. These are *Sweet and Sour Milk*, *Sardines*, and *Close Sesame* by Farah, *Matigari* and *Wizard of the Crow* by Ngugi.¹ Through these novels, this study attempts to demonstrate how the actions of some characters faced with an undue exercise of power set in motion patterns of political behavior that ultimately contribute to the formation of a *spiral of madness*. As labeled in this dissertation, these patterns are *silence*, *distortion*, *madness*, and *resistance*. The interaction between all four elements produces a *spiral of madness*. The first three categories of political behavior, representing forms of obedience and acquiescence, entertain a paradoxical and conflictual relationship with patterns of political behavior falling under the banner of the fourth. Through various narratives and literary techniques such as sarcasm, humor, diversion, and hyperbole, Farah and Ngugi convey the impression of a world where paradoxes and contradictions govern the interactions between dictatorial rulers and their citizens in postcolonial African nations, hence the title of my study: *Postcolonial Madness*. But before we plunge into such "mad" worlds, it appears fundamental to first define some basic terms and delimit the scope of my study.

¹ The first three novels are part of Farah's trilogy called *Variations on the Theme of an African Dictatorship*. For the rest of this dissertation, I will use the word *Variations* as a short version of this title.

Chapter One

Basic and Theoretical Delimitations

This study is, first and foremost, a literary analysis of Farah and Ngugi's articulation of their experience with colonialism in a novelistic form. But as can be inferred from its title, it is also a multidisciplinary endeavor that employs theoretical propositions from various fields of study such as literature, history, psychology, political science, and sociology to gain valuable insights into the plotlines of the novels under scrutiny. I believe that such a multidisciplinary approach is essentially what literary criticism is about. According to the *Routledge Dictionary of Literary Terms*, criticism

can generalize features like genre, rhetoric, motif and language into recurrent types in order to come to perceptions about what is distinctively literary. But developing order in fictions has analogues, deliberate or attributable, in order outside fiction. Thus, while many typologies of order will concern what is distinctive about literary presentation, they are also likely to extend to structures in writings not fictional: to those in language in general; then to those in forms of expression or consciousness; and then in a society at large. These things open literature to analogical explanation and to linguistic, psychological, sociological and ideological study. (227)

Though many conclusions can be drawn from the above, I would like to focus specifically on the fact that literature is neither detached from reality nor theory. A literary critic can concern himself with features such as rhetoric or language use, which are distinctly literary. But at the same time, understanding such features and how an author uses them may require some theoretical formulations developed in non-fictional writing. Consequently, in my analysis of the fictional works by Farah and Ngugi, I will employ a variety of critical approaches that borrow analogies from real-life and historical events and theoretical formulations drawn from the non-fictional realm.

Postcolonialism between theory, history, and story

“Where does fact begin and fiction leave off?” This is the question Ishmael Reed’s narrator poses in *Flight to Canada*, as he wonders why Edgar Allan Poe “isn’t recognized as the principal biographer of that strange war? Fiction, you say? Where does fact begin and fiction leave off?” (10). Reed’s question is interesting in many respects. Most importantly, it can serve as a guiding principle of my writing since I had to constantly ask myself where fiction starts and ends and where disciplines such as history or psychology take over in my discussion. This guiding principle is reflected in the substance and the form of my writing, especially when discussing history, which I must do in the past tense, while discussions of fiction take place in the present tense. Another reason Reed seems interesting to introduce in my methodology chapter is that his narrator does not merely stop at questioning the boundary between fact and fiction. His words go as far as to suggest that we can learn things from fiction that history cannot tell us. According to the narrator of *Flight to Canada*, Edgar Allan Poe “says more in a few stories than all of the volumes by historians” (10). Reed thus claims that we can get valuable information about history through fiction, i.e., we can find history in

the plot lines, metaphors, images, symbolism, interpretations, and logical constructions of the novels under scrutiny.

What Reed's narrator affirms here can also be claimed about the history of colonialism. As we move from Reed's "strange war" in the United States to the history of colonialism in Africa, it becomes apparent that postcolonial fiction writers can also teach us about that history and offer us other theories through their writings. Thus, this dissertation adopts, at times, a combined literary and historical approach because it seems impossible to separate postcolonial African literature from the historical conditions that created it. Moreover, the term "postcolonial" is partly historical since it also denotes the period after colonization. It is more in this sense that the term "postcolonial" in the title of this dissertation should be treated. If my selected novels are postcolonial, *they are postcolonial, first and foremost, in the historical sense*. And even though my critical work is not about history, understanding the history of colonialism is essential in the kind of literary analysis I am undertaking.

As Robert Young argues in his book *Postcolonialism: An Historical Introduction*, postcolonialism is not a theory in the strict sense of the term since it does not rely on empirical deductions and descriptions. For Young, postcolonialism developed through several conceptual resources drawn from various political, psychological, social, and cultural theories. At the same time, drawing attention to the historical and ideological similarities between feminism and postcolonialism, Young stresses postcolonialism's emphasis on the "value of individual consciousness and experience" and the attention it gives to the personal and the subjective, placing the institutional origins of the field "in literature departments which provided the solitary space within academic institutions where subjective forms of knowledge were taken seriously" (64). This, essentially, is what distinguishes postcolonial theory from history, which concerns itself with objective macro events.

Postcolonial theory, on the other hand, pays attention to the lived experience of individuals. This is also the reason why Young believes that before postcolonialism, “there were plenty of histories of colonialism” but that “such histories rarely considered the ways in which colonialism was experienced, or analysed, by those who suffered its effects” (64). The kinds of histories proposed by postcolonial theory are different from official history for many reasons I cannot expound on in this discussion because it would be too digressive. But following Young’s words and ideally speaking, I can suggest that history, which relies on facts, can be considered objective while colonialism as experienced and analyzed by those who suffered its consequences, constitutes the subjective. For Young, while this “subjective experience of the objective in many ways constitutes the realm of culture, and is often expressed most articulately in literature, as it was for Senghor and Césaire, [it] also comprises the realm of psychology, which attempts to provide an objective account of the subjective” (274). Young suggests that there are many ways to investigate and articulate the inner effects of colonialism on colonized subjects. Senghor and Césaire did so through poetry. Fanon articulated his experience with colonialism through psychology, while Farah and Ngugi articulated their experience with colonialism and its effects on postcolonial Africa in a novelistic form.

The postcolonial political novel

Another reason to question the demarcation between fiction and history is that not only does literature reflect reality, but it can also affect it by molding people’s consciousness in a specific way, opening their eyes to certain social realities, and presenting them with alternative actions other than submission to a dictatorial regime. Literary works impact our lives in many ways. They not only affect the lives of people who read them but also the lives of those who produce or propagate them. As I shall emphasize in Chapter Twelve, though

stories are meant to entertain, they also serve other serious purposes. Among those are education, raising awareness, and calling to action. Literature's capacity to change world perceptions and offer alternative options has many implications and consequences for writers. Some people are pleased with what they read and give the writer accolades. Other times, people are dissatisfied with the stories they read and may want to subject the writer to ill-treatment. The funny thing about stories is that they can perform multiple functions and arouse different emotions in different people at the same time. Thus, while fictions of African dictatorships will enlighten the masses and are appraised by many, they also anger the dictators, who may see themselves reflected in their fictional counterparts. The unpleasant emotions that some stories often arouse in dictators are not without consequences for writers, as Adebayo Williams rightly observes: "African writers have suffered great privation. They include torture, imprisonment, arbitrary arrests and detention, internal deportation, forced exile and threat of physical liquidation" (350). But why is that so? Why do dictators appear to hate writers so much?

To answer this question, we can start by examining what Williams says about writers and dictators. In "Literature in the Time of Tyranny: African Writers and the Crisis of Governance," Adebayo Williams explores the relationship between literature and dictatorship on the African continent in great detail. Starting his discussion from the struggle against colonialism, Williams contends that African writers have always played a crucial role in the political orientation of the continent. From the first post-independence leaders, many of whom were intellectuals themselves, African writers have endeavored to articulate "alternative visions, the formulation of rival motifs and tropes, the conceptualization of a more humane and rational worldview which could only come from sustained intellectual reflection" (353). As Bill Ashcroft et al. demonstrate in *The Empire Writes Back*, in the early hours of the postcolonial period, African intellectuals and writers were mainly concerned with "asserting

difference from the imperial centre” (4). However, as several postcolonial regimes grew undemocratic throughout the sixties, writers shifted their attention from the damages of colonialism to the ravages of governance crises on the continent. Most writers of the empire ceased writing back at the former colonizer, as was the case with the Negritude movement. They started addressing more localized issues involving their own black leaders. In doing so, they set themselves against those authoritarian leaders who detested being criticized openly or satirically. This puts literature and those who practice it, whose vocation is the betterment of society in all its facets, at odds with postcolonial dictatorial regimes. For Williams, if dictators seem to detest writers viscerally, it is because literature is

fundamentally incompatible with tyranny. In its purest state, literature is subversive of authority and authoritarian writs. Its joyous and spontaneous celebration of life, its near anarchic contempt for regulation and regimentation makes it the most natural enemy of dictatorship. While the dictator seeks a total domination of men and society, literature often seeks their total liberation. (350)

As we can read in this quote, the dictator and the writer pursue goals that make them enemies of one another. The former seeks to control men while the latter strives towards their liberation. In their confrontation over the fate of men, the writer and the dictator use different weapons.

In her prison memoirs, Egyptian feminist writer Nawal Sa’adawi recounts a thought-provoking response of a prison administrator to a woman prisoner asking for pen and paper to write to her mother. The woman had not even finished her sentence before the answer came: “‘No pen and paper’ came the abrupt reply, interrupting her sentence. ‘That is utterly forbidden. Anything but pen and paper. Easier to give you a pistol than pen and paper’” (49). To Sa’adawi, it first sounded like a farce because she could have never “imagined that pen and paper could be more dangerous than pistols in the world of reality and fact.” But the reaction of prison guards when they found the smallest piece of paper, be it a cigarette paper

or their reaction when they saw a prisoner writing on the floor with a piece of rock, suggested that the regime feared written words more than guns. When Sa'adawi herself was caught with writing material, the female guard explained that "not one written word can possibly leave or enter the political cell. In the other cells, it's possible—any cell but this one. One written word in the political cell is a more serious matter than having a pistol. Writing is more dangerous than killing" (73). The female guard's words derive from her observation that the women detained for murder are treated better than political prisoners who have only used a pen to write. This comparison between a pen and pistol exposes one of the greatest fears of dictatorial regimes: the words of intellectuals.

Sa'adawi's story may have inspired *Penpoints, Gunpoints, and Dreams*, the title of Ngugi's collection of lectures, in which he extensively studies the complicated relationship between rulers and writers. Ngugi acknowledges the validity of Sa'adawi's pen and pistol juxtaposition and justly notes that the pen "gives visible form to the words of a writer; the gun visible authority to the words of a ruler. In every absolutist state the holder of the pen, which forces words on paper, is seen as the enemy of the holder of the gun, which enforces words of the law. Penpoints and gunpoints thus stand in confrontation" (9). As we can see from these descriptions of the relationship between dictators and writers, one derives his power from the gun, and the other resists this power with the pen. Hence, the fact that authoritarian regimes go to extreme lengths to censor literature should already tell us that writing, even fiction, is not a trivial activity destined to amuse readers. It shows that fiction writers and other intellectuals have a responsibility regarding the world they live in. For the writer, this responsibility should start by addressing the problems of dictatorship, not so much because they affect him personally, but because dictatorship gangrenes the whole society.

Consequently, the dictator's visceral hatred for intellectuals in real life has become a recurrent literary theme. In "The Psychology of Dictatorship: A Journey into Muammar

Gaddafi's Mind in Yasmina Khadra's *The Dictator's Last Night*," Mohammed Senoussi rightly notes that "dictators have loomed so largely over the modern novel that they carved out their distinctive subgenre: the *novela del dictador*" (242). As the two authors discussed in this study show, the dictator novel genre, which originated in Latin America, has found its place on the African continent as well because from the period of independence till this day, authoritarianism remains one of the most defining characteristics of Africa, alongside extreme poverty and civil wars. Consequently, as Senoussi observes, Farah's *Variations* trilogy and Ngugi's *Wizard of Crow* belong to the few African dictator novels that "have received significant critical attention" (243). Significantly, in his article "Ngugi wa Thiong'o and the African Dictator Novel," Robert Spencer also places *Wizard of the Crow* "in what has until now been seen as a predominantly Latin American tradition of dictator novels" (145). These words, once again, provide solid justification for the political orientation of my study. In his discussion of the function of the Third World intellectual in his article "Third-World Literature in the Era of Multinational Capitalism," Frederic Jameson makes a compelling conclusion: "In the third-world situation the intellectual is always in one way or another a political intellectual" (74). Considering the conflictual relationship between postcolonial African writers and rulers, it also appears appropriate to claim that the writer is always a political writer in the postcolonial world since writing to improve society can be considered a political behavior.

On political behavior and the dictatorial aspects of the novels under discussion

It follows from what I discussed in the previous subchapter that the postcolonial writer is inevitably a political actor because his writings represent his real world. In this case, writing becomes a political behavior, one of many reactions to political decisions and actions of the

state. My primary understanding and use of the notion of political behavior derive from Carroll Quigley's subdivision of society into six dimensions: military, political, economic, social, religious, and intellectual. For Quigley, all six aspects are closely related, and it would be nearly impossible to comprehensively discuss one without touching upon the others. Quigley supports his argument by showing the connectedness between the military, the economic, and the intellectual levels:

The military level is concerned with the organization of force, the political level with the organization of power, and the economic level with the organization of wealth. By the 'organization of power' in a society we mean the ways in which obedience and consent (or acquiescence) are obtained. The close relationships between levels can be seen from the fact that there are three basic ways to win obedience: by force, by buying consent with wealth, and by persuasion. Each of these three leads us to another level (military, economic, or intellectual) outside the political level. (33)

Quigley's focus on the political domain is particularly timely not only because I am interested in the organization of power in the postcolony but also because it is possible to connect the three basic ways of winning obedience and the four subsequent levels with what I will present as the spiral of madness—silence, distortion, madness, and resistance. Thus, at the military level, the use of force by a government to win obedience may most likely result in silence. At the economic level, the use of wealth to obtain acquiescence favors factual distortion. And the use of persuasive techniques may lead to a form of madness at the intellectual level. Lastly, all three of these basic ways of obtaining consent can produce resistance, a behavior opposite to what the government wants.² This connection between Quigley's basic ways of obtaining consent and the corresponding responses describes the portrayal of dictatorship in our novels

² I base this claim on the belief that when a dictatorial government uses force, wealth, and persuasive techniques it seeks to make citizens obedient if not active participants in the validation of its policies. But some people resist these methods. For example, writers such as Ngugi and Sa'adawi never stopped writing even after imprisonment.

and explains the relationship between writers and rulers. As an example, in the case of Sa'adawi discussed above, the Sadat regime imprisoned the feminist writer for her criticism of the values that the regime upheld. Here, the regime's use of force was intended to silence the writer by isolating her from the rest of society and denying her, once isolated, pen and paper. But Sa'adawi never accepted the dictates of the regime and put her writing on toilet paper using eyebrow pencils (94). In this case, we can describe both the regime's use of imprisonment and the writer's refusal to be silent as political behaviors.

Furthermore, we can try to understand what a political behavior is by turning to dictionaries for a definition and political science for more insight. For instance, in *The Penguin Dictionary of Sociology*, political behavior "refers to the political activity of individuals and its consequences for political institutions (Abercrombie et al. 293). The *Oxford Dictionary of Sociology*, for its part, describes the term as any form of involvement or activity, whether individual or collective, that "has political consequences in relation to government and policy" (501). Thirdly, Trevor Munroe defines political behavior as "any action regarding authority in general and government in particular" (3). Though different in their formulations, these definitions highlight the two most essential components of political behavior: first, that it is an action or activity, and second, that it relates to the organization of power. Thus considered, political behavior encompasses actions such as voting, demonstrations, and expressing public opinion and their absence or renouncing of such actions. By exposing the workings of dictatorial regimes, the novels under study in this dissertation are no less the expression of political behavior in the form of resistance.

Munroe's *An Introduction to Politics* highlights another fundamental aspect of political behavior that is not necessarily detached from other types of behavior, notably the economic and the social. For Munro, "while we understand that they are separate we must also understand that they are connected" (4). His claim not only echoes Quigley's description

of politics but also corresponds to the aim of the present study: to show how different social, economic, and intellectual conditions depicted in the novels under discussion give rise to the spiral of madness, a behavioral framework elicited by the undue exercise of power.³ Lastly, Munroe further nuances his definition by suggesting the terms “conventional” and “unconventional” to differentiate between two forms of political participation. Conventional political participation, such as voting and activism, is political behavior within the boundaries of a country’s traditions and is less aggressive. On the other hand, unconventional political participation is more aggressive than the former; it tends to step outside the norms and traditions of a particular country and may even be law-breaking. In that category, we find illegal political behavior such as rebellions and coups d’état—which are among the things postcolonial dictators fear the most.⁴

Because this dissertation focuses on the literary representation of dictatorship in postcolonial Africa, I will recurrently employ the terms *dictatorial*, *authoritarian*, *autocratic*, *totalitarian*, and *tyrannical*, as well as some of their orthographic variations. It seems pedagogical to clarify beforehand in what sense I will use them. While these words differ from one another, they all represent forms of government that stand in opposition to the notion of democracy. Generally speaking, the term *dictatorship* in this dissertation’s title denotes a form of government, or the country ruled by such a government, characterized by “absolute rule unrestricted by law, constitutions, or other political or social factors within the state” (*Concise Oxford Dictionary of Politics* 150). It has also transpired throughout various definitions that “dictatorship” is a generic term that can be combined with synonymous terms

³ Using the specific example of voting, Munroe proceeds to demonstrate that people’s economic condition often determines a person’s choice of whether to vote or not. In other words, as I shall demonstrate in my chapter on fearful silence, not participating in the political debate is nonetheless a political act.

⁴ This distinction between what is legal and what is not needs further consideration—especially in the case of a dictatorial regime. A dictator can make a law or issue a decree about anything and criminalize the exercise of even the most basic rights. See my subchapter “On the state of democracy and silence in *Matigari* and the *Variations* trilogy.”

to refer to different forms of dictatorship. For my part, I will interchangeably use either of the terms listed above to refer to regimes, leaders, and practices that violate core democratic principles.

Having said that, the question to answer now is to know on what grounds we do establish that the governments or regimes depicted by Farah and Ngugi are considered dictatorial. Concerning Farah's *Variations on the Theme of an African Dictatorship*, there is, in principle, no need for demonstration since the title itself indicates that the fictional regime is dictatorial. But instead of taking the author's word for it, validating my claim with at least the most basic of required characteristics seems more adequate. For that, I turn to the book *How Dictatorships Work: Power, Personalization, and Collapse*, in which Barbara Geddes et al. also appear to use some of the terms mentioned above, such as *autocratic*, *dictatorial*, and *authoritarian*, interchangeably. However, the primary reason for my interest in their book lies in the authors' emphasis on sets of features that characterize each type of governance. For example, Geddes and her colleagues contend that "countries are coded as democratic if government leaders achieve power through direct, reasonably fair competitive election; indirect election by democratically elected assemblies; or constitutional succession to democratically elected executives" (5). More precisely, the researchers emphasize events and patterns that define the beginning and the end of autocratic and democratic regimes. For Geddes and her colleagues, the defining events of the beginning of a dictatorial regime include the following points:

- Government leaders achieve power through some means other than a direct, reasonably fair competitive election; or indirect election by a body at least 60 percent of which was elected in direct, reasonably fair, competitive elections; or constitutional succession to a democratically elected executive.

- The government achieved power through competitive elections, as described above, but later changed the formal or informal rules such that competition in subsequent elections was limited.
- If competitive elections are held to choose the government, but the military either prevents one or more parties for which substantial numbers of citizens would be expected to vote from competing, or dictates policy choice in important policy areas (e.g., foreign policy in the Middle East). We label such regimes ‘indirect military rule.’ (5)

By relating the above to Farah’s trilogy, we can locate the fictional dictatorship within the first category of events. Farah’s General did not accede to power through fair and competitive elections, but through a coup d’état.

The case of Kenya, which undoubtedly inspired both Ngugi’s *Matigari* and *Wizard of the Crow*, is not as straightforward as that of Somalia. Following Geddes’ classification of regime types, I propose to view Kenya as a typical example of a post-independence regime that began on ‘democratic’ premises before turning “authoritarian after they banned an opposition party, arrested opposition leaders, or used violence and intimidation against opposition voters” (6). Somehow, this is also reflected in the two novels we are going to discuss. Whether it is His Excellency Ole Excellence in the former or *The Ruler* in the latter, their accession to power appears to follow some democratic process. Although *Matigari* does not explicitly state how His Excellency—whom we can take to be the first Kenyan president—rose to power, the events in the novel suggest that the outgoing British colonial power handed him the reins of power. *Wizard of the Crow*, on the other hand, gives us some hint about how the Ruler came to power: when the country gained independence, the Ruler was “number two to the First Ruler” and has been “fully in charge after the mysterious death of the First Ruler” (233). Here, we can suppose that the Ruler’s accession to power resulted from a genuine political mandate. Therefore, regarding political succession, it can be affirmed

that both fictional presidents in *Maigari* and *Wizard of the Crow* started on democratic grounds. But does a democratic presidential succession guarantee democratic governance?

Although the Ruler of Aburiria came to power democratically, we can also study his behavior as President to determine whether his regime is democratic or not. In *Wizard of the Crow*, the defining elements that make the Ruler's regime a dictatorship are to be located in the way he manages the country and how he treats his citizens. The narrator provides a compelling example in his synopsis of the Ruler's accession to power:

No sooner was he fully in charge after the mysterious death of the First Ruler than he asked for the list of all condemned prisoners awaiting clemency and signed the warrant for their immediate execution. When he saw that his signature on paper or a word from his mouth could bring about the immediate cessation of a life, he there and then truly believed in his omnipotence. He was now sovereign. (233)

As this quote shows, the Ruler of Aburiria did not accede to power undemocratically, but there is sufficient evidence, as I shall discuss throughout this study, that his rule is dictatorial. Considering the preceding, we can conclude that although the regimes portrayed by both Farah and Ngugi started differently, they are nevertheless similar in that the governing methods of their leaders are fraught with repeated recourse to repression, intimidation, and bribery. And if, in his discussion of autocracy in Farah's *Variations* trilogy, Felix Mnthali rightly contends that "Farah's portrayal of autocracy shows how closely African dictatorships resemble one another" (57), this remark can only be confirmed after reading other postcolonial fictions such as Ngugi's *Wizard of the Crow*.

Chapter Two

Postcolonial Theory and Postcolonial Trends

Having established that the political regimes depicted in our novels are dictatorial, it now appears also important to determine in what way these novels are postcolonial. The terms post-colonialism (with a hyphen) and postcolonialism (without a hyphen) are sometimes used interchangeably to mean at least two things. Firstly, and especially when used with a hyphen, *post-colonialism* refers to the historical moment after colonization, as is suggested by the prefix ‘post.’ If one takes this prefix strictly, post-colonialism may concern itself only with the state of affairs in the colonies after they were granted their independence. *The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language* also defines the derivative adjective *postcolonial* (without hyphen) as: “Of, relating to, or being the time following the establishment of independence in a colony” (1376). In this study, the phrase *postcolonial dictatorship* will, thus, refer to an African country ruled over by a dictator in the period following the end of colonization. However, as Meenakshi Mukherjee writes, postcolonialism “is not merely a chronological label referring to the period after the demise of empires” (3). Thus, secondly, many critics like Mukherjee understand that the word postcolonialism and its derivatives have implications that go beyond strict temporal and chronological considerations. For instance,

Bill Ashcroft and his colleagues suggest that “from the late 1970s the term has been used by literary critics to discuss the various cultural effects of colonization” (168). In short, although most agree on what postcolonialism concerns itself with, defining the term becomes more problematic.

Consequently, in *The Empire Writes Back*, the term postcolonial is used in a larger sense and denotes “all the culture affected by the imperial process from the moment of colonization to the present day” (Ashcroft et al. 2). The authors’ decision to use the term ‘postcolonial’ in this sense can be understood in that, following the poststructuralist fashion of the period in which they write, they view the definition more as a ‘discourse’ than as a period after colonization. Thus, as far as postcolonial literatures are concerned, we talk not only of writings produced after the colonial era but also of works created during that same era. Therefore, according to Ashcroft et al., the common characteristic of all postcolonial literatures is that “they emerged in their present form out of the experience of colonization and asserted themselves by foregrounding the tension with the imperial power, and by emphasizing their differences from the assumptions of the imperial centre” (2). Nevertheless, we can conclude here that to be considered postcolonial literatures, these writings must possess one distinctive feature: postcolonial literatures are necessarily literatures of countries that have been under European imperial domination. Hence, from the formulations of the Negritude movement by Aimé Césaire and his peers to the Subaltern Studies and neocolonial hypotheses, postcolonial theory has gone through many stages and has put forward several critical concepts. It is, therefore, necessary to focus on some of these concepts that challenge the colonial order and continuing Western influences on the cultures of previously colonized people. In the following subchapters, I will briefly review four representative critical trends in postcolonial theory, which are Negritude, Orientalism, Subaltern Studies, and Neocolonialism.

Négritude and the emotive Negro

The Négritude movement, which emerged in the 1930s, was an ideological, literary, and political movement geared towards the celebration of black civilization. In “Qu’est-ce que la Négritude?,” Leopold Sédar Senghor, one of the founders of the movement, not only defines Négritude as the total civilizational values of the black world as they are expressed in the lives and works of black people but also as a combat weapon for decolonization.⁵ Nevertheless, it is worth mentioning that this movement’s definition and practical goals differed from one founding father to another. Differences within the movement were also felt in how they treated some of their main preoccupations. For example, in “An Examination of Assimilation, Colonization, and Black Glorification,” Sam Hurwitz explores discrepancies within the Négritude movement on three principal elements, namely colonization, assimilation, and the glorification of black culture. In its overall argument, the article concludes that the Négritude proponents did not have a unitary vision.

As Beaton Galafa also writes in “Negritude in Anti-colonial African Literature Discourse”: “Negritude is a term that has a lot of definitions. Ironically, the diversity in the definitions comes from the very founders of the movement, Aimé Césaire, Senghor, and Léon-Gontran Damas. Negritude comes out as both a political and literary movement, with its activists torn between art and politics; elitism and populism” (297). It is, therefore, in this sense that in *La poésie de l’action*, Senghor himself acknowledges that their various definitions, though convergent, were not always identical and varied depending on the time and circumstances (80). For example, Senghor is often recognized as the least radical in his

⁵ Paraphrased from the following: “La négritude est donc l’ensemble des valeurs de civilisation du monde noir, telles qu’elles s’expriment dans la vie et les oeuvres des Noirs [...] Au demeurant, cette lutte culturelle se doublait alors d’une lutte politique : la négritude était également arme de combat pour la décolonisation (4).

views on assimilation of the three founding fathers of the Negritude movement. Indeed, when it comes to European values, Senghor believes in active assimilation, which means that black Africans should be able to assimilate these values without becoming assimilated into them. Senghor reminds his readers that the movement was not meant to make the “nègre” isolate himself from, ignore, or hate other civilizations, “but rather, in symbiosis with them, to help in the establishment of a humanism” that would benefit from all civilizations.⁶ In other circumstances, Senghor called for the construction of a *civilization of the universal* and a *cultural métissage* to which Africans would bring their emotion while Europeans would bring their reason: “Emotion is Negro, just as reason is Hellenic” (*Liberté* 1; 288). Here, it appears that in his effort to redeem the “Negro race” by praising their sensitivity on the one hand and elevating their “emotion” to be as important as rationality on the other hand, Senghor most probably produced the opposite of the effects he had intended.

The origin of the problem with Senghor’s concept is that reason has always been said to be the primordial feature distinguishing humans from animals. Thus, by describing the black African as a creature ruled more by his emotion than by his reason, Senghor inadvertently twists the knife in a centuries-old wound of racial discrimination that had just begun to heal with the episode of decolonization. His openness to assimilation and, sometimes, uncritical appraisal of French culture brought him some severe remarks from other black Africanists, such as Ahmed Sekou Touré, Stanislas Adotevi, and Wole Soyinka, to cite a few. But it was at the First Pan-African Cultural Festival held in July 1969 that some of these detractors paired off to deliver an uncompromising criticism of the Negritude movement. For Bernth Lindfors, many French speaking countries at the festival expressed

⁶ This quote is my translation of part of the following: “Malgré la passion des débuts, il n’a pas été question, chez nous, de s’isoler des autres civilisations, de les ignorer, de les haïr ou mépriser, mais plutôt, en symbiose avec elles, d’aider à la construction d’un humanisme qui fût authentiquement parce que totalement humain” (“Qu’est-ce que” 4).

their discontent with the Negritude concept, “sometimes in very, colorful imagery” (5). Two days after Ahmed Sekou Touré’s recorded message, which described Negritude as “a false concept, an irrational weapon encouraging the irrationality based on racial discrimination,” Mamadi Keita, the Head of the Guinean delegation, addresses Senghor’s assumption about emotivity only strengthens clichés about “the Negro,” whom his master defines as “a being without reason, subhuman, and the embittered slave then protests: as you are Reason, I am Emotion and I take this upon myself” (qtd. Lindfors 5). Consequently, for Keita, Negritude is a “good mystifying anaesthetic for Negroes.” Keita’s criticism is very revealing of Senghor’s tentative appropriation of the term “emotion,” which proved unsuccessful, unlike the French word “nègre” which, thanks to the Negritude movement, had been once proudly accepted by many African intellectuals.

Like Lindfors, Bennetta Jules-Rosette considers that the “most strident and pivotal public statement of antinégritude, expressing the dangers and internal contradictions of Negritude, was made at [the First] Panafrican Cultural Festival” (274). According to Jules-Rosette many commentators of the festival, writes Lindfors, the most eloquent contribution came from Dahomeyan politician and philosopher Stanislas Adotevi, who proclaimed Negritude’s failure and death. As we can read in Adotevi’s published intervention, “Negritude was born dead; it was going to die and it died” (Adotevi 32). Without refuting that the movement had been useful in the past by shaking “some consciences and [bringing] a few Negroes together,” Adotevi proceeded to expose “the internal weakness and the disintegration with which it is threatened” (31). According to Adotevi, speaking in 1969, if it was evident that Negritude had since been perverted, the older Negritude had its capital flaw too: in the face of the great humiliation that the Negro race had suffered, the founding fathers, who had been “overtaken by unreason, preferred the crazy advances of love” when they should have opposed “the carnal ardor of black hatred” (31). Obviously, Negritude was a political and

ideological formulation that sought to restore dignity to the black man. But as Pedro Tabensky puts it, Senghor's Negritude essentially failed to accomplish its stated goal "because it simply provides a façade of pride that covers up the humiliation. It offers consolation rather than genuine cure" (471). While acknowledging the validity of this claim, it should also be added that Negritude, which was the expression of the preoccupation of the colonial period, was no longer suitable for most postcolonial issues and was gradually eclipsed by other postcolonial concepts.

Orientalism and Western colonial thought

Another foundational text in postcolonial theory is Edward Said's *Orientalism*. The term orientalism can be used to denote three different elements. Although my review will mostly focus on what the term denotes in the colonial and postcolonial contexts, it also seems useful to briefly talk about the other meanings of the term "Orientalism." The first definition provided by Said is Orientalism as an academic field of study. In Said's words, therefore, anyone "who teaches, writes about, or researches the Orient—and this applies whether the person is an anthropologist, sociologist, historian, or philologist—either in its specific or its general aspects, is an Orientalist, and what he or she does is Orientalism" (2). Nevertheless, Said notes that the use of the expression Oriental Studies may be preferred by specialists, as the term Orientalism is deemed too vague and tainted with "the high-handed executive attitude of nineteenth-century and early twentieth-century European colonialism." According to Ronald Inden, this can be explained by the taking over of the field of *Orientalism* by Utilitarians and Positivists whose accounts have greatly contributed to the shaping of

imperialist policies about the Orient. This shift in meaning has ultimately led the specialists of the discipline to want to separate themselves from the term.⁷

In postcolonial theory, the term Orientalism thus has acquired a negative connotation. It has become a pejorative word, viewed more as an ideology than an academic discipline. As an ideology, the term now often collocates with imperialism in postcolonial studies. Hence, the lumping together of Orientalism and Imperialism has essentially become commonplace after the publication of Edward Said's *Orientalism*. The second meaning Said gives the word *Orientalism* is a more general one. It refers to a style of thought and mode of representation based upon the binary opposition between the Orient and the Occident. In this binary opposition, the Oriental is always portrayed as inferior. Thus in "Orientalist Constructions of India," Inden deconstructs Indological constructions of India, by looking specifically at the concept of "caste" which has long been considered by the West to be the essence of India. This Orientalist assumption has many implications, according to Inden. First, the Indological construction of India "has necessitated the wholesale dismissal of Indian political institutions, and especially of kinship," as well as a depiction of Indian thought as "inherently symbolic and mythical rather than rational and logical" (403). Applying Gramsci's idea of a text as "hegemonic," Inden explains that the predominance of Utilitarians in the field of Indology contributed to shaping a world view of India's place in the world and history. For example, Utilitarian Orientalists considered certain Indian practices, such as reverential, ceremonial, and status-ordered conducts, ought to be treated as "non-rational," placing those practices, as well as the civilization they are part of, at "an earlier time and lower "stage" of evolution (418). This is precisely the kind of reasoning that motivated Europe's *mission civilisatrice*

⁷ Bernard Lewis writes that at the 1973 International Congress of Orientalists, some participants called for the abandonment of the term while a few others demanded that the series of congresses be ended: "The term 'Orientalist' was thus abolished by the accredited Orientalists, and thrown on the garbage heap of history. But garbage heaps are not safe places. The words 'Orientalist' and 'Orientalism,' discarded as useless by scholars, were retrieved and reconditioned for a different purpose, i.e., as terms of polemical abuse" (103).

that relegated the African and the Indian to the realm of emotions and instincts. This also explains why Senghor's exhalation of the black man's emotions over his reason has attracted considerable criticism.

Lastly, Orientalism can be seen as a tool destined to ensure the West's political domination over the Orient. In Said's words, "Orientalism can be discussed and analyzed as the corporate institution for dealing with the Orient dealing with it by making statements about it, authorizing views of it, describing it, by teaching it, settling it, ruling over it: in short, Orientalism as a Western style for dominating restructuring and having authority over the Orient" (3). In his criticism of Orientalism, Said appeals to Foucault's notions of discourse to explain how the West imposed its worldview on the Orient. Orientalism should, therefore, be considered as a discourse that encapsulates "the enormously systematic discipline by which European culture was able to manage—and even produce—the Orient politically, sociologically, militarily, ideologically, scientifically, and imaginatively during the post-Enlightenment period" (3). Since the Foucauldian notion of discourse is also related to the notion of power, Said argues that the relationship between Occident and Orient is one of power, domination, and hegemony of the first over the latter (5). Reading through Said's definitions, it transpires that Orientalism may have been a valid and uninterested scientific discipline for some scholars at a certain time.

As a field of study, Orientalism also played a sizeable role in shaping Imperialist constructions of the Orient and other colonized parts of the world. Said's *Orientalism* and its critical perspective have markedly impacted the postcolonial field by offering an uncompromising critique of the West's discourse. For this reason, Said's theory has been widely acclaimed as inaugurating the field of postcolonial studies. But Said's work has also attracted negative criticism, which I do not wish to digress here into. But one flaw identified in Said's thought is his treatment of the Oriental Other as a homogenous subject. Although

Said's comparison of the Orient to the feminine conveys a sense of feminist critique of Western colonial thought, the Orient remains homogenous concerning the aspects of class and gender. Like Negritude, Said's critical concepts were as response to the specific concerns of the relationship between the West and the Orient. To a certain extent, these concepts can be useful in the African context, but they are not suited for understanding the relationships the new postcolonial elites entertain with their masses or their neocolonial affiliation with Western interests.

Subaltern Studies

Another significant contribution to postcolonial theory is undoubtedly the work of the Subaltern Studies group. The term Subaltern Studies generally refers to a series of essays published by a group of Indian scholars, including Ranajit Guha and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak. Their works center around the theme of subalternity in the postcolonial context and historiography. Although the Subaltern Studies focus was Indian colonial and postcolonial history, the central preoccupations of Subaltern Scholars are not exclusively Indian phenomena. As Gyan Prakash rightly notes, the term subaltern is now recurrent in studies on Africa and other continents, and the challenge Subaltern Studies "poses to the existing historical scholarship has been felt not only in South Asian studies but also in the historiography of other regions and in disciplines other than history" (1476). Prakash's contention is all the truer as the Indian subaltern, on which Subaltern scholars focused, shares the same colonial experience with other subaltern groups around the globe. Therefore, it should not be surprising to see many critics read novels of African writers, including Farah and Ngugi, from a subalternist perspective. In his foreword to *Selected Subaltern Studies*, a volume edited by Ranajit Guha and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, Edward Said also sees the

work of Subaltern scholars as part of postcolonial theory. Said argues that in reading this volume of *Subaltern Studies*,

one becomes aware that this group of scholars is a self-conscious part of the vast post-colonial cultural and critical effort that would also include novelists like Salman Rushdie, Garcia Marquez, George Lamming, Sergio Ramirez, and Ngugi Wa Thiong'o [sic], poets like Faiz Ahmad Faiz, Mahmud Darwish, Aime Cesaire, theoreticians and political philosophers like Fanon, Cabral, Syed Hussein Alatas, C.L.R. James, Ali Shariati, Eqbal Ahmad, Abdullah Laroui, Omar Cabezas, and a whole host of other figures, whose province is a post-independence world (the South of the new North-South configuration) still dependent, still unfree, still dominated by coercion, the hegemony of dictatorial regimes, derivative and hypocritical nationalisms, insufficiently critical intellectual and ideological systems.

(ix-x)

But in this quote, Said's words do more than place *Subaltern Studies* within the general framework of postcolonialism. They also point to "a host" of postcolonial authors whose focus is a postcolonial world that, in many respects, bears a striking resemblance to the fictional worlds dramatized by the novels under scrutiny.

As regards this brief on Subaltern studies, my focus primarily rests on Subaltern scholars' view on the historiography of postcolonial India, which is comparable to postcolonial Africa. In the first volume, *Subaltern Studies 1: Writings on South Asian History and Society*, Guha writes that the term "subaltern," as used in the title, refers to the meaning provided in the *Concise Oxford Dictionary*. Employed as an adjective, it means something of 'inferior rank'. The other meaning that Guha ascribes to the term treats it as a noun to signify "the general attribute of subordination in South Asian society whether this is expressed in terms of class, caste, age, gender, and office or in any other way" (*Subaltern Studies 1* vii).

Thus, the term “subaltern” has come to denote, in postcolonial studies, people who are on the receiving end of any unbalanced power dynamics.

The primary domain of Subaltern Studies is the historiography of Indian nationalism. In “On Some Aspects of the Historiography of Colonial India,” Ranajit Guha, one of the pioneers of Subaltern Studies, critically examines the representation of Indian nationalism by elitist historiographies. Guha starts his argumentation by naming the types of historiographies that dominate historical accounts of Indian nationalism:

The historiography of Indian nationalism has for a long time been dominated by elitism—colonialist elitism and bourgeois-nationalist elitism. Both originated as the ideological product of British rule in India, but have survived the transfer of power and been assimilated to neo-colonialist and neo-nationalist forms of discourse in Britain and India respectively. Elitist historiography of the colonialist or neo-colonialist type counts British writers and institutions among its principal protagonists, but has its imitators in India and other countries too. Elitist historiography of the nationalist or neo-nationalist type is primarily an Indian practice but not without imitators in the ranks of liberal historians in Britain and elsewhere. (1)

After identifying the general orientation of each type of elitism, Guha contends that elitist historiography fails to rationally explain Indian nationalism since it does not account for the “contribution made by the people on their own, that is, independently from the elite for the making and the development of this nationalism” (3). Elitist historiography thus minimizes the involvement of the Indian peasantry and accesses it “negatively” as a law-and-order problem or “positively, if at all, either as a response to the charisma of certain elite leaders or in the concurrently more fashionable terms of vertical mobilization by the manipulation of factions.” According to Guha, the inability of elitist historiography to account for Indian nationalism is derived from the narrow and partial conception of the notion of politics, which

has reduced Indian politics to be exclusively or at least primarily shaped by the “aggregation of activities and ideas of those who were directly involved in operating these institutions” introduced by the British (3-4). But as Guha notes, there existed alongside the domain of elite politics throughout the colonial period the domain of *the politics of the people*, whose principal actors were “the subaltern classes and groups constituting the mass of the labouring population and the intermediate strata in town and country—that is, the people” (4). According to Guha, elitist historiography should “be resolutely fought by developing an alternative discourse” (7). What he proposes is interesting if we consider the overall aim of postcolonial theory to give other subjective accounts of the colonial experience that we do not find in the official histories of colonialism.⁸

That is why Dipesh Chakrabarty proposes, in “Subaltern Studies and Postcolonial Historiography,” to look at Indian historiography from an exclusively postcolonial vantage point. He believes that the “historiographic agenda of Subaltern Studies must not be read as “simply yet another version of Marxist/radical history but as possessing a *necessarily* postcolonial outlook” (10, original italics). According to Chakrabarty, “modern Indian history” has been, in its early stage, the site of an ongoing struggle between “tendencies affiliated with imperialist biases in Indian history and a nationalist desire to decolonize the past” (11). The one notion that has received more emphasis from Chakrabarty is that of “the political,” which Guha believed both the Cambridge and nationalist historians conflated with “the formal side of governmental and institutional processes” (15). Unlike some historians who defined politics as the exclusive domain of the elite, Subaltern Studies historians argue that the subaltern classes of society are also part of the political process. In a certain way, Subaltern Studies seek to represent the peasants, whose role in the rise of Indian nationalism

⁸ See above, pp. 6-7.

has been neglected by official historiography. But will the Subaltern scholars be able to represent the voiceless subaltern?

This is also the question that Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak asks in her famous essay “Can the Subaltern Speak?” In what is considered one of the most influential texts in postcolonial studies, Spivak explores the question of the representation of the third-world subject in Western discourse while devoting particular attention to subaltern women, who are silenced at multiple levels—because of their race, gender, and class. Focusing on the notion of representation, Spivak argues that the subaltern peasants have no voice, not only because they cannot represent themselves but also because the intellectuals who are supposed to represent them often let their personal biases and prejudices cloud the genuine aspirations of the subaltern.⁹ For example, Spivak demonstrates her point by pointing to how the imperialist representation of the Indian widow’s self-immolation ritual of *sati*, while it attempts to liberate Indian women from the Indian patriarchy, only subjects them to another form of domination that was both patriarchal and imperial since it is white men “saving brown women from brown men” (92). Spivak’s main argument by coining this phrase is to demonstrate that even the postcolonial intellectual is not exempt from the risk of betraying the voice of the subaltern in complicity with Western foreign dominant groups.

According to Spivak, there is a “possibility that the intellectual is complicit in the persistent constitution of Other as the Self’s shadow” (75). Here, Spivak’s use of the term “complicit” directly relates to Guha’s observation regarding the historiography of India: that the West, in complicity with the Indian postcolonial elites, continues to fashion the historical representation of Indian nationalism. However, many postcolonial critics maintain that the

⁹ Subaltern scholars were influenced by the theories of Italian Marxist Antonio Gramsci. Some of the arguments of Subaltern scholars sometimes sound like a repetition of Marx and other Marxists. The question of class representativeness, as approached here, can be found in Karl Marx’s “The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte.”

West's influence in the affairs of its former colonies also extends to other areas beyond historiography and see that continuing influence as a new form of imperialism. By extension, Subaltern notions can help understand postcolonial work portraying a world in which there is a dominated and dominant, oppressed and oppressor, or ruled and ruler. While both Ngugi and Farah's novels discussed in this study reflect this attribute, Farah seems to go beyond a simplistic distinction between oppressed and oppressor and sees oppression as a chain reaction, everyone being the oppressor of someone and oppressed by someone else at the same. Farah's critics have sufficiently highlighted this particularity, as we shall see in the literature review. But on the whole, because of their focus on Marxist theory and historiography, subalternist concepts are not suited for analyzing of the relationship between dictators and the different strata of their citizenry.

Neocolonialism: a poorly disguised colonialism?¹⁰

Having comprehensively grasped the daunting nature of postcolonialism, Sudhir Arora comments that colonialism "is dead but out of its ashes the ghost has appeared and is now hovering round the edifice of postcolonialism. The ghost of colonialism is so powerful that the literary necromancers are mystified and do not know how to eliminate its evocative memories that are so stamped on the psyche of the people" (29). Although it remains true that the specter of colonialism continues to haunt world power relations, many legitimately question whether colonialism effectively died in the first place. Such is, for example, the sentiment of Roderick McGillis:

Despite the 'post' in postcolonialism, many people continue to experience a sort of colonial domination. Postcolonialism as a theoretical discourse has a responsibility

¹⁰ This subchapter is part of my published article, "France-Africa: Postcolonial Relations, or Neocolonial Rule?," in which I discuss France's political, economic, and cultural neocolonial relations with its former colonies.

to speak about continuing colonial activity and to examine injustice perpetrated against people who have less political power than others who control the time and space in which the less powerful live. (3)

As can be understood from this quotation and some of the postcolonial trends reviewed above, the colonizer's presence is still felt, although he is now physically absent. For example, Said's *Orientalism* and the work of the Subaltern Studies scholars emerged after decolonization, but it transpires that the primary target of their criticism is colonialism. This has led many observers to conclude that colonialism may have effectively ended in military and administrative terms but not at the cultural and economic levels.¹¹

Just as there is no universal definition of postcolonialism, the term "decolonization" is equally surrounded by indeterminacy. This is even more so since the decolonization process differed from one colony to another, and the notion is often analyzed from multiple perspectives and in terms of multiple explanatory models. In *Decolonization: A Short History*, Jan Jansen and Jurgen Osterhammel propose three central views—imperial, local, and international. For example, decolonization from a local perspective will focus more on the transfer of power from colonial authorities to indigenous elites. In the international view, the focus is on changes in world politics that no longer tolerate the continuation of colonial exploitation by European powers (2-3). They also propose different modes of decolonization. These are the *transfer of power model*, the *model of national liberation*, the *neocolonialism model*, the *unburdening model*, and the *world politics model*. I do not wish to descend into the intricacies of all these models in my discussion. But as an illustrative example, the *national*

¹¹ The point is that as most African countries emerged from their colonial pasts into the 1960s with the prospect of a more respectful and equitable relationship with their respective colonizers. France and Britain, for example, showed their willingness to contribute toward such a goal through the establishment of political bodies such as the Commonwealth and the *Organisation Internationale de la Francophonie*. But, while the stated purpose of these organizations was to bring together member countries around shared goals of democracy, equality, and the rule of law, postcolonial relationships between former colonizing countries and newly independent nations are still marked by and often reflect an unacceptable reality.

liberation model explains decolonization as a violent process whereby the natives have reclaimed their self-determination rights. The Algerian independence, seen as the consequence of a national struggle, can be explained through this model.¹²

But here, I am interested in the *neocolonial model*, which explains decolonization as a deliberate and tactical renunciation of coercive domination for strategic and geopolitical control (Jansen and Osterhammel 28-32). Kwame Nkrumah confirms this theory in *Neo-Colonialism, the Last Stage of Imperialism*. According to Nkrumah, the guiding principle of neocolonialism is “that the State which is subject to it is, in theory, independent and has all the outward trappings of international sovereignty. In reality, its economic system and thus its political policy is directed from outside” (ix). The neocolonial control denounced here manifests itself at the economic level through global financial institutions, at the political level through military bases, and at the cultural level through languages and cultural products.

In his political novel *Devil on the Cross*, Ngugi wa Thiong’o also advances the neocolonial hypothesis through a parody of Biblical stories. By subverting the Biblical parable of the talents, Ngugi compares the imperialist with the biblical master who entrusts his servants with talents to fructify in his absence. According to Ngugi, the master colonialist, who knew that the day would come when he would be forced out of the country he exploits,

¹² The Algerian war of independence was preceded by the Vietnamese victory against the French army at Dien Bien Phu. Fanon writes:

The great victory of the Vietnamese people at Dien Bien Phu is no longer, strictly speaking, a Vietnamese victory. Since July, 1954, the question which the colonized peoples have asked themselves has been, ‘What must be done to bring about another Dien Bien Phu? How can we manage it?’ Not a single colonized individual could ever again doubt the possibility of a Dien Bien Phu; the only problem was how best to use the forces at their disposal, how to organize them, and when to bring them into action. This encompassing violence does not work upon the colonized people only; it modifies the attitude of the colonialists who become aware of manifold Dien Bien Phus. This is why a veritable panic takes hold of the colonialist governments in turn. Their purpose is to capture the vanguard, to turn the movement of liberation toward the right, and to disarm the people: quick, quick, let’s decolonize. Decolonize the Congo before it turns into another Algeria. Vote the constitutional framework for all Africa, create the French *Communaute*, renovate that same *Communaute*, but for God’s sake let’s decolonize quick... And they decolonize at such a rate that they impose independence on Houphouet-Boigny. To the strategy of Dien Bien Phu, defined by the colonized peoples, the colonialist replies by the strategy of encirclement—based on the respect of the sovereignty of states. (70-71)

called his loyalist slaves to whom “he gave his property and goods to look after and even increase and multiply” after his departure (83). Through his subversion of this biblical parable, Ngugi shows how the masses are tricked into believing that their own black leaders govern their country. In reality, it is financially controlled by the former colonizer. But though Ngugi’s focus in *Devil on the Cross* is the financial and capitalist exploitation of the independent nation by imperialist powers, he also laments the continuing cultural imperialism exerted through European languages.

Indeed, languages played several crucial roles during colonization. Though language policies varied from one colonizing country to another, European languages were used in the most critical sectors, including education and administration. Generally, the spreading of colonial languages occurred to the detriment of indigenous languages that were downgraded and sometimes even viewed as savage and primitive dialects (Babaci-Wilhite and 16). In French colonies, for example, French was the only language taught and spoken in schools. Native languages and other European languages were forbidden and subject to shaming (Lange 488). However, the hegemonic position of European languages and the shame associated with indigenous languages did not disappear with the advent of decolonization. Except for the Maghreb countries, the general tendency after independence was to maintain the former colonizer’s language as the language of administration and education. An interesting point to note here is that both the use of European languages and their rejection by political decision-makers in postcolonial Africa have been controversial.

For example, in Algeria, where the French language was discarded for Arabic, some intellectuals have reclaimed French as their own, such as the novelist Kateb Yacine, who considers the French language as the Algerian people’s prize of war (Fikri, n. pag.). Still, on the francophone side, Ahmadou Kourouma defended his use of French as his writing language, arguing that his written French had to be given an African flavor before it could

faithfully depict African realities (qtd. in Lievois 53). On the anglophone side, Nigerian writer Chinua Achebe defends his English use in African literature. Although Achebe laments that “man should abandon his mother-tongue for someone else’s,” he also maintains that he has no choice but to use English, which he inherited from colonization. But Achebe remains optimistic and hopes others will write in their mother tongues. Regarding his own case, he believes that English can express African realities through some form of appropriation: “I feel that the English language will be able to carry the weight of my African experience. But it will have to be a new English, still in full communion with its ancestral home but altered to suit its new African surroundings” (349). Moreover, the widespread use of European languages such as French and English and their Africanization in fiction writing has led some scholars to affirm that Africans have become co-owners of those languages and call for accepting French and English as African languages (Jeyifo 135).¹³ But many voices have also risen against using European languages in African literature.

Ngugi is undoubtedly one of the most vocal opponents of European languages as the medium of African literature. In *Decolonising the Mind*, he addresses the central questions in African literature, of which language holds the central position. Ngugi recognizes that the damage done to African languages by colonization may have pushed many African writers to distance themselves from these languages. However, he believes this obstacle must not be seen as a fatality but rather as a challenge the African writer must answer. Furthermore, Ngugi believes that African writers have a calling to do for their languages, “what Spencer, Milton and Shakespeare did for English; what Pushkin and Tolstoy did for Russian; indeed, what all writers in world history have done for their languages by meeting the challenge of creating a literature in them” (29). Then, responding to those who justify their choices by brandishing the Africanization argument in an interview with Charles Cantalupo, Ngugi contends that it is

¹³ See also Pierre Dumont’s book *Le français langue africaine*.

a misnomer to label “African literature” both African literature written in African languages and African literature written in European languages. According to Ngugi, only the former deserves to be called African literature, while the latter must be called *Europhone* African literature. Ngugi’s first attempt at challenging this paradigm was his play *I Will Marry When I Want*, originally written in his mother tongue, *Gikuyu*, and performed at a local community theater. The masses cheerfully received the play. However, the Kenyan government deemed it seditious and later ordered the author’s imprisonment. This method proved counterproductive because, far from deterring Ngugi in his criticism of the Jomo Kenyatta regime, his prison time only strengthened his desire to speak to his people directly and in their language. Consequently, Ngugi decided to write all his subsequent novels in *Gikuyu*, and they became available to European readers only through translation.¹⁴

In conclusion, postcolonial theory has gone through many stages and developed its criticism through various key concepts. The postcolonial trends I discussed above emerged at different times to respond to different questions across different geographical areas and fields of study. The Negritude movement, created in the colonial period, raised awareness about the value of black culture. Through his criticism of the Orientalist construction of the East, Edward Said questions the validity of the binary distinctions that imperialists used to justify their conquest and control of the Orient. The work of Subaltern scholars also contributed to the deconstruction of official historiographies of colonialism, which often minimize or dismiss the role of the subaltern subjects in the formation of nationalist consciousness.¹⁵ Subaltern scholars sought to rectify the distorted construction of the subaltern Other by

¹⁴ In “The Politics of Translation: Notes towards an African Language Policy,” Ngugi offers an overview of the obstacles to comprehensive and all-embracing language policies in Africa. These barriers range from limitations internal to Africa, such as linguistic diversity, to those imposed by colonialism and globalization. According to Ngugi, linguistic diversity can be solved by focusing on translation, which he describes as the common language of all languages. However, as he emphasizes, inter-African language translations must be favored over translations into European languages to “make Africa visible in the world” (41).

¹⁵ Spivak, for example, is a Derrida deconstructionist who is influenced by poststructuralist language theory.

proposing alternative accounts. The neocolonial theory argues that colonization may have ended officially but maintains that imperialist powers succeeded in retaining control over their former colonies by manipulating the elites of the now independent nations through exploitative global capitalist and financial mechanisms.

Ngugi's thematic orientation would place his novels within the precepts of Negritude, neocolonial criticism, and Subaltern studies. Farah, however, is more difficult to situate within the postcolonial trends discussed above. This situation arises mainly because, although Farah is a postcolonial writer, his focus has always been on Somalia's struggle and its own national history and values. However, Farah never loses sight of Somalia's complicated past with imperialist powers and often reminds the reader of the Italian colonial legacy in Somalia. In the *Variations* trilogy, many of Farah's characters have been educated in Italy and sometimes converse in Italian. In *Close Sesame*, for example, Farah uses his protagonist's actions and misfortunes in the colonial past to assess Somalia's present political situation. But besides these cursory references to the colonial past, Farah's critique of postcolonial Somalia cannot be considered anticolonial like Ngugi's appraisal of postcolonial Kenya. But before reaching further conclusions regarding the thematic orientations of Farah and Ngugi, it seems pertinent to conduct a literary review of the secondary literature on Farah and Ngugi to learn what critics generally say about their oeuvres.

Chapter Three

Literature Review

The goal of this literature review is not to provide an in-depth analysis of everything written on either Farah or Ngugi. That would be too ambitious a task and exceed the scope of this study. Instead, I intend to offer a very modest panorama of how critics have generally interpreted the works of these two authors. Their novels have been studied under various aspects, all of which my review will not cover. As postcolonial writers, both Farah and Ngugi are generally concerned with how postcolonial regimes manage their independent countries. As such, there are striking similarities between their incisive assessments of dictatorial rulers. But at the same time, the societies that each author fictionalizes in their writings have peculiarities that impact how each author approaches a particular topic. In the following literature review, I will discuss each author separately according to the thematic aspects that have received considerable attention from critics. At the end of this literature review, I will also discuss how each author relates or does not relate to the postcolonial trends in the previous subchapter.

Nuruddin Farah, the champion of women

According to many critics, *one of the main aspects of Farah's work is his sensitivity to the plight of women*. Among notable critical works that discuss Farah's sympathy for women, we can cite Jacqueline Patricia Alden and Louis Tremaine's *Nuruddin Farah*, Bardolph's "Brothers and Sisters in Nuruddin Farah's Two Trilogies," Bilal Ahmad Dar "Nuruddin Farah's Women: A Challenge to Somalian Patriarchal System," Khadididatou Diallo's "Signs of Gendered Violence from the Threshold: The Epigraph in Nuruddin Farah's *From A Crooked Rib*," Souleymane Diallo's "The Feminine Cultural Politics Essentialism and Popular Imagination Liberality in Nuruddin Farah's *Sardines* (1982)," Annie Gagiano's "Farah's *Sardines*: Women in a Context of Despotism," Mary Nabwire Juma and her colleagues' "The Collective Consciousness of Women's Rights in Alice Walker's *The Color Purple* and Nuruddin Farah's *From A Crooked Rib*," Helmi Ben Meriem's "(Re)claiming the Body of the Somali Woman in Nuruddin Farah's *From a Crooked Rib*," Gerald Moore's "Nomads and Feminists: The Novels of Nuruddin Farah," Sarah Nagaty's "The Erotic as an Act of Resistance to the Despotism of the State: Nuruddin Farah's *Sweet and Sour Milk* as an Example," Ifeoma Ezinne Odinye's "Violence against Girls: A Feminist Perspective on Nuruddin Farah's *From a Crooked Rib*," Maggi Phillips's "To a Room of Their Own: Structure and Shadow in Nuruddin Farah's *Sardines*," Ritushmita Sharma's "Voices From The Margins: A Reading Of Migrant Women's Agency In Nuruddin Farah's *From A Crooked Rib* and *North of Dawn*," Parvathi Abib Sène's "A Gender-Sex System that Afrocentralizes the Issue of a Traditional Female identity: The Case in Nawal El Saadawi's *Woman at Point Zero* and Nuruddin Farah's *From a Crooked Rib*," Vudumula and Anitha Tangellamudi's "Challenging Patriarchy And Other Power Structures: Reconceptualising Gender Identities in Nuruddin Farah's *Knots*," Grazia Sumeli Weinberg's "The Italian Legacy in Post-colonial

Somali Writing: Nuruddin Farah's *Sardines*," and Derek Wright's "Parents and Power in Nuruddin Farah's *Dictatorship* Trilogy."

As this long list of scholarly works shows, the second-class position of women in Somalia is a recurrent theme in Farah's novels. In novels such as *From a Crooked Rib*, *Sweet and Sour Milk*, and *Sardines*, women are portrayed in various painful social conditions. In his analysis of *From a Crooked Rib*, Abib Sene draws due attention to Farah's critical stance regarding the practice of female infibulation and the complications that it forces women to live with afterward through the character of Ebla (80). Mary Nabwire Juma gives a similar reading of the same novel and inscribes the genital mutilation of women within a broader scheme of objectification and commodification of the female body. According to Juma, Farah's novel makes "the objectification of women as sexual objects apparent," as evidenced in Ebla's being forced into marriage first by her grandfather and later by her cousin (141). But as Juma also suggests, Farah makes readers conscious of women's right to be free actors by creating scenes in which they are oppressed and situations in which some women liberate themselves from male dominance (143). In consideration of this, we are obliged to agree with Juliet Okonkwo's assertion that Farah is the African writer who "has done the greatest justice to female existence in his writing, in the number of female characters he creates, and the variety of roles accorded them as well as in the diversified attitudes toward life represented" ("Changing Roles" 217). Okonkwo's analysis, which also includes comments on *Sweet and Sour Milk* and *Sardines*, presents three different categories of women, some of whom reject the fate meted out to them by society while others submit to, and even perpetuate, patriarchal authority.

Putting Farah in contrast with other prominent African writers, such as Achebe or Soyinka, Okonkwo emphasizes his almost unique perspective on women in that he gives his female characters a realistic existence because they are "to take an active part in various forms

of life around them” (“Changing Roles” 221). Similarly, Bilal Ahmad Dar analyzes female resistance to male and state oppression in *From a Crooked Rib* and *Sardines*. The title *From a Crooked Rib* suggests the Biblical and Koranic stories of creation in which God took a rib from Adam to fashion Eve. However, contrary to the Scriptures, which ordains that a woman must submit to her man, Farah’s book stars a protagonist, Ebla, who journeys towards freedom as she flees her community to shun an arranged marriage. As for *Sardines*, Farah has concocted a powerful plot in which the reader is offered diverse female roles in a Somalian republic where private and public life become indistinguishable.

The novel’s main character is Medina, who must face the tyranny of Idil, her mother-in-law, at home and resist the General’s unruly methods on the political scene. As Dar suggests, “Medina’s character has been portrayed by the novelist in a very lucid and emphatic manner to suggest her bold resolution to resist and fight against the oppression of state dictatorship and the blows of patriarchy” (2279-80). Her grudge with the General concerns her refusal to follow the editorial line of the regime. The General sacks her for her defiance, which marks the beginning of a contentious relationship. As Medina puts it: “The General’s power and I are like two lizards engaged in a varanian dance of death; we are two duelists dancing a tarantella in which they challenge their own destiny. He is as aggressive towards me as I am towards him. He uses violent language and so do I. He calls me ‘a dilettante bourgeois’, ‘a reactionary’; I call him ‘fascist’ and ‘dictator’” (Farah, *Sardines* 48). As this quote shows, Farah’s Medina does not bow before the oppressive authority of the dictator, who can imprison her if he wishes.

Medina’s second power struggle is between her, an educated and liberated woman, and her mother-in-law Idil, a traditional and authoritative matriarch who wants to infibulate her granddaughter. Medina’s answer is firm and unapologetic: “She will not be circumcised. Over my dead body. Ubox is my daughter, not Idil’s” (63). Medina’s response to matriarchal

tyranny at home is comparable to her opposition to the tyrannical Head of State in many respects. In *Sardines*, Medina is engaged in two separate but complementary power struggles:

The General's power and I are like two lizards engaged in a varanian dance of death—the emphasis on power and not on the General; power as a system, power as a function. Was Idil part and parcel of that power? The sky would fall in on anyone who upset a pillar of society in this case Idil. So Medina would go about with care; they were like monitor lizards in combat, each dancing the tango of its strategy, chest to chest, face to face ... She would rather be like the matador who gives way when the bull rushes at him blind as red blood. (52-53)

We can see that the terms Medina uses to describe her relationship with her mother-in-law are similar to those she has used for the General. What is interesting in this quote is Medina's emphasis on the fact that she opposes the General's power and not the General himself. According to Fiona Moolla, this inflation "inflation of the representation of the dictator as a larger than life, but also abstract, character is to make the Somali dictator a philosophical principle of authoritarianism writ unaccountably large, rather than a fairly pusillanimous military man and politician" (209). Here, Moolla's observation justly points to Medina's battle against all forms of tyranny. Consequently, for Moolla, although Farah's depiction the dictatorial regime "is sufficiently specific to be historically linked with the Somali dictator [...], the real dictator, in crucial ways, is absented in order to exist as a stand-in for all other forms of authoritarianism." This makes Farah's dictator symbolic not only of African dictators but of the universality of authoritarianism.

To finish this discussion of the fate of Farah's women, let us add that Jacqueline Bardolph highlights Farah's ability to give his women characters enough space to express themselves realistically, not just limiting their roles to traditional ones, as is common practice in African literature. As Bardolph writes, "Farah's women, from his first novel onward, are complex individuals and full subjects in their lives: Ladan, Medina, Duniya remain distinctive

and real in the reader's memory" (732). In any case, Farah's reputation as a feminist writer has been sufficiently studied, so much so that Djibouti writer Waberi cannot help but remark that, as far as Farah is concerned, critics have made immoderate use of the author's sympathy for women. After walking us through the various phases that consolidated Farah's reputation as a feminist, Waberi further comments that these critics brandish the feminist argument so often as to "raise it to the rank of fetish, sesame or magic key opening all the doors of Farahian habitation."¹⁶ What Waberi suggests here is understandable, for as I have contended at the start of this review, one of the most studied topics regarding Farah's novels is the oppression of women and their resistance to such oppression. However, we have seen that in some of the statements discussed above, the issues relating to women are rooted in power dynamics that go beyond gender differentials and become synonymous with state oppression and resistance to it.

When it comes to Farah's *Variations on the Theme of an African Dictatorship*, most critical readers focus their attention on *the political dimension of the novels* that make up the trilogy. The authoritarian atmosphere and Siad Barre's brutal methods of dealing with criticism, which have set Farah running for his life and made him live in exile, are also important themes in the novelist's writings. The list comprises Ujowundu Cornel and Lovina Madu's "The Leader as a Tyrant and an Oppressor in Nuruddin Farah's and Chinua Achebe's *Anthills of the Savannah*," Josef Gugler's "African Literary Comment on Dictators: Wole Soyinka's Plays and Nuruddin Farah's Novels," Rachid Id Yassine's *Nuruddin Farah*, Dubravka Juraga's "Nuruddin Farah's *Variations on the Theme of an African Dictatorship*: Patriarchy, Gender, and Political Oppression in Somalia," Felix Mnthali's "Autocracy and the Limits of Identity: A Reading of the Novels of Nuruddin Farah," Fiona Moolla's "Figuring

¹⁶ This quote is my translation of the following: "On la dégaine, cette empathie s'entend, plus souvent qu'il ne faut, on la hisse au rang de fétiche, de sésame ou de clef magique ouvrant toutes les portes de l'habitation farahienne" ("Femmes en mouvement" n. pag.).

the Dictator in the Horn of Africa: Nuruddin Farah's *Dictatorship* Trilogy and Ahmed Omar Askar's Short Stories," Nicholas Robinette's "Dionysius' Ear: Nuruddin Farah's *Sweet and Sour Milk*," Florence Stratton's "The Novels of Nuruddin Farah," Barbara Turfan's "Opposing Dictatorship: A Comment on Nuruddin Farah's *Variations on the Theme of an African Dictatorship*," and John Williams's "Doing History: Nuruddin Farah's *Sweet and Sour Milk*, Subaltern Studies, and the Postcolonial Trajectory of Silence."

As we can see from this non-exhaustive list of critical works, Farah's critique of Siad Barre's dictatorial rule through fiction has received ample scholarly attention. I want to start my discussion of this thematic angle with Derek Wright's analysis of Farah's polemical position towards Somali oral traditions in his novels. For Wright, Farah's incorporation of oral features into his novels is different from the use of oral stylistic devices by other writers such as Chinua Achebe, Yambo Ouologuem, and Ayi Kwei Armah, who saw orality and literacy as two distinct modes. Farah's fiction, as Wright observes, "has always behaved as if the oral and written modes existed not only simultaneously but interpenetratively, the one already there inside the other" ("Oligarchy" 87). Wright further notes that while writers like Ngugi and Armah conceived "traditional cultural values and their oral modes of expression" as counter-discursive alternatives to "the corruptions and tyrannies of post-colonial politics," Farah's fiction "seeks neither to rehabilitate traditional forms, like the later Armah, nor to discredit and repudiate them, like Ouologuem, but rather to show how indigenous traditions, both oral and domestic, have themselves been implicated in the new political tribulations and terrors of the independent state" (88). Indeed, as many of Farah critics have noted, the General has perverted Somali traditional values of orality to secure his tyrannical power. For John Hawley, Farah's novels express "ambivalence toward his country's oral traditions" because although they "record the highest aspirations of its people," they "also serve as the most effective agent for social control" (196). In the *Variations* trilogy, Farah's association of

tyranny with traditional values and orality captures the regime's effective mobilization of traditional social structures to ensure political compliance within the family and the tribe.

Another notable analysis of the political significance of Farah's novels is Okonkwo's article "Literature and Politics in Somalia: The Case of Nuruddin Farah." Okonkwo discusses the representation of political realities in fiction. Focusing on the case of Farah, the author undertakes to answer the following question: can the political novel successfully portray political ideology without doing violence to the aesthetics of the novel genre? Okonkwo writes that to describe political reality faithfully, "the techniques of the novel must be manipulated to accommodate the writer's social, economic, and political message" (57). Farah's ability to depict meaningful and relevant political settings in the *Variations* trilogy rests on his use of specific references to the history of Somalia, and this allows Farah to render "with suffocating intimacy the brutality, suspicion mental and physical degradation which are consequent upon unstable totalitarian governments operated by a megalomaniac with a lust for unbridled power" (58-59). According to Okonkwo, the tyrant's rise to power is representative of new military governments in Africa, which "had been jubilantly welcomed" before disenchantment took over as these military coups, often carried out with high aspirations with a pretense of welfare and freedom, quickly turned to autocratic rule.

However, as Okonkwo observes in her analysis of *Sweet and Sour Milk*, many years have already passed since the coup. The regime fails to implement its stated goals and readily resorts to propaganda to maintain its influence (59). One example of falsification of events is when Soyaan, an opponent to the General's regime, is praised as a "Hero of the Revolution" after his death. For the victim's brother, the celebration of Soyaan's loyalty to the General is a flagrant lie. Instead of declaring Soyaan a traitor, which would signal that something is wrong with the regime, the General exploits his death to gain support and make Soyaan's accomplices feel betrayed and abandon their project (60). The hagiographic project is done

with the collaboration of the twins' father, who "lends credence to the falsehood" by repeating the regime's lies for his personal interest (62). Thus, the political fracture that haunts the political arena also goes through the middle of real families.

As many literary critics have noted, Farah uses this and other instances of familial discord over political matters to draw parallels between the authority of the father and that of the state and expose Siad Barre's instrumentalization of Somali traditional structures. In *The Novels of Nuruddin Farah*, Derek Wright rightly points to the centrality of the family structure in the nation's life and their participation in the tyrannical rule of the country. For Wright, the family unit "becomes a microcosm of the state, the domestic situation closely entwined with the political one" (48). Interestingly, Wright also notes how Farah's portrayal of the "needs which bind domestic and national politics together" reveals that "Somalia's traditional political institutions, the authoritarian family structure at the roots of the society actually conditions people to and predisposes them towards the tyranny officially endorsed and institutionalized by military regimes." Farah's depiction of the family as a replica of the state is not just circumstantial but also made explicit through his epigraphic quotation of m Wilhelm Reich: "In the figure of the father the authoritarian state has its representative in every family so that the family becomes its most important instrument of power" (*Sweet* 97). For Juliet Okonkwo, this epigraph succinctly captures the parallel Farah "establishes between the family patriarch and the Head of State" from the beginning of Chapter Six to the end of Chapter Ten in *Sweet and Sour Milk* ("Literature and Politics" 61). As Okonkwo suggests, these chapters explore "the operative mode of the patriarchs of the family and the state" and show how the authoritarian state uses "the revered role of the father figure in the family" to ensure obeisance to the regime. Bardolph also argues that by explicitly referring to Reich's analogy, Farah poses a moralist "who asks his reader not to blame an individual for his tyrannical excesses or a foreign power for its domination without first asking himself whether

the dealings at the highest state level are not just a replica on a larger scale of his or her own individual behavior” (727). Bardolph’s analysis of the parallels between family and state also considers the two other novels of the *Variations* trilogy and suggest looking at “the power relationships between generations” to comprehensively grasp Farah’s demonstration.

Not coincidentally, another central theme in Farah’s trilogy is the generational conflict between parent and their children. Their divergences manifest across gender equality, tribalism, and politics. In “Autocracy and the Limits of Identity: A Reading of the Novels of Nuruddin Farah,” Felix Mnthali draws attention to many characters’ quests for identity and freedom under state oppression or parental domination:

In the novels of Nuruddin Farah individuals and groups search for and assert their identity. Children are fascinated by their childhood and try to find out in what way it makes them different from adults and above all why such a difference should be the cause of the ‘raw deal’ given to them by adults. Women are concerned about the discrimination meted out to them on the grounds of their sex. They do not wait for anyone to acknowledge their rights. They assert these rights. (63)

As this quote shows, we find characters who fight oppression at multiple levels. Children strive to assert their identity at home despite their parents, with whom they disagree on many matters. As discussed earlier, discrimination against women is also pervasive at home and in the broader society. However, the gravest oppression that the *Variations* trilogy denounces is political—the realm from which I will approach all novels under discussion in this study.

One of the major themes this study investigates is silence, and I would like to end this literature review of Farah with John Williams’s article “Doing History: Nuruddin Farah’s *Sweet and Sour Milk*, Subaltern Studies, and the Postcolonial Trajectory of Silence,” which discusses the same trope through theories of Subaltern Studies. Although Williams’s approach differs from mine, his conclusions are enlightening for exposing certain aspects of silence at the discursive level. Williams starts his analysis by introducing the two dominant ways of

reading “literature as evidence of something,” as proposed by Wolfgang Iser, i.e., “the attempt to grasp what is literary about it—often using such unwieldy structuralist terminology as ‘poeticity—and the view of it as a representation of society” (Iser x). Williams’s invocation of this dichotomy proceeds from his belief that Farah’s *Sweet and Sour Milk* can be read as both a political and literary text. For Williams, this means that Farah’s novel “‘does history,’ which is not to say that it merely ‘tells’ the history of postcolonial Somalia, but that it participates in a kind of historiography that is, to borrow a phrase from Edward Said, both ‘frankly revisionist’ and ‘fiercely theoretical and intellectually insurrectionary’” (162).¹⁷

Most important for this project is Williams’s discussion of silence as it relates to the overall objectives and methodology of Subaltern Studies. He proposes a three-part trajectory of silence as it operates throughout Subaltern Studies:

- 1) There is an imposition of silence by a colonial or neocolonial state through mechanisms such as official historiography and middle-class discursive hegemony, a process fueled by domination and greed. This forced silence is largely the domain of the colonial elite, and is manifested in the entire field of discursive power in venues of official historiography, literature, journalism, documentation, etc.
- 2) An insurrectionary act of drawing attention to that silence, calling it out, mapping its genealogy, and identifying the hypocrisy of its boundaries—a process fueled by resentment.
- 3) A revisionary act of speaking from that silence, giving it a voice, an identity, and eliminating its absence in a process motivated by optimism (however naive). (163)

There is much relevance to the workings of silence as proposed here. In applying his tripartite trajectory of silence to *Sweet and Sour Milk*, Williams successfully demonstrates that silence

¹⁷ Here, Williams is referring to Said’s foreword to Ranajit Guha and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak’s edited volume *Selected Subaltern Studies*: “The first volume of *Subaltern Studies: Writings on South Asian History and Society* appeared in Delhi in 1982. Edited by Ranajit Guha, an extraordinarily brilliant Indian historian and political economist resident in Australia, it comprised six substantial essays—five of them massively detailed and frankly revisionist, one of them, Guha’s, fiercely theoretical and intellectually insurrectionary” (v).

is imposed on the characters—the living and the dead—by distorting their words. Williams’s analysis of silence as it relates to subalternist formulations and, more particularly, to the issue of historiography accurately describes the confrontation between the government, which has written another story for the deceased Soyaan, and Loyaan, who is trying to restore the voice of his late brother by revealing to the world things he wrote when he was still alive. Williams’s discussion of the trope of silence in relation to subaltern historiography in *Sweet and Sour Milk* deserves credit for charting a tripartite model that explains how silence is first imposed, then remarked, and finally eliminated. My approach to the characterization of silence uses other theoretical premises, which will first explain the multifaced nature of silence and then isolate politically relevant silences from other forms of silence. My investigation of silence will focus on how Farah and Ngugi give insightful presentations of “human” reactions to state violence through the portrayal of character attitudes, one of which is silence. But before proceeding to my own investigation, we need to know more about Ngugi and how critics have generally approached his novels.

Ngugi wa Thiong’o, a defender of women and African languages

If Farah is primarily known as a champion of women, one can describe Ngugi as the champion of African languages, although the condition of women in society is also a recurring theme in his writings. Other significant themes in Ngugi’s novels include neocolonial criticism, the appraisal of African cultures, and class struggle. Like most postcolonial African novels, Ngugi’s novels are not just an emulation of the Western novelistic genre in an African language. His novels generally incorporate elements of African oral genres and feature specific elements of the Gikuyu art form called *gicaandi*. In “On the Polyphonic Nature of the *gicaandi* Genre,” Kimani Njogu rightly observes that Ngugi “assertively claims a space for the *gicaandi* genre in Gikuyu literature,” novelizing “the genre

by consciously and overtly utilizing it to define the narrative of the Gikuyu novel *Caitani Mutharabaini*” (48). Ngugi’s adaption of the *gicaandi* genre to the novel is also observable in his other fictional works. Discussing the link between gender and unreliable oral narration in *Devil on the Cross*, Evan Mwangi also focuses on the *gicaandi* genre’s protocols to demonstrate the performer’s contradiction, incompleteness, and hegemonic masculinity. For Mwangi, “the contradictions that Ngugi’s conflation of gender and orality produces” is mainly reflected “in his use of a male oral narrator to enunciate the experiences of a female heroine” (29). By taking into account both the Gikuyu and English versions of the novel in their analyses, Njogu and Mwangi make an essential contribution to the scholarship on the works of Ngugi that is based on the knowledge of local culture.

Njogu and Mwangi compare the original Gikuyu and the translated English novels and highlight several of the elements that have been lost in translation. For instance, Mwangi uses the Gikuyu version, his own translation, and Ngugi’s auto-translation of a particular passage to demonstrate how Ngugi’s decision to translate the text to be fluent in English also undermines his creativity in the description of the character Ndititka wa Nguunju:

In the Gikuyu text, Ndititka wa Nguunju’s tummy is described as arrogantly staring back at people like ‘*ino yari gwa thiaka*’ ‘the one that was at thiaka’s’ (*Caitani* 176), a metaphorical reference in Gikuyu everyday conversation that is lost in Ngugi’s autotranslation to a mythical hyena that invaded Thiaka’s home but was so obstinate it would not budge to the very people on whose territory it was trespassing. We note that in the dead metaphor, the proper noun designating Thiaka’s name is spelt with a lowercase ‘t’ to indicate that the expression is so run out of the mill, the name of the fictional victim of the hyena has become a common noun. (37, original italics)

Unfortunately, non-Gikuyu speakers, including myself, will not be able to appreciate this aspect of the richness and creativeness of Ngugi’s composition. Even more problematic is that

the subsequent losses encountered in the English version tend to increase when the novels are translated into other languages from the translated English version instead of from the Gikuyu version. In an interview with Maya Jaggi, discussing *Matigari* as myth and history, Ngugi addressed this issue by insisting on the importance of translating from the original work. He fears that translating from English to another language will produce translations that become “further and further removed from the original in terms of its spirit and meaning” (249). That is why he and his publisher “closed the option for people to translate from the English by insisting that *Matigari* must be translated directly from the Gikuyu” (249). Nevertheless, the English versions of Ngugi’s novels, which I will base my analysis on, are creative and innovative enough to generate a significant number of critical works.

Many other critics have pointed to the creative use of oral storytelling techniques regarding the compositional elements of Ngugi’s novels. These include Fidelis Balogun’s “*Matigari: An African novel as oral narrative performance*,” Mohamed Chaabane Ali’s “Ngugi wa Thiong’o Deployment of Orality And his Socialist Discourse In *Wizard Of The Crow*,” M. J. Cloete and R.N. Madadzhe’s “Bury my Bones but Keep my Words: The Interface Between oral Tradition and Contemporary African Writing,” Thomas H. Jackson’s “Orality, Orature, and Ngugi wa Thiong’o,” Seok-Ho Lee’s “Ngugi wa Thiong’o’s Postcolonial Orality: Towards a New Poetics of Drama,” Emmanuel Obiechina’s “Narrative Proverbs in the African Novel,” Bayo Ogunjimi’s “Language, Oral Tradition and Social Vision in Ngugi’s *Devil on the Cross*,” Mumia Geoffrey Osaaji’s “Elements of Orality in Ngugi Wa Thiong’o’s *Wizard of the Crow*,” Graham K. Riach’s “Myth, Orality and the African Novel,” Mustapha Bala Ruma’s “Orality and African Literature: A Reading of Ngugi wa Thiang’o’s [sic] *Wizard of The Crow* (2007),” Confidence Gbolo Sanka and his colleagues’ “The Importance of Oral Tradition in Ngugi wa Thiong’o’s Writings: A Critical Analysis of the *River between* and *Petals of Blood*,” and Njogu Waita’s “Orality and the

Written Word in the Age of Globalization: The Case of Ngugi wa Thiong'o's Kikuyu Novels.”

Among the critical works listed above, some deserve closer examination for their unique perspective on Ngugi's use of language and oral traditional art forms. In “*Matigari: An African Novel as Oral Narrative Performance*,” Odun Balogun examines different elements that characterize epic narratives in *Matigari*. According to Balogun, the analysis of those features shows that they were intentionally utilized and arranged by Ngugi to allow the book to be performed orally (130). The first aspect Balogun explores is Ngugi's attitude towards literature in European languages and his decision to write fiction in Gikuyu, his native tongue (130-31). Ngugi's choice was mainly motivated by his desire to communicate with his people, who cannot read in European languages or even their mother tongue. Another merit of Balogun's article resides in his analysis of *Matigari* through elements of the epic genre. These include the characterization of Matigari as the typical epic hero and of the exploitative elite as the villains in the form of ogres; the compositional structure, which features formulaic sentences and questions, a multigenetic character, prefabricated formulaic units, and thematic units, and heroic themes and phraseology.

The features of orality have also received considerable attention in some of Ngugi's other novels. Confidence Gbolo Sanka et al. have examined the stylistic and thematic forms and functions of orality in *The River Between* and *Petals of Blood*. They propose that Ngugi's incorporation of oral traditional forms, such as legends, myths, and songs, in his writing gives an African color to the literary piece and conveys his commitment to a particular cause (6). For Mohamed Chaabane Ali, who looks at the role of orality in *Wizard of the Crow*, Ngugi's deployment of orality should not be seen as a mere expression of pride regarding African traditions and languages but considered as “part and parcel of his utopian imagining of the possibility of creating an egalitarian order in a continent that is presently characterized by

misrule, social maladies and masses' exploitation by the bourgeois class" (279). Mustapha Bala Ruma, still exploring the relationship between oral and written literatures, examines the influences of the oral tradition on the plot structure of *Wizard of the Crow* and Ngugi's use of multiple narrators, some of whom are observers of the events themselves. Sometimes, as Ruma notes, we can see these narrators "recount and render events happening in the novel orally in the presence of a live audience and in the process also embellish the story as they deem fit, thereby rendering different versions of the same event" (196). The various kinds of transformation and distortion introduced into the stories, whether by the primary narrator or secondary narrators, will be discussed further in Part Three of my study, especially concerning the emergence of rumors.

Another major theme, and probably the most obvious, analyzed in Ngugi's novels is the *denunciation of women's oppression and other injustices and inequalities at political, social, and economic levels*. The fate of the unprivileged, oppressed, and marginalized, whether based on gender, race, or class, is a constant concern in Ngugi's novels. Many critics have highlighted Ngugi's deep concern for the discrimination against women in society by the patriarchy. Major works that discuss Ngugi's portrayal of women are Syed Zamanat Abbas's "Empowering The African Woman in Ngugi wa Thiong'o's *Devil on the Cross* (1982): A New Perspective," Ahmad Jasim Mohammad Alazzawi's "A Feminist Perspective in Ngugi Wa Thiong'o's Novel *Petal of Blood*," Solomon Omatsola Azumurana and John Ajama Audu's "African Feminism/Womanism and Gender Complementarity in Ngugi wa Thiong'o's Novels," Joseph M. Brogdon's "Reverential Feminism: (Re) Considering the Status of Women in omen in the African Novel," Eren Bolat's *Postcolonial Representation of the African Woman in the Selected Works of Ngugi and Adichie*, Eren Bolat's "The Road to Prostitution: Ngugi's Wanja and Ekwensi's Jagua Nana," Eren Bolat's "The Figure of Postcolonial Women In Ngugi Wa Thiong'o's *Petals Of Blood* And *A Grain Of Wheat*,"

Raphael, Nettie Cloete's "Women and transformation: A recurrent theme in Head and Ngugi," Dalleo's "Ngugi wa Thiong'o's Wizard of the Crow and Postcolonial Pedagogy," Ebele Eko's "Changes in the Image of the African Woman: A Celebration," Nikita Ann Jacob's "Feminism through political and religious revolution in Ngugi wa Thiong'o's *Devil on the Cross*," Angela Kimaru and Peter Muhoro Mwangi's "A Critical Analysis on Reversal of Gender Roles in a Colonial And a Post colonial [sic] African Novel: A Comparative Study," Nasser Maleki and Pedram Lalbakhsh's "Black Woman, Indoctrination of The Male, And Subversion of the Patriarchy in Ngugi's *Weep Not, Child*," Honoré Ngoie Mwenze's "Women's fight in Ngugi wa Thiong'o's *Devil on the Cross*: A Structural Analysis," Faustina Nankuri et al.'s "Gender perspectives and portrayal in Ngugi wa Thiong'o's *The River Between* (1965)," Chinelo Nwokolo and John Ode Iyanya "Ingenious Women Transformation In Ngugi wa Thiong'o's *Devil On The Cross* And *Petals Of Blood*," Ifeoma Catherine Onwugbufor's "Wanawake Wa Radi: A Socialist Ecofeminist Review of Ngugi's *Wizard of the Crow* and *Devil on the Cross*," Chinenye Ifeoma Okparanta's dissertation *Rewriting the Letter: Women and Epistolary Forms in Post-independence African Fiction in English*, and Albert Mugambi Rutere's book-long study *Women and Patriarchal Power in Selected Novels of Ngugi Wa Thiong'o*, Sayed Sadek's "The Struggle Of African Women In Selected Works By Ngugi wa Thiong'o," and Omar Sougou's "Rethinking Androcentric Representations of Women in African Literature."

Among these critical works, which discuss Ngugi's portrayal of women, Ahmad Alazzawi's reading of *Petals of Blood* presents a unique perspective that not only highlights the triple oppression that women suffer on the basis of their race, class, and gender but also shows that this oppression spans three different periods in history: precolonial, colonial, and postcolonial. The advent of colonization has affected profound structural changes in African societies. Quoting Roopali Sircar, Alazzawi first argues that women enjoyed some degree of

freedom and independence in the precolonial era because men and women were involved in “the production of the same kind of socially necessary goods” (Sircar 6). However, as Sircar continues, the colonizers’ introduction of the cash economy and industrial labor deprived women of their relative autonomy, “with men alone given access to machinery. This reduced women’s contribution to society and relegated them to the domestic sector.” According to Alazzawi, Ngugi’s *Petals of Blood* presents this shift in the condition of women from precolonial to postcolonial societies by imagining female characters, such as Nyakinyua, Mariam, and Wanja, whose setbacks and combats reflect the challenging conditions of women in colonized societies (852). As these characters struggle to free themselves from the patriarchy, they also have to suffer the consequences of colonization. Many postcolonial critics have identified this double oppression as double colonization.

Ngugi’s treatment of women can be seen in the general context of postcolonial African literature. He is one of the trailblazers who have changed the thoughtless gender bias of the early authors. Other critics who read Ngugi from a feminist point of view agree that his novels do not merely stop at showing that women are exploited. Ngugi’s female characters are also empowered, especially in his later novels. As noted above, Ngugi’s female characters have evolved from spectators in a male-dominated world to active, independent actors who are as intelligent, if not more, as the male characters. In “Changes in the Image of the African Woman: A Celebration,” Ebele Eko also points to Ngugi’s portrayal of women, which marks a shift in the image of the African woman in African literature by first-generation postcolonial writers. Eko points out that the roles of African women in fiction changed from authors such as Senghor, who idealized womanhood, to authors who, without being much critical of the status quo, cast women “in the strict sexist role of wives and mothers, submissive to the norms and regulations that restrict them” (211). According to Eko, Ngugi, Sembene Ousmane, and Alex La Guma deserve special exemption because of their endeavor to bring

forth a “new breed of women.” Some examples of such women are Mumbi in *A Grain of Wheat* and Wanja in *Petals of Blood*. In these characterizations, Eko argues, “one sees a definite attempt, on the part of some male writers, at taking their female characters more seriously” (212). What Eko suggests here regarding the evolution in Ngugi’s portrayal of women is similar to Dalleo’s analysis of pedagogy and gender in Ngugi’s novels.

According to Dalleo, there has been an evolution in the way Ngugi tackles the relationship between education and gender from some of his earliest novels to more recent ones. Dalleo points out that Ngugi’s female characters have evolved from being there to “highlight the existential and ideological struggles of the male protagonists” in novels such as *Weep Not, Child* and *The River Between*, to representing the main revolutionary force in the fight against discrimination against women in *Wizard of the Crow*. For Dalleo, therefore, the new attitude toward gender in the latter novel, in which the limelight is shared between a man and a woman, should be seen as a criticism of the patriarchal “lecturer from the earlier novels and a way of imagining a pedagogical relationship between equals in which each teaches and each learns” (51). This is evidenced not only by the fact that Kamiti and Nyawira open one another’s eyes to different realities but also by the narrator’s explicit statement: “In fact, the difference between their previous sojourn and now was most noticeable in her. Then she was the pupil and he the teacher. Now they were both pupil and teacher” (*Wizard* 722).

Another notable contribution to feminist criticism of Ngugi’s novels is Albert Mugambi Rutere’s doctoral dissertation, *Women and Patriarchal Power in Selected Novels of Ngugi Wa Thiong’o*. Through his historical, chronological, and comparative approach to the situation of women in Kenya, Rutere first offers a summary of women’s reaction to patriarchy across different cultures, as well as in the novels of notable African feminist writers, both female and male. Rutere’s third chapter then provides a detailed account of power relations in the Gikuyu community. His conclusions align with what has been said earlier and suggest that

precolonial Gikuyu women enjoyed economic and social freedoms: “A woman had control and autonomy in deciding on how to share her produce. A woman could spare some grain, especially from bumper harvest and sell in a market [*ndonyo*] to buy what pleases her” (93, original insertion). This relative freedom was negatively impacted by colonization, and the inequalities introduced by British colonizers remained in place in the postcolonial era—the new leaders did nothing to improve women’s social and economic conditions. For Ruter, the postcolonial elite’s treatment of women constitutes a form of betrayal that Ngugi strives to expose through his female characters, highlighting their marginalization, oppression, and their courageous counteraction, first, against colonial subjugation and, second, against hegemonic male domination (151). As victims of postcolonial disenchantment, women in Ngugi’s novels are forced to fight for their survival with dignity or indignity.

Life circumstances force many female characters in Ngugi’s novels to prostitute themselves to survive. Prostitution is a recurrent motif in Ngugi’s texts and can be interpreted in at least two ways. First, the notion of prostitution is used in its habitual sense for a woman who “sells” her body in exchange for pecuniary compensation. Most Ngugi critics read this theme from this perspective. For instance, this is the case of Wanja in *Petals of Blood* and Wariara in *Wizard of the Crow*. But Ngugi is also careful not to provide a one-sided view of prostitution that would make it irrevocably condemnable. But, some character’s choice of prostitution is not their own choice. As Ahmad Alazawi rightly notes in his feminist reading of *Petals of Blood*, “Ngugi shows that Wanja is a strong and loving woman but the society cruelly drives her to be a prostitute and makes her life tragic” (850). When he considers the reasons that have pushed Wanja to become a prostitute, Eren Bolat observes that, for her, prostitution is not a happy choice but a way to resist the dictates of patriarchy and to be the sole master of her own destiny. For that reason, as Okparanta highlights, “Ngugi received accolades for his portrayal of Wanja, a prostitute-cum-revolutionary in the novel *Petals of*

Blood" (59). However, Ngugi does not stop at portraying prostitution as a consequence of a modern capitalist Kenya but goes further to allegorize prostitution in a figurative sense.

The second interpretation of prostitution that many critics have failed to account for in Ngugi's novels derives from parallels drawn between a woman's body and the nation. Prostitution, here, can be seen in political terms in consideration of the ruling elite's connivance with foreign powers. In *Ngugi wa Thiong'o, Gender, and the Ethics of Postcolonial Reading*, Brendon Nicholls uses the term "prostituted economy" to describe the lamentable economic condition of Kenya's working class. According to Nicholls, the "personal sexual history with which Wanja wishes to break is symbolically conflated with a turning point in the national history of Kenya as a prostituted economy. In *Matigari*, this analogy is made evident through Matigari's multiple descriptions of the country's elite as people who sell their country to imperialists (37, 82, 126). And Ngugi states this explicitly in his prison memoir:

Nyerere once rightly compared those African regimes who dote on their neo-colonial status to a prostitute who walks with proud display of the fur coat given to her by her moneyed lover. Actually the situation of a comprador neo-colonial ruling class is more appropriately comparable to that of a pimp who would proudly hold down his mother to be brutally raped by foreigners. (*Detained*, 13)

As Ngugi's words suggest, prostitution is a word that not only designates a woman who sells her body but also describes the behavior of African leaders who let neocolonial powers take control of their countries in exchange for material comfort, an analogy overlooked by many Ngugi critics.

Many critical readers have justly noted that *neocolonial criticism* is another recurrent motif in Ngugi's novels, starting with *Devil on the Cross*. Among critical works that discuss the theme of neocolonialist and globalist influences in Ngugi's novels we can cite Apollo Obonyo Amoko's *Postcolonialism in the Wake of the Nairobi Revolution: Ngugi wa Thiong'o*

and the Idea of African Literature, Byron Caminero-Santangelo “Neocolonialism and the Betrayal Plot in *A Grain of Wheat*: Ngugi wa Thiong’o’s Re-Vision of *Under Western Eyes*,” Simon Gikandi’s *Ngugi wa Thiong’o*, Emeka Ikechi and Tarikiye E Angaye’s “Neo-Colonialism in Ngugi wa Thiong’o’s *Devil on the Cross* and Ferdinand Oyono’s *The Old Man and the Medal*,” Chantal Niyindeba Karumuhinzi’s “Neo-colonialism as viewed in Ngugi wa Thiong’o’s *Devil on the Cross*,” Cengiz Karagoz’s “The Local Elites In *Matigari* By Ngugi Wa Thiong’o,” Sourav Kumar Nag’s “Fighting Neocolonialism: A Case Study of the Selected Novels of Ngugi Wa Thiong’o,” Damlègue Lare’s “Rupturing Neocolonial Legacies in the African Novel: Ngugi wa Thiong’o’s *Matigari* as a Paradigm,” Peter Leman’s “China-Africa Relations, Political Conditions, and Ngugi wa Thiong’o’s *Wizard of the Crow*,” Oliver Lovesey’s *The Postcolonial Intellectual Ngugi wa Thiong’o in Context*, Ugwuanyi Dele Maxwell’s “Postcolonialism and the Politics of Resistance in Ngugi Thiond’o’s [sic] *Wizard of the Crow*,” Rebecca Miller’s “Capitalistic Christians and Educated Elites: Fanonian Theory and Neo-Colonialism in Ngugi Wa Thiong’o’s *A Grain of Wheat*,” Gichingiri Ndigirigi’s “What is my Nation: Visions of a New Global Order in Ngugi wa Thiong’o ‘s *Wizard of the Crow*,” Brendon Nicholls’s *Ngugi wa Thiong’o, Gender, and the Ethics of Postcolonial Reading*, and Josephine Ntelamo Sitwala’s *Neo-colonial Elitism and its Influence in Kenya: A Case Study of Ngugi wa Thiong’o’s Petals of Blood, Devil on the Cross and Matigari*. Uchechukwu Peter Umezurike’s “Postcolonial Ogres in Ngugi wa Thiong’o’s *Wizard of the Crow*.”

In Ngugi’s novels, it obvious that postcolonial ruling elites continue to serve the interests of former colonial powers instead of improving the social and economic conditions of the main population. Ngugi’s neocolonial criticism fights many evils at once. Many critics have focused their attention on this double combat against colonialism in disguise and against incompetence and oppression by local leaders in Ngugi’s novels, from *Devil on the Cross* to

Wizard of the Crow; although in prior novels, *Petals of Blood* and *Weep Not, Child*, one could already perceive nascent neocolonial tendencies. First, to denounce neocolonialism means to denounce continuing Western influences that maintain African populations in abject poverty. However, this new form of colonialism cannot succeed without collaboration at the local level. The second target of neocolonial criticism is, therefore, the postcolonial local elite who betrays the hopes of the masses. Thus, in his analysis of the first four novels of Ngugi, James Stephen Robson contends that the theme of betrayal is present in many forms.

In *The River Between*, for example, betrayal manifests in abandoning traditions. In a *Grain of Wheat*, we see some members of the Gikuyu community betray the *Mau Mau* resistance fighters for personal gains. In *Petals of Blood*, the plot reveals the betrayal of the working class by the national bourgeoisie (Robson iii-iv). However, in *Devil on the Cross*, we see an unequivocally formulated criticism of neocolonialism. For Josef Gugler, while *Devil on the Cross* borrows some elements, such as the plight of women, from earlier novels, there is nevertheless a shift from a class analysis to an unreserved neocolonial perspective (336). For Gugler, who argues that “*Devil on the Cross* reads like a fable version of Leys,” this shift in approach has to do with Colin Leys’s study, *Underdevelopment in Kenya. The Political Economy of Neo-Colonialism*, a book that “created quite a stir at the University of Nairobi, where Ngugi was chairman of the Department of Literature at the time” (338). Thus, we can state that, at least since *Devil on the Cross*, neocolonial criticism explicitly found a place in Ngugi’s work, alongside the other major aforementioned themes.¹⁸

Although the literature review of Farah and Ngugi presented here is succinct, it allows us to see how critics have pigeonholed each author. When combined with the overview of postcolonial theory, this literature review shows how each author approaches postcolonial

¹⁸ *Wizard of the Crow* can be considered a complex novel because of its length and narrative twists and because it tackles multiple problems at once. These range from domestic violence to the mental alienation of the postcolonial subject to postcolonial misgovernance and to neocolonial influences in the fictional Aburiria.

preoccupations more clearly. As many of the critics discussed above suggest, both Farah and Ngugi seem to express a deep concern for the condition of women in society. Many of their novels not only feature female protagonists but also put women in roles not always conventional for women. To summarize, while the principal focus of both authors remains on the authoritarian abuse of power by postcolonial regimes, they also have a certain sensitivity for neocolonial dealings—although Ngugi’s works receive a more explicit neocolonial treatment than Farah’s. Farah’s neocolonial message is more difficult to apprehend because Somalia’s case does not reflect the first meaning that comes to people’s minds when the term “neocolonial” is uttered. As Nkrumah maintains in *Neo-Colonialism, the Last Stage of imperialism*, “the power exercising control is often the State which formerly ruled the territory in question, but this is not necessarily so. For example, in the case of South Vietnam the former imperial power was France, but neo-colonial control of the State has now gone to the United States” (4). If the case of Kenya corresponds to the first scenario, Somalia belongs to the second, neocolonial scenario. This observation allows us to read Farah’s *Variation* trilogy as a statement against Soviet neocolonial influences in Somalia under Siad Barre, the real-life counterpart of the General in the novels. This literature review reveals that although both Farah and Ngugi focus on postcolonial societies in their fiction, they also approach issues differently.

As Okonkwo rightly observes regarding Farah’s portrayal of contemporary politics and politicians, although his novels “manifest a deep political consciousness, he is careful not to adopt an ideological stance as Ngugi, Armah, Soyinka or Sembene Ousmane have done. He seems committed to the mirroring of the foibles, cruelties and imperfections of man in society and this has contributed to his success” (“Nuruddin Farah” 45). On the other hand, Ngugi tends to be more ideologically positioned and many critics have even use the term “radical” in their assessments of Ngugi and his oeuvre—especially, regarding his views on class struggles

and languages in African literature (see Smith). Also, Ngugi's novels demonstrate a broader thematic reach than Farah's fiction, and can be analyzed using concepts from all the postcolonial trends reviewed above. After demonstrating the postcolonial context of our novels through the explanation of some key terms of postcolonial theory and a selective literature review of what others say about the novels of Farah and Ngugi, I shall now explain, in a few paragraphs, the main themes that my own study will investigate.

Chapter Four

Outline of this Study

As stated at the beginning of the last chapter, this study explores the characterization of certain aspects of dictatorship in Nuruddin Farah's *Variations on the Theme of an African Dictatorship* trilogy and Ngugi wa Thiong'o's *Matigari* and *Wizard of the Crow*. The main argument of this study is that Farah and Ngugi's portrayal of the relationship between ruler and ruled in postcolonial Africa suggests the existence of a *spiral of madness*. However, while individual elements of the spiral—silence, distortion, madness, and resistance—have been discussed by other critics separately, no attempt has been made to put all four elements into a nested framework of political behavior. Therefore, building upon what others have written about the themes and the novels discussed, this study aims to show that Farah and Ngugi's characterization of silence, distortion, madness, and resistance gives the impression of a world ruled by appearances and contradictions on which dictatorial regimes base their power. These four elements have been studied separately by earlier critics in some of the novels under scrutiny, but my analysis proposes to put them in a coherent behavioral framework observable both in and outside of fiction. When studied in the specific order considered in this study, i.e.,

silence, distortion, madness, and resistance, the elements investigated describe a gradual descent into a *spiral of madness* from which no escape is possible.

Part Two, the first part of my own investigation, explores the allegorization and dramatization of silence in Farah's *Sweet and Sour Milk* and Ngugi's *Matigari*. These novels portray silence as a response to authoritarian attempts to obtain obedience by force. But before we can appreciate the interplay between silence and state violence, it seems essential to understand what silence is and to contextualize it in relation to the political orientations of our fictional regimes. The closer one element is to the other, the stronger the relationship. Thus, this part is divided into three chapters. Chapter Six will serve as an introduction to the notion of silence. As will be shown, silence is an elusive phenomenon. It has multiple types, functions, and forms. After reviewing multiple facets of silence, I will focus on the type of silence I refer to as "referential" because it is not defined by the act of talking itself but by the kind of information communicated. The free circulation of information being an essential condition of democracy, this chapter will also discuss the constitutional right to free expression, which undemocratic regimes regularly curtail by crafting undemocratic laws to silence dissent.

Chapter Seven will discuss Ngugi's critique of political compliance and cowardice through the portrayal of his characters' reactions in the face of authoritarian terror in *Matigari*. To make his message effective, Ngugi imagines a protagonist who is as unforgiving of the regime's misgovernance as he is toward those who remain silent about such a regime. But what does it mean to be silent in this context? What methods does the regime use to reduce its citizens to silence? Most importantly, how does Ngugi's portrayal of the postcolonial authorities show contradictions between the government's democratic pretense and the forced compliance it imposes on the masses through undemocratic methods? As the summary of the novel will show, the postcolonial disenchantment and betrayal by the new

elite not only manifests the endurance of social and political injustices but also exacerbates them because the sufferers of those injustices are not allowed to talk about their condition of oppression. As the protagonist, Matigari, tours the country looking for truth and justice, he discovers that the population is entrapped in a spiraling conspiracy of silence, which renders the expression of certain kinds of information and opinion unpopular. In a satiric but thoughtful tone, Ngugi reveals how the government instills, in the fearful multitude, automatic responses of self-preservation triggered by naked terror and the fear of prison and other repressive methods. But for Ngugi, fear of punishment and even death is not an excuse for cowardly silence. Ultimately, my goal in this chapter is to discuss how Ngugi uses the element of fear and an inflexible protagonist to put his readers in uncomfortable positions. Should the reader condemn those who seek silence in the face of tyranny? And above all, what the reader himself would do in such a situation?

Chapter Eight of Part Two will address Farah's dramatization of silence in *Sweet and Sour Milk*. The kind of silence explored here is also *referential*, but it is motivated by the desire to protect. In a way, *protective silence* is a form of silence and arises in the face of surveillance and torture, which represent effective mechanisms in the attempt of dictatorial regimes not only to track their citizen's movements and control their bodies but also to decipher their intentions and suppress any attempt to rebel. In *Sweet and Sour Milk*, Farah conceives of silence as a defensive mechanism that puts power in the hands of the political dissident. To guard against the intrusive attempts of the totalitarian regime to extract valuable information, some characters resort to silence. Farah's representation of torture uses the interplay between the terms "interrogation" and "torture" to show how dictatorial regimes often deny torturing their citizens. Like Ngugi, Farah obliges the reader to reflect on the morality of torture through an inversion motif in which the protagonist uses silence to obtain responses from a person in authority.

Part Three will discuss the phenomenon of *distortion*, the second component of the spiral of madness in Farah's *Variations* trilogy and Ngugi's *Wizard of the Crow*. This part will be broken down into four chapters. Chapter Nine will serve as an introduction to the notion of *distortion*. In it, I will first reconsider silence from the perspective of psychology and sociology to suggest that both Farah and Ngugi's representations of fearful silence also expose the mechanisms of denial, which allows some characters to ignore political injustices unfolding before their eyes. This chapter uses the psychological notion of defense mechanisms to demonstrate that the line between silence and distortion is thin in the novels under discussion. The former denotes a refusal to acknowledge reality, and the latter is a deformation of reality. But there are many reasons why some characters twist the truth in the novels under scrutiny. Some lie deliberately and for materially motivated ends, while others do so unknowingly or even pathologically. In Chapter Ten, I will discuss Farah's critique of political lies, corruption, and bribery in *Sweet and Sour Milk*, which goes beyond the commonly accepted belief that political lies are almost always motivated by material gains. If, for the most part, we witness a pervasive pattern whereby material advantages such as ministerial positions and other civil offices are used to buy obedience, in Farah's fictional Somalia, appearances can also be misleading, and the fact that before his death, Soyaan worked with the General, whom he detested, draws due attention to the different reasons why characters collaborate with the dictatorial regime.

Some collaborators, such as Keynaan and most civil servants, are motivated by material benefits. Still, others like Soyaan and his friends work with the General to better understand how to undermine his rule. By presenting the same character's private convictions and public stance, Farah mitigates his narrator's moral high ground and his detestation of liars and upstarts. As I will discuss in Chapter Eleven, some characters have no choice but to collaborate with the tyrant. This is even more the case in Farah's fictionalized Somalia, when

the regime indulges in political tribalism and relies on allocating advantages along ethnic lines to divide and rule. Tribes who obey the General see their members appointed to critical positions, and those who oppose his rule are barred from enjoying their country's resources. Through the character of Samater, who is forcefully appointed as minister, and Loyaan, appointed as councilor to Belgrade and then deported, Farah shows that not everyone who collaborates with the regime is a traitor motivated by material benefits. But as my next chapter will also show, some characters can lie unconsciously or pathologically for no apparent reason.

In Chapter Twelve, I will focus on unconscious distortion and Ngugi's use of storytelling and multiple versions of events as a counterpoint to the dictator's narrative in *Wizard of the Crow*. In the first subchapter of this chapter, I will lay out the theoretical basis of my argumentation by discussing the dynamic nature of oral stories and the various functions performed by storytelling. I will argue that storytelling is a human activity that is inherently prone to distortion, mainly because of failing memory. Some studies on storytelling and lying suggest that both entertaining and accurate storytelling experiments contain distortions, even if the storyteller is instructed to be straight in his retelling. This conclusion also accurately describes how both authors choose to deliver their texts. Although the British psychologist Frederic Bartlett's classical experiments on storytelling may be considered outdated, they can help us understand how rumors and popular legends are born in *Wizard of the Crow*. A witness to an event unconsciously exaggerates some aspects, and the distorted version is passed down by word of mouth, distorting the story further. Ngugi's use of exaggeration in the novel is layered and differentiates the satirical story of the novel from the exaggerated witness accounts of the character of Arigaigai Gatherer. Ngugi's primary narrator, who frames the plot, can be seen as an artist who consciously uses hyperbole to make his story entertaining and engaging. Arigaigai Gatherer, on the other hand, acts as a witness who

puts things out of proportion while constantly swearing that he is telling the truth. A closer look at Gatherer's distorted stories suggests that he is pathological liar. But instead of psychologizing this character, I will discuss how Ngugi uses this particularly puzzling behavior that hovers at the fringe of insanity to show that rumors are destructive to authoritarian power.

Part Four will consequently focus on madness in Farah's *Variations* trilogy and Ngugi's *Wizard of the Crow*. The term "madness," as used in this part, will assume different denotations as we move along the chapters. So, in Chapter Thirteen, which will prepare the theoretical ground for my literary analysis, the notion of madness will only be explored indirectly by investigating the traumatic and alienating consequences of colonization. Many postcolonial critics like Frantz Fanon and Ashis Nandy agree that colonization has left traumatic wounds on the psyches of the colonial and postcolonial individuals. Colonization as a *mission civilisatrice* entailed a cultural reformation of the "savages," and findings from psychoanalysis and cultural psychology also suggest that the clash between indigenous and imported European cultures must have provoked a certain kind of mentality that is passed down from colonial to postcolonial generations. This is also one of the theses put forward by Ngugi in *Wizard of the Crow*. In Chapter Fourteen, I will discuss Ngugi's Fanonian critical examination of the black man's inferiority complex, which can sometimes manifest outwardly in disturbing behavior, giving the impression that something is wrong with the mind of the postcolonial subject. In the novel, Ngugi gives the black man's inferiority complex a physical manifestation in an illness called "white ache" and uses the healing powers of the Wizard of the Crow to question the professed superiority of Western cultural and medical practices.

Chapter Fifteen focuses on the portrayal of the postcolonial dictator's "mad" behavior in Farah's *Sweet and Sour Milk* and Ngugi's *Wizard of the Crow*. The first part of this chapter is theoretical and will try to answer some questions regarding why people often call dictators

and their actions “mad.” It will explore the notions of derangement and personality disorder in the political realm. After this theoretical premise, I will discuss how Farah uses a divisive debate between a group of dissidents in *Sweet and Sour Milk* to expose a common misconception about the psychological fitness of dictators. While one side of the argument claims that the General is a fool and believes that he should not be taken seriously, the other maintains that he is a cunning strategist who has design over the lives of his citizens. But in Farah’s *Sweet and Sour Milk*, the General’s mental capacities are even more delicate to apprehend for the reader, who never sees the dictator in action. In *Wizard of the Crow*, on the other hand, Ngugi gives his reader a first-row seat to observe the grotesqueries of a postcolonial dictator whose behavior pattern can be best captured by the French expression *folie du pouvoir*. In *Wizard of the Crow*, Ngugi uses humor to unmask the deranged thinking of a supreme ruler who projects to build a modern Tower of Babel so that he can converse with God every morning. Soon, the project becomes the center of a political battle between the Ruler and political activists, who use ingenious methods to oppose what they call “this madness of Marching to Heaven” (210). The Ruler’s project can be considered madness because he firmly believes in something that cannot be done. However, the characterization of madness in postcolonial dictatorships is not just a matter of individual dictators. Madness can also take a social dimension.

Part Five will, therefore, put forward the hypothesis that the novels under discussion in this study do not stop at portraying dictators as deranged or mad political leaders. They also suggest dictators often use propaganda and indoctrination to enroll the masses in their “mad” ideologies. The contagiousness of madness is a valid psychological and social subject. Many social scientists, such as Gustave le Bon or Joost Meerloo, have used concepts such as *folie à deux*, social madness, and mass delusion to describe situations in which entire nations succumb to delusions created by totalitarian regimes. In Ngugi’s *Matigari* and *Wizard of the*

Crow, the postcolonial government uses multiple propaganda techniques to make the masses believe in things that do not exist. In Ngugi's novels, however, these attempts remain unsuccessful because the masses never chant the eulogies of the dictators. In comparison, Farah's *Variations* trilogy seems more realistic in its depictions of mass adulation of the General. Farah is even more critical of those who participate in the personality cult of the General, whether genuinely or for material benefits. The analysis of specific situations of indoctrination and propaganda in our novels will show both authors go beyond the use of indoctrination and propaganda as information-sharing mechanisms when they make the dictators in their novels attempt to share their deranged perceptions and intentions with their populations. Note that madness here is rather more metaphorical than medical—a dichotomy to be adequately discussed in the last part.

Part Six, the last big part of this study, will serve two purposes. First, it will focus on resistance and its paradoxical relationship with the notion of madness in Farah's *Close Sesame* and Ngugi's *Matigari*. In Chapter Eighteen, I will discuss the sociopolitical and religious significance of madness in *Close Sesame*, mainly how Farah uses the mysterious figure of "Khaliif the madman" to suggest that madmen, much like medieval court jesters, play a safeguarding role for their communities by saying out loud what others think to themselves and discuss in private. Khaliif's fearless criticism of the dictatorial regime raises many questions about political power and forces Deeriye, the protagonist, to reflect upon his sanity and the nature of madness itself. In his metaphysical reflections on madness, Deeriye even envies Khaliif for his immunity to fear. There is certainly some merit in associating fearlessness with madmen, but the downside of this association is that sane people who speak without fear are sometimes called mad as well. And this renders the notion of madness susceptible to instrumentalization, as we will witness in Ngugi's *Matigari*, where the dictatorial government uses accusations of madness to discredit political opponents. Here,

what the government calls madness is resistance to its authority. As my reading will suggest, this “pathologization” of resistance is symbolic in Ngugi’s portrayal of political persecution in *Matigari*.

In Farah’s *Close Sesame*, the General’s regime also relies on accusations of madness and treats resistance as an illness. With the character of Deeriye, who puts himself in perspective through “Khaliif the madman” and other figures of Somali history and folklore, Farah builds linkages between conceptions of madness in precolonial, colonial, and postcolonial Somalia. The dialogues that Farah imagines between his characters quickly force the reader to see madness from a relativistic perspective. What is madness, and who decides who is mad? Is madness a medical condition, or is it a social construction? How many kinds of madness do we have? These are some questions that Farah’s characters try to wrap their heads around. To correctly interpret Farah’s responses to these questions in *Close Sesame*, I will turn to social scientists like Howard Becker, Michel Foucault, and Thomas Szasz, who have called attention to society’s use of madness and other types of deviance as tools for social and political control. In our novels, the categories of behavior discussed in earlier parts entrap the postcolonial in a circle of madness because silence, lying, and madness constitute forms of denial of reality. With the element of resistance, we will see that characters who reject authoritarian madness are labeled “mad” for speaking out against injustice when the masses remain silent, telling the truth when others lie, and remaining sane in the face of state propaganda. In other words, the only sane characters are those labeled mad by everyone else. This is a typical example of projection, which casts the postcolonial characters, sane and mad, into an inescapable *spiral of madness*.

PART TWO

ON SEEKING CONSENT THROUGH VIOLENCE AND SILENCE IN THE DICTATORIAL STATE

The fact is, we are willing enough to praise freedom when she is safely tucked away in the past and cannot be a nuisance. In the present, amidst dangers whose outcome we cannot foresee, we get nervous about her, and admit censorship.

E. M. Forster—*Two Cheers for Democracy*

Introduction

Silence is a recurrent motif in postcolonial novels and a critical concept in postcolonial theory and feminism. The significance of silence in postcolonial studies is multiple, especially when gender and power dynamics intersect with postcoloniality. In their essence, feminism and postcolonialism pursue similar objectives and have gone through similar developmental stages (Young 64). Silence is central to both critical approaches in that they aim to expose the mechanisms whereby the voice of the powerless is suppressed under patriarchy and colonialism. This is also what Ashcroft et al. highlight when they write that postcolonial critics such as Bhabha and Spivak have sought, through their appropriation of contemporary poststructuralist accounts to the field of postcolonial theory, “to offer ways of dismantling colonialism’s signifying system and exposing its operation in the silencing and oppressing of the colonial subject” (175). As expressed here, postcolonialism aims to liberate the oppressed postcolonial subject from the shackles of colonialism by offering alternative discourses and critical tools that question and take apart the very foundations of the West’s hegemonic systems of oppression. In terms comparable to those written by Ashcroft and his colleagues, Paul Muldoon also notes that postcolonialism “has functioned as an explicitly political form of critique intent on exposing the colonial systems of representation that work to silence the subaltern subject” (33-34). As we learn from both Ashcroft et al. and Muldoon, the colonial discourse asserts its preeminence by imposing itself over the subaltern subject’s speech. Therefore, postcolonialism is a critical attempt to dismantle colonial prejudices and let the postcolonial subject speak for himself.

This conception of postcolonialism assuredly reveals the revisionary nature of postcolonial discourse, which is mainly postcolonial in the ideological sense of the term. Here, postcolonialism means talking back at the former colonizer. However, this is useful for

my analysis only to a limited extent. Even if, at some point, my discussion will focus on Ngugi's criticism of colonial mentality in *Wizard of the Crow*, the central part of my analysis is postcolonial from a historical perspective. My novels, and Farah's trilogy in particular, can be considered "post-colonial" because they were written after colonization and mainly discuss how the postcolonial disenchanted subject responds to the betrayal of his hopes by the elite. Here, the issue of silence poses itself as well, but this time, it lies mainly outside the logic of intellectual representation and is meant in more literal and political terms. The question is no longer whether the postcolonial intellectual can give a voice to the subaltern but whether the postcolonial intellectual is allowed to speak and talk back, not at the former colonizer but at the dictator. It is, however, worth mentioning that the forms of oppression induced by dictatorship do not render Spivak's question completely irrelevant insofar as the patriarchal oppression of women is still part of the new power dynamics. As I have already discussed the feminist sensitivities of both Nuruddin Farah and Ngugi wa Thiong'o in my literature review, I shall now focus on silence and oppression in purely political terms.

In this Part Two, I will discuss the concept of silence in Ngugi's *Matigari* and Farah's *Sweet and Sour Milk*. More specifically, I will read these novels through Carroll Quigley's definition of politics as "the ways in which obedience and consent (or acquiescence) are obtained" (33). To Quigley's contention that obedience and consent can be obtained using force at the political level, I add the element of silence as a common reaction to a dictator's attempt to obtain obedience through violence. Ultimately, this part will explore the relationship between information, the use of force, and silence in dictatorial regimes as portrayed in our novels. The concept of silence being elusive and multifaceted, Chapter Five will serve as a general overview wherein I will explain the type and forms of silence I am exploring in the novels under scrutiny. I regard a type of silence as a category that encompasses multiple forms of silence. For instance, I see referential silence as a type of

silence that revolves around a person or thing spoken of. It contains two forms, which are fearful and protective silence.

As my theoretical analysis of the concept of silence will show, there is a particular type of silence that is not defined by the absence of speech or communication but by the kind of subject under discussion and the kind of information not transmitted in a discussion. I will use *referential silence* for this type of silence that implies that someone can communicate while remaining silent on specific details. This type of silence is preponderant in the political domain, especially in dictatorial regimes, but also in everyday situations, where talking about certain things can result in unpleasant consequences ranging from embarrassment to prison and death. Information being the core factor of *referential silence*, it has become commonplace to view any attempt by a governing body to limit freedom of expression and the transmission of information as *silencing*.

After placing the novels in context regarding notions such as freedom of expression and censorship in dictatorships, I will analyze both forms of *referential silence* introduced above, i.e., fearful and protective silence, in two novels from my corpus, namely, *Matigari* and *Sweet and Sour Milk*. As far as my methodology of analysis is concerned, it is essential to state that although each novel explores both forms of silence, it transpires that each book lends itself more readily to the analysis of one form of silence than the other. As such, I will discuss *complicit and fearful silence* in *Matigari* since explicit references are made concerning a form of silence that condones the exploitation of the poor by the rich. Therefore, Chapter Six explores the relationship between violence, fear, and silence in *Matigari*. In *Sweet and Sour Milk*, protective silence will generally receive more emphasis because of a project aiming to topple the General's regime. So, in Chapters Seven and Eight, I will explore the regime's use of surveillance and torture to acquire or extract information about the plans

of their critics and the characterization of silence as a mode of resistance to such unjust methods.

Chapter Five

On the Implications of Silence in Politics

There are various dictionary definitions of silence. These definitions—which will progressively appear throughout this chapter—can be categorized along two main axes. Silence can be defined either in terms of lack of noise or from the perspective of human communication. Jack Bilmes draws a similar distinction by differentiating silence as the absence of sound from silence as the absence of notable talk. In the first case, we talk of absolute silence; in the second, we talk of relative silence (3). As far as noise is concerned, one may argue that silence consists of the absence, complete or partial, of distractive noises. From this perspective, we can posit that the goal pursued when an individual seeks silence is eliminating distraction. To explain this better, let us consider the following classroom example. A teacher's talk during classes is permitted and very much welcome because he dispenses valuable information. In the meantime, students must avoid chattering because it is rude and distractive. Music may well play, or a dog may vigorously bark in the background, and then the teacher will take the necessary measures to stop the disturbance. The time and energy devoted to demanding silence during classes thus transform silence into a valuable and

desired asset. In this case, silence is synonymous with serenity and a show of interest. There are, however, further aspects to silence, mainly when human communication is concerned.

The role of silence has received much attention, especially in the language-learning classroom. For instance, Adam Jaworski and Itesh Sachdev contend that the teacher is expected to talk while students must listen in silence. In a classroom, the teacher enjoys greater interactional power and has the authority to “self-select to speak, nominate new speakers, choose to be silent or silence others with greater freedom than the pupils” (279). A teacher’s use of silence in the classroom is crucial for various reasons. According to Jaworski and Sachdev, a teacher can use silence in combination with specific gestures and facial expressions to show disapproval, scold, or restore order. On the student side, numerous reasons can trigger silence, including lack of confidence, anxiety, compliance, and defiance (Jaworski and Sachdev 278; Harumi 31). While student silence seems acceptable and appreciated for compliance reasons, remaining silent in other situations can become troublesome. Charles Bong and Hollena Nori suggest that most teachers may experience frustration when students respond to their questions with silence (6). For Nguyen Thu Hanh, student silence and lack of verbal participation can also lead to communication failure between the teacher and their students and among students themselves (153). Thus, from the perspective of human interaction, silence denotes, in its most straightforward conception, the state of someone who is not talking when they are expected to. Thus, Paul Watzlawick et al. rightly state in *Pragmatics of Human Communication* that not talking does not mean we are not communicating (48). As I shall shortly discuss, some silences can stand for approval or disapproval.

Though I have not yet said much about silence, we can learn from our two classroom examples that silence is multi-faceted. Depending on the situation, it can be desirable or inadmissible, either self-imposed or imposed from the outside. In human communication, as

well, silence can be positive or negative. For instance, there are many sayings about silence, some of which praise the many merits of silence, while others condemn it. Some of the most famous quotes that immediately come to our minds are “silence is golden” and Pythagoras’s claims that “a fool is known by his speech and a wise man by silence.” These sayings aim to teach the individual to observe restraint when conventional wisdom prescribes silence. However, there are also multiple social situations where silence is negatively perceived. To understand this duplicity of silence, it seems necessary to first explore some of the functions, types, and forms of silence.

Different types and functions of silence

Before I proceed with types, functions, and forms of silence, it seems noteworthy to signal that it is not my intention to break down the concept of silence into all its intricacies. I want merely to enumerate and review some of its properties for a better contextualization of the forms of silence we are going to encounter. It is also noteworthy to signal from the outset that there are no universal criteria for or a universal typology of silence, nor are there commonly agreed-upon terms to identify its types and forms. Also, the list of silences we encounter in research papers varies from one scholar to another. Concerning the typologies of silence that I will discuss in the following few pages, I will not explain each form of silence but focus on the ones that relate to the forms of silence that I will discuss in the selected novels, providing additional information in footnotes when needed.

In “Communicative Silences: Forms and Functions,” Thomas Bruneau proposes three major types of silence based on human communicative function, namely, psycholinguistic, interactive, and socio-cultural silences. In another typology of silence, proposed by Dennis Kurzon, there are four types of silence—conversational, thematic, textual, and situational. Another way to gain additional insight into silence is to study its various functions.

Johannesen investigated the uses of silence in four different contexts. These include thought processes and cultural development, interpersonal communication, political and civic life, and pathology. In “Communicative Functions of Silence,” Vernon Jensen also explores the communicative functions of silence. While considering that context and culture play an essential role in the functioning of silence, Jensen distinguishes six different functions performed by silence—linkage, affecting, revelational, judgmental, and activating. The typologies of silences given here derive from only four sources. However, we can see that no two scholars use the same terminology even though some of their silences are similar. Without consensual terms denoting these forms of silence, a detailed discussion of these typologies would only complicate my theoretical foundation. Still, many silences in these typologies can help us identify the type of silence I explore in this chapter. These are Bruneau’s socio-cultural silences, Kuron’s situational and thematic silences, Johannesen’s political and civic life, and Jensen’s judgmental function.

Bruneau defines socio-cultural silences as “those related to the characteristic manner in which entire social and cultural orders refrain from speech and manipulate both psycholinguistic and interactive silences” (36). The cultural side of these silences suggests that the perception and the value of silence vary from one culture to another.¹⁹ Social and cultural norms dictate socio-cultural silences and must be observed around uncomfortable topics or at specific places like churches and libraries. Because these silences are imposed, they can also serve as means of exerting control, and their transgression, which is “viewed as a strong form of anti-social behaviour,” may cause the contravener to be “socially ostracized, physically removed, or even injured” (42). As I shall explain shortly, the controlling aspect of

¹⁹ Thus, silence in the West is often put in contrast with the Asian conception of silence, which values silence and tolerates longer intervals of silence. Scholars have widely touched upon this point, especially regarding second language learning. It is generally argued that Asian learners—Chinese and Japanese for instance—use silence more often than Western students (see Harumi; Bong and Nori 6).

these silences makes them particularly interesting for our project. Bruneau's socio-cultural silence shares many features with Kurzon situational and thematic silences. Situational silence usually involves a group of people and occurs in socially organized events, while thematic silence intervenes when the individual communicating avoids specific themes or topics.

For Kurzon, there is a distinction between not answering a question, part of conversational silence, and not talking about a specific topic, an instance of thematic silence (1678). Here, *situational* and *thematic* silences are engaging in the context of this study because they reveal some critical aspects of the forms of silence that I will discuss in *Matigari* and *Sweet and Sour Milk*. For instance, thematic silence allows some characters to avoid controversial topics when conversing. In situational silence, other characters understand that certain opinions can be voiced in the privacy of their rooms but not from the rooftops. Regarding the use of silence in political and civic life, Johannesen provides three examples: silence as a constitutional right guaranteed by the Fifth U.S. Amendment, silence as a strategy of social protest, and silence as an avoidance strategy during political campaigning (32). Johannesen's civic and political silences are interesting. However, they do not quite describe the kind of silence I investigate in the novels. In my study, silence will be discussed as an avoidance strategy, and from the citizenry's perspective.

Last, there is Jensen's judgmental function of silence, which intervenes when silence is "employed to register assent or dissent, favor or disfavor" (Jensen 254). The judgmental function of silence has significant implications in the social and political domains, with which this study is concerned. In the face of social injustices, as the following two chapters will show, silence on the part of the members of society is interpreted as a sign of approval. Examples abound in this sense, but perhaps one of the most recent examples of such passive

silence is George Floyd's tragic death.²⁰ Although only one police officer was directly responsible, his colleagues who stood by in passive silence also made themselves guilty of the tragedy, notably in the eyes of the people. Ngugi's words in his prison memoir echo the same concern regarding Kenyan intellectuals: "I was outraged by the silence of most lecturers and professors, a silence which I took for complicity with the fascist evil" (107). The term "complicity" is a strong word in this context, but it also captures the gravity of silence in the face of political and social injustices. In my subsequent discussions of the effects of silence in political contexts, I will use the term *complicit silence* when emphasizing aspects of silence that enable the perpetuation of political abuse to endure. However, in other circumstances, silence is used to show disapproval. Such uses of silence may take the form of silent protests to show disapproval of some government policies, for example. In that case, we can say that the silence is defiant. As we can see from the discussion above, silence has many forms and functions. Unfortunately, no single type or function of silence reviewed above can sufficiently describe the type of silence this study explores. rather, the type of silence I am concerned with incorporates elements of the silences reviewed. So, we need an appropriate term to designate it.

Two kinds of referential silence

There are multiple forms of silence in the novels under scrutiny. Among the communicative silences discussed above, there are many types, one of which is called thematic by Kurzon, implicit by Bilmes, and hidden by Kurzon. Although termed differently, this type of silence primarily denotes the concealment or withholding of specific information. I will mainly

²⁰ George Floyd was an African-American man who died during a brutal police arrest in May 2020. His death sparked nationwide protests that not only called for the condemnation of the police officers involved but also denounced the United States' racist history.

investigate this type of silence and the forms of silence it contains in the novels. In Roman Jakobson's model of verbal communication, we distinguish six factors: addresser, addressee, message, context, contact, and code. Each of these factors corresponds to a given function of language. Accordingly, language's referential function emphasizes context in verbal communication, also known as the referent or "someone or something spoken of" (Jakobson 355). Suppose we accept from the preceding that verbal communication aims to transmit a message. In that case, the message must carry a subject matter, identified as the referent, the person or the thing that is spoken of. Here, the suggestion is that a type of silence revolves around this referential function in communication. I shall call it *referential silence* because its purpose is to prevent the individual from performing the referential function of language, to prevent him from talking about someone or something.

Nevertheless, Ephratt has used the term referential silence to qualify a type of silence used to perform the referential function of verbal communication, i.e., silence or a blank space on a form, which is used to refer to something or someone.²¹ However, my use of the term *referential silence* will focus on the type of silence that allows the individual to talk without mentioning a particular piece of information or to avoid talking about that object. In the context of dictatorship, a government will not necessarily ban talking, but it will only allow talking about certain things. Viewed this way, we understand that an individual may be allowed to speak and suffer no consequences if they do not transmit information about a specific subject, object, or person—the referent. Thus, in a dictatorship, the dictator does not repress the act of talking or writing per se. He only suppresses topics and opinions that are unfavorable to him while allowing and encouraging any other writings that polish his image.

²¹ Ephratt writes: "We talk of the zero sign as morphologically meaningful eloquent silence only when it is an outcome of choice, where, by omitting morphological material, the speaker conveys referential meaning" (1914). Examples of such a form of silence include the silence of guests to signify that they have no objection during a marriage ceremony or certain passive sentences in which the doer is omitted—eg.: Three people have been arrested during the peaceful rally.

Moreover, I believe that the instance of silence identified above as *referential* can be broken down into at least two primary forms—in theory. We have the one silence that is unacceptable and must be condemned, especially in the face of social injustices—and the other one that must be maintained or encouraged, even at the cost of one’s life. In the first form, which I call *fearful*, the governing body uses fear to prevent the individual from mentioning specific information—denouncing political injustice, for example. And if the individual responds to this fear with silence, we can also talk about *defensive silence*. The second form, *protective silence*, concerns situations where people remain silent in the face of the government’s stratagems to extract information from them. In both forms of silence, what is in question is not the absence of speech or talk but the information one refrains from communicating. However, the ability to share information freely has implications beyond the scope of our everyday conversation: it is a core democratic principle that should be upheld.

Freedom of expression and freedom-restricting laws

Sharing information is a fundamental right in civic, political, and legal contexts. We can date this right back to the French Declaration of the Rights of Man and the Citizen. Article 11 states that “the free communication of thoughts and opinions is one of the most precious rights of man.” The essence of this article has been taken over, complemented, and incorporated in international statutes on human rights as well as in national constitutions around the world, generally under the denomination of freedom of expression. However, the meaning of freedom of expression is not the same in all framing documents—the American First Amendment is one of the most inclusive. Considering different formulations and descriptions in several state constitutions and international statutes, four distinct guarantees can generally be included in the notion of freedom of expression: freedom of opinion,

freedom of expression, freedom of information, and freedom of the press. Despite the nuances between these four guarantees, it is common to enshrine them in a single article under the umbrella term of “freedom of expression.”²²

Freedom of expression cannot be adequately protected without another essential democratic principle. In most constitutional democracies, separating the three branches of government is a valued principle. The independence of the judiciary is another valuable democratic principle (Gibler and Randazzo 707). It allows the judicial branch to act freely without being instrumentalized by the executive. Judges, especially Supreme Court judges, are the ultimate guardians of citizens’ fundamental rights. Moreover, the goal of the Supreme Court is not only to uphold the laws of their country but, most importantly, to ensure that every passed law complies with the national constitution. This role is made explicit when these courts go by the appellation of Constitutional Court or Constitutional Council in some countries. France is one such country whose *Conseil constitutionnel* has recently declared unconstitutional a law intended to combat hate on the internet.²³ The Constitutional Council was seized by sixty senators who argued that the Avia Law violated the right to free expression. In their decision, the Council stipulated that the constitution gives the legislators the right to limit freedom of expression by creating constitutional exceptions.²⁴ However, the

²² As we can see from these definitions, no single constitution deals with all four elements with clear and separate terminologies, and no two documents have the same terminology for and description of freedom of expression. Some documents treat freedom of opinion and freedom of expression as two distinct guarantees, though they are sometimes used interchangeably.

²³ Loi Avia, a French law intended to fight hate speech on the internet, proposed to the parliament

²⁴ In a democratic country, those basic rights are protected by the constitution and can only be legally restricted according to the constitutional provisions. Secondly, the general nature of those exceptions has been the source of much confusion and has often generated tensions between the executive, the parliamentary, and the judiciary branches (Select Committee on the Constitution 15-16). It is, therefore, possible for a government to see in such exceptions as “the protection of national security” or “the prevention of disorder” an opportunity to muzzle political critics. In his 2011 report on promoting and protecting the right to freedom of opinion and expression, Frank La Rue focuses on internet censorship in many forms. He notes that some governments restrict, control, manipulate, or censor internet content without any legal basis or through unambiguous laws (8). Arbitrary restriction of internet communication and content thus constitutes a human rights violation. Thus, in a report on

Council added that any legal infringement on the freedom of expression and communication must be necessary, appropriate, and proportionate to the pursued objective. Having determined that several articles in the law lacked these three requirements, it ruled that those articles contradicted the constitution.²⁵

Let us consider, then, if the government of France, one of the most democratic countries in the world, can make a law that is ruled unconstitutional, how much more frequent such unconstitutional infringement will be in countries ruled by dictators, where the judiciary has no control over the actions of the government. In less democratic societies and under utterly authoritarian regimes, the relationship between the judiciary and the executive branches is in reverse order. It is the executive which exerts control over the judiciary. Furthermore, when the executive controls the parliament and the judiciary, the checks and balances intended by the principle of the separation of powers become virtually nonexistent. Without a controlling judiciary, political abuse through arbitrary laws will be rampant. We can conclude that information is central to most of the fundamental rights discussed above. Information is exchanged whenever an individual and the media outlet exercise their right to free expression. So, when a government uses force or unconstitutional laws to restrict the exercise of such freedoms, we have a case of silencing. But why do dictatorial regimes put unconstitutional limits on freedom of expression? Why do dictators fear the free flow of information?

It is widely acknowledged that information occupies a crucial position in decision-making in all walks of life, ranging from mundane decisions in our homes to more strategic decisions in business and politics. At the political level, for example, when elections are concerned, it is instrumental for each candidate to be well informed about the demographics

Azerbaijan, the Commissioner for Human Rights of the Council of Europe, Nils Muiznieks, cites incidents where an arbitrary law served as the legal basis for the arrest and prosecution of political activists (12).

²⁵ Décision n° 2020-801 DC du 18 juin 2020.

of the constituency who live in the district in which they run.²⁶ But equally important for the outcome of an election is the personal information about a candidate, especially when it is not good. For each candidate to maintain their chances in the competition, securing their personal information is crucial while maneuvering to dig some dirt on their rivals.

Recent examples include the American 2016 and French 2017 elections, which have been the stage of particularly vicious smear tactics. In the latter, for instance, François Fillon, the candidate of Les Republicains and favorite in the polls, saw his numbers fall after information about alleged financial fraud was revealed.²⁷ Despite opening a formal investigation and, later, calls from his party members to step down, Fillon maintained his candidacy, claiming he was the target of a plot to assassinate him politically. But the damage was already done, and Fillon ended up losing the presidency and putting a an end to his political career (Evans and Ivaldi 118). Thus, information becomes a formidable weapon when we use it to tarnish a person's image and destroy their career. Fillon's use of the word "assassinate" reinforces the idea that information can become a weapon, the use of which is not limited to the military and political realms.²⁸ We can measure the value of a piece of

²⁶ Information about the population of the locality where one is a candidate maximizes the chances of winning. For, example, knowing the percentage of young people compared to that of old people will allow the candidate to fashion his speech and actions better. Inversely, voters rely on professional or personal information about the candidates to make informed decisions.

²⁷ The Fillon affair, also known as Penelopegate, is a financial scandal in which Fillon was charged with employing his wife, Penelope, and two of their children as his parliamentary assistants. While this is not necessarily illegal, Fillon was particularly criticized because it was believed that his family never really held these positions for which they received comfortable salaries.

²⁸ The use of information as a weapon is also an acknowledged practice in the military under the appellation of information warfare. The booming of information technologies has added a new dimension to the waging of war. In its widest sense, information warfare denotes "the use of information to achieve our national objectives" (Stein, "Information" 32). Other, more circumscribed, definitions tend to reveal different aspects of the concept. For example, George Crawford defines information warfare as "an orchestrated effort to achieve victory by subverting or neutralizing an enemy command and control (C2) system, while protecting use of C2 systems to coordinate the actions of friendly forces" (2). The definition of the US Military Services presents information warfare as the "use of information in support of national strategy to seize and maintain a decisive advantage by attacking an adversary's information infrastructure through exploitation, denial, and influence while protecting friendly information systems" (qtd. in Whitehead 4). Many similarities emerge from these definitions, notably, the idea that information warfare has a double objective and that it operates through deceptive means.

information by the probable impact it will have on an individual or a community. That impact may be good or bad, great or minor. These factors will, in turn, determine the price an entity is ready to pay to acquire information, prevent its release, or keep it. As I have discussed in Chapter One, the dictator has a legitimate fear of the words of the intellectual, as though they were bullets shot at him. In dictatorships, the destructive potential of certain kinds of information can make the regime go to extreme lengths, such as arbitrary imprisonment and political assassination, to prevent their critics from sharing information that can weaken their hold on power. But before discussing how Farah and Ngugi characterize the relationship between state violence and citizen silence, let us first how democracy itself can become an oppressive tool when the of our novels arbitrary laws to impose silence on dissident voices.

On the state of democracy and silence in *Matigari* and the *Variations* trilogy

Considering what I discussed above, it is possible to formulate the plots of *Matigari* and *Sweet and Sour Milk* as quests for information and accountability. “Where can one find truth and justice in this country?” asks Matigari, while Soyaan seeks the truth about the death of his twin brother. The plots also highlight a complete disregard for fundamental rights, including the right to access information, and a total lack of transparency on the part of governments in both novels. The question of the judiciary process is also a significant concern in the fictional universes depicted by both *Matigari* and the *Variations* trilogy. In *Matigari*, Ngugi treats the theme of justice as a moral aspiration and a legal disposition. In legal terms, the unnamed country has a ministry for Truth and Justice. However, the Ministry for Truth and Justice in the novel neither serves justice nor allows truth to see the light of day—hence the character

Matigari's quest for truth and justice.²⁹ In *Matigari*, the government's narrative about Matigari, which is disseminated through the radio, is worthy of note. Not only is it a distorted version of reality, but it has also evolved through time as the government gets caught by its lies. To begin with, Matigari and the other fugitives have all been presented to the masses as criminals. However, only part of this claim is genuine. Indeed, if we limit ourselves to a general definition of a crime, some characters can be effectively called criminals among the escapees. But again, we must recall that what constitutes a crime is defined by the law and that anything can be made a crime. For instance, the teacher, by talking about Marxism, and the student, by asking a person in authority questions about the country's administration, have committed no crime according to the democratic principle of freedom of expression and information. However, since their questions inconvenience the government, the ruling elite decides to criminalize the exercise of a constitutionally guaranteed right.³⁰

However, such fundamental rights, which authoritarian regimes often curtail, are requalified as crimes through tendentious interpretation of existing laws or the passing of new freedom-restricting ones. Such laws do exist in most countries and may come under different headings. In Kenya, we have the Treason Act, the Law of Sedition, and the Chiefs Act. These laws, it must be stressed, are not intrinsically freedom-destroying, but their vagueness often allows for their distortion, resulting in the State prosecuting constitutionally guaranteed political actions. The Kenyan Law of Sedition, for example, defines sedition, among other things, as the imagining, devising, or intending of the death, wounding, or restraint of the president. Here, I want to dwell on the word "imagining" and the notion it entails. It is unclear

²⁹ This is characteristic of many mildly autocratic regimes that present a façade of democracy to the outside world by endowing themselves with institutions that have no legitimacy or autonomy (Gèze 57).

³⁰ As Ngugi writes in *Penpoints, Gunpoints, and Dreams*, "Any visions of a better life impose questions on the present order of things, and that was the Socratic dilemma. Questions can be a form of criticism, and this is as irritating to the state that thinks it knows everything as it was to those in Athenian Greece who thought they knew all there was to know" (20).

what the lawmakers strictly intended when using the word. Nevertheless, we can argue that they must have used it more in the sense of fictional representations of the death of the President than as the mere capacity of the individual to form mental images in his mind. If the legislators had used words that directly address works of fiction and art, the provision would be seen for what it genuinely is, i.e., a freedom-restricting law. Taking the notion of imagination in its most literal sense will only make that provision look more laughable. But there is an intriguing fact about the fictional character of Matigari in the real politics of Kenya that suggests that Kenyan legislators could have made a law to prevent their citizens from having evil thoughts about the president. As Ngugi states in the preface of *Matigari*, the references

to resurrection have had interesting consequences for the novel. For a short period in 1987, Matigari, the fictional hero of the novel, was himself resurrected as a subversive political character. The novel was published in the Gikuyu-language original in Kenya in October 1986. By January 1987, intelligence reports had it that peasants in Central Kenya were whispering and talking about a man called Matigari who was roaming the whole country making demands about truth and justice. There were orders for his immediate arrest, but the police discovered that Matigari was only a fictional character in a book of the same name. In February 1987, the police raided all the bookshops and seized every copy of the novel. (viii)

As this quote shows, Matigari's embodiment of the Kenyan people's aspirations for a more just world enjoyed so much popularity among the peasants that the fictional stories turned into rumors in the real world, prompting the regime to order Matigari's arrest before realizing he was a fictional character.

With the Kenyan regime's ludicrous handling of Ngugi's "imagined" Matigari, we can now imagine that in a country where the government had already ordered the arrest of a fictional character, making a law to tell people not to imagine the President's death can be a

serious matter. In his novel *I Refuse to Die: My Journey for Freedom*, Kenyan political activist Koigi wa Wamwere also brilliantly captures such an illogicality by having the police arrest his character named Gathagu because he has dreamt that he was a king. The police officers argue that for Gathuga to become king in his dream, he must have killed the sitting one, the President. So, they take Gathagu to court and enunciate the charges:

Your Honor, the police prosecutor addressed the magistrate, we charge Gathagu with sedition. He contemplated the overthrow of President Moi when he dreamt of being the king of Kenya. We ask the court to give him a deterrent sentence that will warn other subversives against dreaming dangerous dreams.

The court obliged and jailed Gathagu for five years. (293)

This hilarious case of “dreaming treason,” as Koigi terms it, shows that anything can be made a crime through a fallacious interpretation of a valid constitutional law in dictatorial countries (293). It is also interesting to see that the regime controls the judiciary because even though the charges are phony, the court has no choice but to “oblige” and condemn Gathagu for dreaming.

Ngugi’s portrayal of censorship in *Matigari* also reveals that the ruling elite can misuse laws to persecute their opponents for exercising their freedom of speech. When Matigari is jailed for the first time, he shares his prison cell with other detainees. One is a student “arrested for asking the Provincial Commissioner about the running of the country since independence” (54). The Commissioner is not pleased with the student’s questions, so he invokes the “*notorious Chiefs Act*” to justify the student’s arrest.³¹ There is also the case of Ngaruro wa Kiriro, a workers’ representative in Matigari who confronts the Minister for Truth

³¹ The Chiefs Act is a Kenyan legal provision on chiefs’ authority, prerogatives, and duties. Article 18 of the act states: “Any person who, without lawful excuse, disobeys or fails to comply with any lawful order issued or given by a chief or assistant chief under this Act shall be guilty of an offence and liable to a fine not exceeding five hundred shillings and in default of payment, to extra mural penal employment for a period not exceeding fourteen days” (10).

and Justice during a meeting convened to settle a dispute between workers and their employers. When the minister arrives, he does not listen to both parties before decreeing the end of the strike. Ngaruro wa Kiriro expresses his disagreement with the minister's solution to the dispute and the workers' intention not to resume work until their demands are met. But the minister sees Ngaruro's behavior as a defiance of his order and other decrees. According to the Minister for Truth and Justice, Ngaruro

has just broken the law three times over. Firstly, he has defied my order; and secondly, he has defied two presidential decrees. He has defied the order which I announced here a few minutes ago, in everyone's hearing. I just announced the end of the strike, didn't I? It ended the moment I finished speaking. Therefore this man is actually asking people to go on strike again. In doing so, he is urging people to defy the special decree by the President. Do you know which law he is breaking by asking people to disobey His Excellency? The law of sedition and *treason*. (110, original capitals)

What we witness here is an instance of false accusation against a political activist. The minister invoked a series of laws and decrees to criminalize the workers' right to strike. This is a typical example of a tendentious interpretation of a law that is not intrinsically freedom-restricting. We can also analyze the minister's reasoning through Michel Foucault's reflections on the administration of justice in the *Ancient Régime*. For Foucault, the punishment of crime was then "a way of exacting retribution that is both personal and public, since the physico-political force of the sovereign is in a sense present in the law" (*Discipline* 48). So, breaking any law was considered an offense against the sovereign. We can see that the functioning of justice in the fictional country, as resented by the minister, is comparable to what Foucault describes in *Discipline and Punish*. This is another reason to argue that the postcolonial regime in *Matigari* is not democratic.

In Farah's *Sardines*, too, the regime criminalizes the exercise of the right to freedom of expression and even to think. "In this country, thinking wicked things about the General is criminal. One of your uncles paid for that dearly. Do you know the full story? Do you know why he was punished so severely? Your uncle said that the General wasn't God. That earned him a life sentence" (30-31). This quote says a lot about the state of democracy in the *Variations* trilogy, where the regime criminalizes freedom of expression. The case of the uncle looks like a typical Orwellian thoughtcrime that just adds a dystopian impression to Farah's depiction. But, in fact, the historical reality was not far from being a dystopian nightmare since, as even Amnesty International has noted in a 1999 report, there was a "notorious article made it a capital offence to spread rumours (*afminshar*)" (11, original capitals). That is why a preliminary historical review is needed to understand the political context portrayed in the *Variations trilogy* properly.

The character of the General is a fictional representation of General Siad Barre, the dictator who ruled Somalia from 1969 to 1991. Coming to power through a military coup, Siad Barre changed the country's name from "The Somali Republic" to "The Somali Democratic Republic." His rule brought about other substantial changes as well. The most notable of these transformations happened in the administration of justice. Before the 1969 coup, the Somali judicial system was regulated by the 1962 Law on the Organization of the Judiciary, which combined four legal traditions.³² After suspending the constitution and abolishing the Supreme Court, the military regime transferred the powers of the three branches of government to the Supreme Revolutionary Council. The regime later established

³² According to the Academy for Peace and Development,

At independence in 1960, when British Somaliland and Italian Somalia were united to form the Somali Republic, four distinct legal traditions – British Common Law, Italian (Continental) law, Islamic *Shari'a*, and Somali customary law – were in simultaneous operation. These four legal systems were partially integrated by the passage of a Law on the Organization of the Judiciary by the National Assembly of Somalia in 1962. According to this legislation, the civil and penal codes and commercial law were to be based on Italian law, whereas the criminal procedure code was to be based on Anglo-Indian law (3).

a National Security Court, which had authority over matters concerning the protection of public order and national security (Samatar, “Historical Setting” 38). According to André Le Sage, its members, whom the military appointed, “had broad powers of detention, arrest and seizure. They had the liberty to take jurisdiction away from all subsidiary, lower-level courts, and there was no right of appeal (except to the SRC itself)” (20). It is important to note that the broad jurisdiction of the National Security Court could justify the regime’s use of arbitrary laws to restrict the exercise of fundamental rights. This is, for instance, what happened in 1975 when Siad Barre’s regime executed ten Sheikhs for exercising their right to protest. After considering such elements as the concentration of powers in the hands of the Supreme Revolutionary Council, the absence of a constitution, and the enforcement of arbitrary laws, we can conclude that the Somali Democratic Republic was democratic, but in its name.

Though a work of fiction, Farah’s fictional Somalia contains numerous precise historical accounts of the military regime era. For example, in *Close Sesame*, we find an explicit reference to the country’s name change during a discussion about the pseudo-democratic nature of the nation: “The Somali Republic became the Somali *Democratic* Republic when the General came to power. The ‘Democratic’ portion of the name is decorative, to say the least, an embellishment of the worst kind” (100-1, original italics). The insertion of the term democratic in inverted commas may be interpreted as the character’s admission that nothing is democratic in the General’s rule. As Zeinab remarks in the quote above, the term “democratic” is often used by undemocratic regimes to justify their actions. As such, Zeinab concludes that democracy becomes “an instrument with which the elites whip the masses everywhere; it enables the ruling elite to detain some, impoverish others, and makes them sole proprietors of power” (100). Other parts of the conversation between brother and sister revolve around the absence of fundamental rights, rigged elections, and corruption in government bureaucracy, the last of which will receive ampler consideration in Part Three.

But for the time being, let us briefly discuss how Farah treats the misapplication of laws to persecute political adversaries through intertextual references to legal texts. In *Sweet and Sour Milk*, the family has found two pieces of paper in the personal effects of the deceased Soyaan. On the first one is written what is probably an article taken from the constitution: “*Any person who spreads or takes out of the Somali Democratic Republic printed, readings, spoken or broadcast matter, or persons in the SDR who display, distribute or disseminate information aimed at damaging the sovereignty of the revolution of the Somali nation will be liable to death*” (52-53, original italics). With this first piece of writing, Farah fully implicates the reader in the creative process because even though the language and structure of the text suggest something familiar, there is no clear indication of its source. The only clue Farah gives the reader is that it could have been quoted from a Somali legal document in effect during Siad Barre’s rule of terror. This law article, which is probably quoted from existing Somali law, is also mentioned in another context in *Sadines*, where Medina, the protagonist, reflects on the case of her brother, Nasser, whom the regime has arrested, along with his lover: “There was the National Security Law of 10 September 1970 (Article 18) which would sentence both Nasser and Dulman to death for having ‘spread, disseminated, or distributed reading, spoken or broadcast matter or information aimed at damaging the sovereignty of the revolution of the Somali nation’” (262). The present quote is not from the law itself but from what seems to be an official document stating the legal reasons for someone’s arrest by the regime.

Another article of the constitution is written on a second piece of paper found in Soyaan’s personal effects: “*Any person who uses religion for the purpose of breaking up the unity of the Somali people or weakening or damaging the authority of the Somali state shall be punishable by death. (Article 12)*” (53, original italics). This time, Farah’s intertextual quote gives more precision as to the source of the text. But the question remains whether this

is quoted textually from the existing law or whether it is only a fictive quotation in reference to the real law article. For instance, the historical Somalian Revolutionary government passed a law (Law no. 54 of 10 September 1970 for Safeguarding National Security) on the same date indicated by the fictional character Medina. Though I have been unable to confirm the textual existence (historically) of Farah's quote, his technique is nevertheless suggestive enough to pique my curiosity.

Still, these quoted articles have their "real" existence inside the novel. The latter is fascinating because its application has led to the execution of the ten sheikhs mentioned multiple times in *Sweet and Sour Milk*. For example, when Loyaan sees ten unnumbered burial mounds in the cemetery on the day of Soyaan's burial, he legitimately wonders whether these tombs could be those of the ten Sheikhs: "Persons executed by a firing squad for their political beliefs are buried in unnumbered tombs. No member of their immediate family is allowed to see their dead bodies. I wonder if these are the tombs we are walking past" (44). Loyaan's twin brother, whom the family is burying that day, was even there when the Sheikhs had been executed: "I was there when they fired. I watched their bodies collapse like mined buildings," Loyaan remembers from his conversation with his twin brother (53). As these examples show, the dictatorial regime has used democratic instruments to criminalize the exercise of fundamental freedoms. Ironically, democracy, which is supposed to liberate people from oppression, becomes the very tool with which they are legally oppressed.

I dwell on the issue of fundamental rights and the judiciary's role because they constitute important themes whose comprehension is essential to understanding the concept of silence in non-democratic settings. How, then, is silence related to these topics? To answer this question, it may be insightful to consider the term "silence" and its meanings as a verb. Among the various synonyms provided by the *Collins English Dictionary and Thesaurus* and other thesauruses, we find verbs like suppress, repress, muzzle, and censor, many of which I

have already employed in this section (1105). We can also use these verbs to refer to actions taken by any government, either through arbitrary laws, by the use of force, or material incentives, even to limit their citizens' rights to express themselves, to assemble, or to protest peacefully. Such actions, then, can legitimately be seen as attempts at silencing. In its most extreme sense, to silence would also mean to kill or to execute, which is what the General's firing squad did to the ten sheikhs in *Sweet and Sour Milk*. We can also interpret Soyaan's fatal poisoning as silencing since he can no longer expose the regime's inconsistencies. The regime also ensures that he can neither speak through the political writings he left behind, as evidenced by the regime's efforts to locate and destroy the documents. But for silence to be resorted to as a product of repression, the state must set specific psychological, behavioral, and social processes and mechanisms in motion. Ngugi's *Matigari*, which I will analyze in the next chapter, illustrates many of the issues regarding freedom of expression and censorship exposed above with engaging dialogues and scenes. Ngugi's characterization of political repression also lends great importance to dictatorial regimes' methods to win obedience. Chapter Six aims to discuss how Ngugi balances humor and seriousness to denounce political violence and the masses' acquiescent silence.

Chapter Six

Matigari and the Fight against Fearful Silence

Having previously demonstrated the correlation between information, freedom of expression, and silence, I shall now discuss the representation of these notions in Ngugi's *Matigari*. The novel recounts the story of Matigari, a survivor of the war for independence. After many years of battle, he emerges from the forests upon victory over his colonial master. He decides to look for his wives and children so that they can go home together. However, he is imprisoned for claiming the house he has built with his own hands. His search for his family quickly turns into a quest for truth and justice as he discovers that social injustices still endure after the departure of the colonial oppressors. The oppressor is no longer a white colonizer but a black man. After he is freed from jail, Matigari continues roaming the country looking for truth and justice, asking questions such as, "Where have truth and justice gone to in this country?" (61).³³ Not only does he not get an answer to his questions, but he is shocked to discover that there is even a conspiracy of silence around these questions. Various classes of society seem

³³ This question is asked multiple times under different formulations throughout the novel: "Can you tell me where a person could find truth and justice in this country?" (72); "How and where can a person girded with a belt of peace find Truth and Justice?" (85).

to avoid this subject for fear of repression or lack of interest. After a verbal confrontation with the Minister for Truth and Justice, Matigari is sent to a mental hospital to discredit his claims. Ironically, the “Minister for Truth and Justice” does not serve those values but instead serves the interests of the elite and the newly independent nation’s bourgeoisie. The discovery of this and the repression that he undergoes only make Matigari more radical. Initially girded with a belt of peace, he decides to revert to violence after his attempts to talk things over have failed. Matigari encounters all sorts of people and difficulties on his path to finding truth and justice. While some characters like Muriuki and Guthera help him search for truth and justice, others, such as the hooded justice, try to expose his plans. Still others meet Matigari’s questions with indifference and warnings that his questions will get him trouble.

Matigari against the fearful lot

In *Matigari*, Ngugi suggests that fear is the dominant cause of silence and a significant theme. Generally speaking, fear is a natural human emotion provoked by the threat of danger. Other terms such as anxiety, phobia, and panic can be used to characterize specific fears depending on whether the danger is real or imagined, immediate or remote. In more technical terms, Ralph Adolphs defines fear as an emotion “caused by particular patterns of threat-related stimuli, and in turn, causing particular patterns of adaptive behaviours to avoid or cope with that threat” (80). This definition clarifies our previous simplistic approach to fear, showing us that fear has a cause and triggers behavior patterns, unlike irrational Freudian angst.³⁴ This conception of fear is also said to be functional because it is generally accepted that the primary purpose of those responses is to ensure the individual’s well-being or survival (Steimer 231). Other studies have revealed that three types of adaptive responses appear when

³⁴ Angst: existential anxiety.

an individual faces imminent and life-threatening harm (McNaughton 3). These are fight and flight, described as active avoidance behaviors, and freezing, which is said to be a passive avoidance response (Hamm 5). All three forms of response are well portrayed in *Matigari*. However, I will investigate only the first two thoroughly because they occur repeatedly, while scenes that show characters freezing during aggression are rare. That said, I would like to start my discussion with a scene showcasing a freeze response. What is interesting about the scene in question is that the different actors also display other fear responses.

The conflict between *Matigari* and the government starts when two policemen decide to harass Guthera because she refuses to sleep with them. Alerted by the screams of the woman and the sudden movement of people, *Matigari* steps out of the bar only to discover a horrifying scene:

A crowd of people stood around Guthera, watching the policemen unleash terror on the woman. She was kneeling on the ground. The dog would leap towards her; but each time its muzzle came close to her eyes, the policeman who held the lead restrained it. Guthera's wrapper lay on the ground. Each time she stood up to retreat, the dog jumped at her, barking and growling as though it smelled blood. Some people laughed, seeming to find the spectacle highly entertaining.

A gush of urine rushed down her legs; she was staring death in the face. (30)

In this scene, Guthera faces a life-threatening danger that forces her to respond. Since the threat is a dog that Guthera cannot fight, we first see her try to flee the danger. But every time she tries to, the dog jumps at her. It appears that she cannot perform either of the flight and fight responses, which have long been considered the only two attitudes in the face of a threat. Her last reaction, peeing on herself, can be interpreted as a sign of resignation.

Contrary to the passersby who watch the scene from a distance, *Matigari* shows a fight response because he chooses to cope with a problem rather than avoid it. He always chooses to confront injustice and repression whenever he sees it. For example, he does not hesitate to

defend Guthera while others stand by and fearfully watch. Indeed, the word fear appears in the novel for the first time in this scene. Matigari's condemnation of the incident is transparent and without appeal:

What is going on here? Are you going to let our children be made to eat shit while you stand around nodding in approval? How can you stand there watching the beauty of our land being trodden down by these beasts? What is so funny about that? Why do you hide behind a cloak of silence, and let yourselves be ruled by fear? Remember the saying that too much fear breeds misery in the land. (30-31)

For Matigari, the silence of society concerning those injustices is unacceptable because it condones the improper behavior of the police. This ties in well with the judgmental function of silence, which, in this situation, is seen by Matigari as approval. A similar remark was made in 1993 by Reverend Jesse Jackson about crimes committed against black people by other black people. He, too, believes that there "is a code of silence, based upon fear. Our silence is a sanctuary for killers and drug dealers" (qtd. in Royko; n. pag.). Matigari's condemnation of silence also matches Sartre's disapproval of writers who allowed repression to continue by writing nothing about it. Thus, for Sartre, writers must face their responsibilities because if every word comes with consequences, so does each silence (*Situations*, 13). This passage in *Matigari* is particularly revealing because it not only condemns fear but also establishes a causal link between fear and silence.

It is also worth noting that Matigari's anger is directed at the masses rather than the police. He does not blame the country's misery on the elite and the bourgeoisie alone. For him, part of the cause is to be found in the masses themselves because they are too afraid to speak up against injustice. For Matigari, therefore, fear has everything to do with that attitude, hence the saying that runs through the novel, with little variations in formulation: "Too much

fear breeds misery in the land” (76).³⁵ Matigari, for his part, refuses to yield to fear and, thereby, becomes the embodiment of courage and boldness, both interpreted as features of the fighting response. Neither prison nor psychiatric asylum have been able to stop him on his track toward truth and justice. This is not to say that he is fearless, for when he is asked the question afterward, he confesses that he, too, was scared. Nevertheless, for Matigari, people “have to learn to fight fear. We must wage war on the fear that has descended on this land. Fear itself is the enemy of the people. It breeds misery in the land” (170-71).³⁶ As Matigari’s words show, those who speak against injustice and exploitation have the same self-preservation mechanisms. But they have learned to dominate their fear of repression and developed a *fight* attitude in response to it. In *Matigari*, only a handful of characters, such as Matigari and Ngaruro wa Kiriro, dare to confront injustice. The overwhelming majority of the population has developed another type of attitude to deal with their fear of repression.

The second type of fear response, *flight*, is typical of the masses but best demonstrated in characters such as the teacher and the student. After their short stay in prison, with the student narrowly escaping police killing afterward, the teacher and the student adopt a flight response and stop seeking truth and justice. Even the mere mention of these words generates tremendous fear in them. When Matigari visits them both after their jailbreak, he is shocked to discover that fear has already made them forsake the positions they stood for a few days earlier:

‘Ssssshhh, stop talking so loudly,’ the teacher cautioned him. ‘Yesterday is gone and forgotten. Today is a new day. Tomorrow will be another day. Didn’t you hear

³⁵ The saying appears in different formulations throughout the novel: (Remember the saying that too much fear breeds misery in the land” (31), “Too much fear breeds misery in the land. Leave me in peace” (87), Great fear breeds great misery in the land” (90), told him that too much fear breeds misery in the land” (92), “Too much fear breeds misery in the land” (112), and “Fear itself is the enemy of the people. It breeds misery in the land” (171).

³⁶ Matigari’s words echo Franklin D. Roosevelt’s famous phrase during his inaugural address in 1933: “The only thing we have to fear is fear itself.”

that teachers and lecturers are being detained without trial? Look at me. I have a wife and two children. What will they eat if I am sent to prison? And all for asking too many questions! The ‘thief’ told us that there is a lot of wisdom in learning to keep one’s lips sealed. He ought to have added that there are people who reap benefits from singing the approved tune, those who dance in step with the approved dance. I have since been ordained into the order of cowardice and have joined the ranks of those whose lips are sealed. You’d better go. (92)

It is evident from this passage that the teacher’s attitude stands in clear opposition to Matigari’s courageous personality. His decision to remain silent in the face of injustice is motivated by his fear of prison and of seeing his family deprived of their livelihood. This quote also encapsulates what I have mentioned earlier on the state of democracy and freedom of expression in dictatorships, where exercising a constitutionally guaranteed right can lead to dire consequences. The teacher’s silence can also be analyzed by looking at two of the five factors that Kurzon used to explain the types of silence we find in his classification.³⁷ First, concerning intentionality, the teacher’s silence can be considered intentional since he willingly chooses not to talk about politics. Secondly, the source of his silence appears external because it is dictated by a conspiracy of silence and the prospect of repression. But does the fact that the government threatens to imprison him excuse his silence? Through the teacher’s words, we can see that Ngugi seeks to expose a most instinctual human drive to self-preserve and puts the reader in front of a moral dilemma that renders the teacher’s character more relatable. The teacher’s silence becomes less reprehensible once we understand the reasons that motivate him.

³⁷ For each silence in his typology Kurzon suggests five factors: the number of participants in the interaction, the identity of the text that is left unsaid, and the intention of the silent person, the psychological presence or non-presence of the silent person, and the source of the silence (1675-76). Only the last two elements are discussed in my text, mainly for two reasons. Firstly, because they can influence each other under some circumstances, and secondly, because most instances of silence that we will analyze in our base bibliography are deeply affected by both factors.

It has been noted earlier that this type of silence—*referential silence*—should be distinguished from silence as the absence of communication. While the latter may denote the absence of speech or communication at any given time, *referential silence* revolves around some information being transmitted. Here, it is worth noting that whenever Matigari asks questions about truth and justice, people never caution him to stop talking altogether. Instead, they only advise him not to ask certain kinds of questions. In the teacher's case, let us recall that he is imprisoned for the kind of information he shared in class. He has commented on Marx and Lenin: "Do you know what they based the allegations on? The fact that I stated that the political and economic systems of countries like the Soviet Union, China, Cuba and many other socialist countries are based on the teachings of Marx and Lenin" (54). The government's imprisonment of the teacher for his remarks raises many intriguing questions. One question I will answer in my chapter on surveillance is how the regime can know who has said something reprehensible. But one question that needs an immediate answer because it relates to silence: why is it normal and acceptable to talk about capitalism but criminal to talk about Marxism and Communism? Or what makes specific topics unpopular and unfit for public expression? To answer this question, Elisabeth Noelle-Neumann's *spiral of silence* seems an insightful concept to explore.

The spiral of silence in *Matigari*

We can see that in *Matigari*, the regime is pro-capitalist in its mode of production of goods and the redistribution of wealth. This fact is corroborated by Ngaruro wa Kiriro's use of such terms as *capital* and *labor* when describing the relationship between the workers and the factory owners (109). Their relationship is one in which the latter exploits the former—what has been defined as class struggle. As Marxism and Communism are associated with

promoting the rights of the working class, these ideologies and the values they defend have become unpopular in the face of public opinion. Noelle-Neumann defines public opinion as “the opinion which can be voiced in public without fear of sanctions and upon which action in public can be based” (44). According to her, the individual’s fear of isolation shapes how they express their public opinion. Therefore, before publicly expressing opinions, the individual first assesses the distribution of opinions in their social environment. Through this assessment, the individual can see which views are prevailing and which are losing ground. They tend to express themselves openly if their private opinions align with the dominating views. Yet, they are more inclined to remain silent if their views clash with the majority opinion. For Noelle-Neumann, the “tendency of the one to speak up and the other to be silent starts off a spiralling process which increasingly establishes one opinion as the prevailing one” (44). This assumption ...preference falsification

It follows from the preceding that silence depends not only on the controversial nature of a particular subject but also on the quality of the opinion—praise or criticism—expressed by others. In *Matigari*, Marxism is considered a controversial public topic, irrespective of the view expressed. To a pro-capitalist government, even pronouncing the word Marxism can be dangerous. Thus, in the novel, Marxism and communism are taboo subjects. Therefore, talking about Marxism can bring the government’s wrath on the individual unless one is in a position of power like the Minister for Truth and Justice. But even the Minister must strongly condemn Marxism lest he be charged with promoting it. Considering both the controversial nature of Marxism, the penchant of His Excellency Ole Excellence’s government for capitalism, and the quality of opinion expressed, we can conclude that punishment may follow in situations where the individual praises Marxism or criticizes capitalism. It is, thus, for fear of isolation or repression that some individuals take refuge in silence.

How does fear lead to silence?

In *Matigari*, Ngugi demonstrates that the kind of silence elicited by the fear of repression is not a natural or automatic response. Here, the hypothesis is that silence as an adaptive response characteristic of the masses in totalitarian countries is acquired through two distinct but complementary learning processes: fear conditioning at the individual level and the social transmission of fear, reinforced at the collective level. At the individual level, fear may arise from personal, direct experience with repression—a fear-inducing stimulus. In politics, repression is the word used to designate a variety of actions that involve the use of force to control an individual or a group of individuals. These actions include, but are not limited to, detention and torture, all of which can inflict pain and discomfort or, ultimately, lead to loss of life. Understandably, someone who has once been imprisoned or tortured will have a legitimate fear of prison. Even the thought of going through the same painful experience again can trigger either of the defensive mechanisms described above (also see Olsson et al.; Adolphs). However, this is merely an associative stage that neither tells the individual why repression occurs nor teaches him what their response to fear should be.

The learning process whereby the individual effectively learns to develop silence as a response to the fear of repression is known as *operant conditioning*. This concept was introduced by American psychologist and behaviorist Burrhus Frederic Skinner, who drew some of his insights from Edward Thorndike's law of effect. Though it is an ancient concept in psychological research, it is a classic notion explaining behavior and well worth considering. *Operant conditioning* can be defined as a learning process whereby the individual's behavior is acted upon through a system of reward and punishment (Staddon 87). Operant conditioning reward and punishment are related to experiments with animals but they can also help us understand how authoritarian regimes obtain obedience from their citizens—although in the political realm the use of terms such as “carrot” and “stick” is more common.

When this system of reward and punishment is transposed into the relationship between government and subject, the following assumption can be made. If criticism elicits repression, and silence elicits no repression, then praising the government must benefit the individual. In this chapter, I will only focus on repression.

It follows from the above that political repression does not occur randomly. It happens because of prior behavior—in this case, criticism of the government—and will continue until the individual produces the response the government wants. The primary aim of punishment is to weaken or eliminate misbehavior. In its secondary role, punishment may seek to teach another and more appropriate behavior (Lungu 77). The problem with punishment, however, is that it can fall short of both stated aims and produce undesirable effects on the individual's behavior. Studies on corporal punishment, for example, have demonstrated that using punishment to control misbehavior may cause the subject to become more aggressive as a proactive defense mechanism (Durrant and Ensom 1373). But how exactly does all this explain what we witness in *Matigari*?

As far as Matigari is concerned, the fact that he continues looking for truth and justice after imprisonment and psychiatric confinement shows that punishment has failed to silence him. We can even note a pattern of escalation from peaceful confrontation, girded with a belt of peace, towards radicalization as he finally decides to take arms. At the beginning of the novel, we see Matigari bury his AK 47 and his cartridge belt, saying to himself: “‘It’s good that I have now laid down my arms.’ He tore a strip of bark from a tree and girded himself with it, once again murmuring, ‘Instead, I have now girded myself with a belt of peace’” (4). The belt of peace is a recurrent image in *Matigari*, whereby Ngugi shows that we must always try to solve our problems diplomatically first. Even though he renounced violence, we also see Matigari, on multiple occasions, instinctively reach for his pistol before remembering that he has traded his cartridge belt for a belt of peace. For instance, this happens during his

confrontation with the two police officers terrorizing Guthera: Matigari moves his hand “to his waist in a gesture he had often performed during his years of struggle with Settler Williams in the mountains” (30). When he feels his gun is not there, he remembers his pledge to resolve things peacefully. Another interesting case of Matigari’s restraint unfolds during his encounter with Robert Williams, the white imperialist, and John Boy Junior, his black collaborator. When the latter uses his whip on Matigari, the automaticity kicks in again as “Matigari reached towards his waist. Then he remembered that he had girded himself with the belt of peace. He tried his best to endure the pain without letting it show; getting up slowly from where he lay, he held on to the gate for support” (47). But Matigari’s setbacks do not stop here, for his diplomacy also leads him to prison after receiving the whiplashes and to psychiatric confinement following an encounter with the Minister for Truth and Justice. Later, Matigari realizes the inefficacy of his approach and reflects as follows:

I believed that if I wore a belt of peace, I would be able to find truth and justice in this country. For it has been said that truth and justice are mightier than any armed power. That the enemy who is driven out peacefully, by negotiations, never comes back. But the one driven out by force alone always comes back. Yet where did that kind of thinking land me? First in prison, then in the mental hospital.

This passage, once again, shows Matigari’s desire to settle disputes peacefully. He laments that not only has his diplomacy failed to work things out, but all he receives in return is repression. Consequently, Matigari decides to speak the same language as the government: that of violence. In the novel’s final pages, we learn that “Matigari had already laid down the belt of peace. He would now return to the forests and the mountains and wear his belt of arms for a second struggle”—the first time being during the war against the colonialists (160). We can make a few conclusions from the above. The first is that Matigari always chooses to face his problems instead of running away from them. Second, the government’s punishment of Matigari’s behavior does not deter him from his quest but rather radicalizes him. Another

character that exhibits the same fighting spirit in *Matigari* is Ngaruro wa Kiriro. However, characters like these represent a minority in a population dominated by fear.

Successful conditioning: the teacher and the student have learned their lesson

The teacher and the student are perfect examples of successful fear conditioning. They stand in opposition to Matigari. The government has detained both for exercising their right to freedom of expression, more precisely for using it to express a view contrary to public opinion. In the present case, punishment aims to change how the teacher and the student express their opinion. Freedom of expression can be used to criticize or praise the government. In *Matigari*, asking questions about how the country is run and making comments about communism are considered criticism and bad publicity for the regime. Hence, repression ensues whenever the individual uses his right to speak freely to criticize the government. Repressive methods such as prison and torture aim to prevent the dissenters from criticizing the regime. By using violence, the government hopes its victims will renounce their freedom of expression or use it to say positive things. Silence, then, appears as a middle ground for the individual who is neither daring enough to criticize the government nor willing to compromise their integrity by praising it. Indeed, silence is not what an authoritarian government would rather have, but it will be perfectly fine with silence as a response. At first glance, silence seems to be neither praise nor criticism. This way, repression is not even necessary. The teacher and the student have chosen to remain silent because they fear the

consequences of criticizing the government. However, as logical as their response to state violence can be, their stance remains morally inadmissible.³⁸

This kind of fear response, also called “defensive silence,” has been extensively studied concerning employee silence in organizations (see Deniz et al.; Wynen et al.). According to Deniz et al., it “involves the individual weighing up the alternatives and making a conscious choice to withhold ideas information and opinions as the safest option for the individual at that point in time” (693). Although this definition in the context of organizational silence, it can also help us understand how silence works in the wider context of national politics. One reason for this analogy between organization and state is that the violence of state authoritarianism renders such research in the field of oppressive African politics too dangerous for such academic questioning. As we have learned from the literature review on Farah, this analogy is also justified because the authoritarianism of the state is merely a replication of what is happening on a smaller scale in organizations or our homes. For example, in organizations, abusive supervision can provoke fear and defensive silence (see Kiewitz et al.). On the global political scene, surveillance would be the equivalent of abusive organizational supervision, yielding a similar defensive silence. So, we can say that silence is the safest option for the characters of the teacher and the student because they have experienced repression personally and do not want to be punished again. Therefore, their fear of prison and their choice of silence are logical. However, this still does not tell us why other people who have never experienced political repression personally exhibit not only the fear of it but also provide the adaptive response expected from them. How do they know that they must remain silent?

In countries where dictators rule, the masses have been conditioned to resort to silence as an adaptive response through the *social learning of fear*, i.e., learning fear through

³⁸ See above, p. 103. Matigari interprets this kind of silence as complicity with the oppressor.

observation or via verbal instruction. For example, it has been demonstrated, especially in the case of observational learning, that socially acquired fear involves “the same, or similar, associative learning mechanisms” as conditioned fear (Olsson et al. 4). Again, this is derived from experiments on animals but it explains why the masses in *Matigari*, who have not had a direct experience of repression, will nevertheless express the same fear: they have already seen or heard of someone suffering terrible consequences for questioning how the elite run the country. An excellent example of this process occurs during a meeting with the minister for Truth and Justice, the purpose of which is to settle a workers’ strike. The verdict given by the minister ignores all of the workers’ demands. It unilaterally approves the company owners’ exploitative practices by declaring the end of the strike and banning all strikes across the country. To finish, the minister warns that a strike against the company will be considered a strike against the government, and so will any act of provocation, insult, or abuse against the company. It is after these declarations that the Minister invites questions from the assembly.

Ngaruro wa Kiri, a worker at the exploitative company, stands up and comments on the minister’s partial judgment. Because he challenges the Minister for Truth and Justice’s decision, he is arrested for being insolent and for breaking the “law of *sedition* and *treason*” (110, original italics). Thus, before the very eyes of the people, Ngaruro is grabbed by two policemen and thrown into a room with some of the fugitives who have escaped prison. We read that people “started shouting and arguing. The police commissioner blew the whistle. The riot police stood in the doorway and at the windows. A hush fell over the room. The people were trapped” (111). This is a clear signal that eventual challenges to the minister’s declaration will be met with the same response. It is only after this demonstration of force that the minister asks, again, if there are any more questions. His question receives no response. No one dares to say a word after witnessing what happened to Ngaruro. The repression that Ngaruro suffered and the threat of future repression have created an atmosphere of fear in the

crowd. What we witness here, as Serge Chakotin observes in *The Rape of the Masses: The Psychology of Totalitarian Political Propaganda*, is the goal of a threat of repression or a menace, i.e., “to produce fear, in order to inhibit any inclination to resistance to the menacer” (74). In the present case, the threat of repression against the assembly seems to work because no one tries to prevent the police from dragging Matigari, the teacher, and the student into a backroom pending their trial.

A farcical justice in a pseudo democracy

Due to the atmosphere of fear generated by the threat of violence, the Minister has to repeat his question twice before Matigari decides to confront him. As said earlier, Matigari is not ruled by fear, and we see him break the code of silence again while everyone else is petrified. Matigari steps forward and tells the assembly how he fought and killed the colonialists and Settler William and his servant John Boy in the forests only to come out and see that the same injustices that had driven him into the forests are still operating even after the colonists’ departure. After submitting his questions to the Minister for Truth and Justice, Matigari is arrested and whisked into the same back room as Ngaruro wa Kiri, pending trial. As said before, in the fictional country of *Matigari*, the most basic freedoms are not respected, and the government controls the judiciary. Ngugi signals this lack of independence of the judiciary cleverly by showing the Minister for Truth and Justice boasting of the democratic drift of his country:

I want you, together with our visitors from USA, Britain, West Germany and France, to witness how the law works in a country under Christian democracy. In some countries I know of, criminals such as these would have been hanged, or made to face the firing-squad. But here everything must be done under the law. For instance, I am the Minister for Truth and Justice, but even I must abide by the law.

So I must accept the verdict that has been reached by these gentlemen, because I too am under the law, *and I believe in the independence of the judiciary*. Right, I want you all to listen to this verdict very carefully. (120, original italics)

Here, the Minister's words echo what I said earlier about the democratic façade of some authoritarian regimes that censor and punish their citizens through arbitrary laws. The Minister speaks of the law, but a law can violate constitutional rights—as is the case in the present situation. The second incoherence in the Minister's words is his insistence on *the independence of the judiciary*. This supposed independence is virtually non-existent in dictatorships where the government controls the judges. Besides, Matigari's conviction is based on the false testimony of an informer who has infiltrated Matigari's prison cell. More precisely, the hooded informer told the judges that Matigari "shared his bread and beer in goal in clear imitation of Christ's Last Supper" (123). As I shall discuss in the next chapter, this is a distortion of reality because it was not Matigari but the drunkard who did so. Another element that the judges considered is Matigari's story about his struggle against the colonialist Settler Williams and his black servant, John Boy, in the forests. Official historiography tells a different version of the same story, and the Minister believes Matigari "must be out of his mind" because his version contradicts the government's.

The third reason why the judges have decided to confine Matigari is that he is asking strange questions. When another person continues reading the verdict, the Minister submits the following question to the audience: "And the sort of questions he is asking, are they the sort of questions which would come from sane heads like yours or mine?" (124). He suggests that someone in his right mind will not ask questions about truth and justice. Earlier in this chapter, we encountered this reasoning when Matigari confronts the two policemen harassing Guthera. While one of them thinks Matigari is that bold because "he might even be an eminent person dressed plainly," the other tells Matigari that he is crazy (32). The second time, the murderer cautions Matigari in prison that his questions will lead him to a mental

hospital (61). Now, the Minister for Truth and Justice also invokes the act of asking about truth and justice as a clear indication that Matigari is mad. All of these incidents have in common that they say Matigari is mad because he does not yield to fear and asks questions others are afraid to ask. But let us pause momentarily and ask the following question: who would we rather say is mad here? Matigari and Ngaruro, who courageously expose the uncomfortable truth, or the fearful masses, who yield to fear and remain silent?

Although it is too early to give a final answer to this question, I am inclined to think that specialists like Gustave Le Bon, Joost Meerloo, and Serge Chakotin, who have studied the phenomena of authoritarianism and mass delusion, would choose the second category. Their studies tend to associate submission to authoritarian terror and conditioning with madness. To give an example, in *The Rape of the Mind: The Psychology of Thought Control, Menticide, and Brainwashing*, Meerloo writes:

The weapon of terror has been used by tyrants from time immemorial to make a meek instrument of man. In Totalitaria, the use of this weapon is refined to a science which can wipe out all opposition and dissent.^[39] The leaders of Totalitaria rule by intimidation; they prefer loyalty through fear to loyalty through faith. Fear and terror freeze the mind and will; they may create a general psychic paralysis.

(126)

What Meerloo says in the quote above is comparable to Chakotin's remark on using menace to inhibit any attempt at resistance (see above, p. 114). However, Meerloo teaches us something new about the effect of such intimidation on the mind. He coined the word *menticide* to describe totalitarian governments' assault on the minds of their citizens through various techniques, including terror and propaganda. When it is successful, *menticide*, which means "the killing of the mind," plunges society into what many have called mass delusion or

³⁹ Meerloo uses the name "Totalitaria" to denote the ideal totalitarian state.

madness. To partially answer the question posed above, it seems logical to argue that it is not Matigari who is mad but those who remain silent due to totalitarian terror. However, as regards madness, I will leave it at this for now because there are more pressing and intermediary issues to explore before we can satisfactorily understand the implications of madness in totalitarian contexts.

In conclusion to this section, we can say that *Matigari* is not only a denunciation of political injustice in the postcolonial world. The novel is, first and foremost, a stark condemnation of *fearful silence*. I have described this form of silence as referential because it relates to the kind of information that is not mentioned in a conversation. Through referential silence, characters like the teacher and the student voluntarily avoid making explicit references to political incompetence and social injustice. As has been demonstrated, their behavior is caused by the fear of many forms of repression, ranging from imprisonment to death. By acting this way, however, they allow government impunity to endure. This explains why Matigari not only condemns *fearful silence* but also declares fear the enemy of the people. Yet, at the same time, Ngugi makes the character of Matigari look too severe and uncompromising by letting characters such as the teacher and the student reveal their most intimate fears. But can't Matigari understand that the teacher and the student have legitimate fears? The moral dilemma raised by such a dualist position is an indirect question to the reader: what would he do were he in the teacher's shoes? And what sort of moral judgment would it pass on the teacher's fearful silence if he were in Matigari's shoes? For his part, Matigari does not accept any justification for silence and consistently refuses to heed the warnings that his question will cause him trouble. But is silence always bad? I answered this question at the beginning of this chapter when I suggested that silence is better than speaking in some circumstances. And this seems to be the case in *Matigari*.

From fearful to protective silence: has Matigari said too much?

Before ending this chapter, I want to point to Ngugi's dualistic portrayal of silence in *Matigari*. When Matigari is arrested and thrown in prison, he and his cellmates take turns explaining their imprisonment stories. Everyone has told his story except a man who seems interested in Matigari and keeps asking him questions: "The man who had not yet spoken now cleared his throat. Addressing Matigari, he said, "May I ask you a question? You say that you returned from the forest this morning. Where are your weapons? Where did you leave them? Or did you have them on you when you were arrested?" (62). These questions should have made Matigari uneasy and weary, but he has his own philosophy on asking questions and tells the man that he has no problems answering his questions: "You may ask me as many questions as you like. I say questions are the gateway to wisdom and knowledge. Show me a person who does not ask questions, and I will show you an idiot." But as Matigari continues answering the man's questions one after the other, another prisoner, the one accused of murder, feels the need to warn him:

A prudent person keeps their mouth shut. I had better repeat it to you because a leader who does not accept advice is no leader. The forest in the heart is never cleared of all the wood. One carefully selects what to cut and what to leave. I do not know you, and you do not know me. There are a lot of police informers in the country. Whenever you find twelve people gathered, one of them will always be an informer, a traitor. (63-64)

Ignoring this precious advice, Matigari reveals his plan to reclaim his house to all present. The murderer's suspicion is later validated during the worker's meeting with the Minister for Truth and Justice, who confirms that the "government has eyes and ears all over" and that there was an informant among the prisoners the day Matigari was arrested (117). The

informant, wearing a hood to conceal his identity, then serves as a witness for the judges who sentence Matigari and the other detainees to confinement in a psychiatric hospital.

Throughout the novel, the character of Matigari demonstrates courage by standing up against injustice and great wisdom through his speech. In this sense, he cannot be seen as an incarnation of Pythagoras's wise man, who is known for his silence. Matigari's wisdom comes from his words. But as wise as Matigari is in his words, the fact remains that he has also been imprudent by saying too much about his plan. Matigari should have kept silent about certain details and act only in due time. By talking carelessly, he compromises his mission and risks his life. The Bible also warns against the dangers of talking and the benefits of silence. Proverbs 13:3, for example, reads that he "that keepeth his mouth keepeth his life: but he that openeth wide his lips shall have destruction" (King James Version).⁴⁰ We see a form of silence in this verse that protects the silent person, but the context of this quote can be misleading since it does not say in what situation one ought to be silent. The same applies to Pythagoras's phrase, or the character of the murderer's warning when taken out of context. For example, when the teacher reminds Matigari of these words, he only quotes the part that says, "there is a lot of wisdom in learning to keep one's lips sealed" (92). But the murderer has contextualized his warning, which is about speaking selectively. The kind of silence recommended by the murderer differs from the *fearful silence*, which Matigari has always condemned.

Considering the preceding, I am inclined to argue that Ngugi's Matigari symbolizes the dual nature of silence: silence in the face of injustice is bad, but silence can also be a good strategy in a police country. It is this second form of silence that I wish to explore in Chapter Seven. But instead of investigating this theme in *Matigari*, I turn to Farah's *Sweet and Sour*

⁴⁰ The meaning of this verse is made more explicit in other Bible versions, where we find terms such as "careless talker, speak rashly, or talk too much."

Milk, whose repressive atmosphere provides more cases for analysis. Another reason for this choice, as stated at the beginning of this chapter, is that in Farah's fictional Somalia, we have an underground group plotting to overthrow the regime and a regime that relies on surveillance and torture to thwart the plans of its enemies. In the face of such insidious and cruel techniques, some characters must rely on *protective silence* to protect their plans and those involved.

Chapter Seven

Surveillance and Protective Silence in *Sweet and Sour Milk*

This Chapter discusses Farah's characterization of *protective silence* as a resistance strategy against abusive state surveillance in *Sweet and Sour Milk*. Farah's characterization of silence in *Sweet and Sour Milk* is, in many respects, comparable to Ngugi's in *Matigari*. Regarding *fearful silence*, the reasons some characters use to justify their silence resemble those used by the teacher in *Matigari*. In *Sweet and Sour Milk*, Farah undoubtedly makes a connection between silence in the face of political injustice and fear when one of his characters, Ibrahim, explains to Loyaan, the protagonist, that the citizens are inarticulate with fear and

prefer not to speak. 'I have a wife and children to take care of,' one of them would say to you. 'I have an aged mother and a family to care for, to maintain,' another would tell you. 'My neck is not longer than yours. Extend yours. But I won't. I have open mouths to feed. To feed these open mouths, I need to close mine. When not closed, my mouth helps me to masticate not formulate thoughts.' You hear these or variations of these. (151-52)

As this quote suggests, fear is the principal reason people remain silent in totalitarian states. I have already discussed how this form of silence is elicited and maintained in *Matigari*. Due to the similarities between how both Farah and Ngugi treat this subject in their novels, I decided

to explore the characterization of another form of silence in *Sweet and Sour Milk* instead of repeating the same conclusions. Besides, the overall authoritarian atmosphere of the *Variations* trilogy and Farah's explicit approach to the themes of surveillance and torture amply justify the exploration of this form of silence in that novel.

Various dictionaries define *surveillance* as a close watch kept over a person, an object, or a place for information gathering. In more specific contexts, such as politics and security, it can be defined as monitoring a criminal, a suspect, or a place where a crime is expected to happen. The final goal of surveillance can be the exploitation of the collected information for the prevention and investigation of crime, or for the maintaining of law and order. Galic and his colleagues explain that surveillance has "a certain purpose, which can be controlling and disciplining the subject into certain forms of behaviour or a set of norms, but also—possibly at the same time—protecting and caring for that subject" (10). This explanation shows that surveillance can be conducted for good or bad reasons. In the context of *Sweet and Sour Milk*, the reasons for state surveillance are ominous and only serve the regime's need to maintain itself in power.

From Orwellian surveillance to Foucauldian discipline in Farah's

Variations

In literature, George Orwell's *1984* is often cited as the prime example of a fictional work on oppressive mass surveillance. The totalitarian potential of surveillance described in that book is often compared with modern-day surveillance practices. In "The Representation of Surveillance Society in Dystopian Novels and Contemporary Society," Emilie Kaleta and Johanne Skall Sorensen explore, in three novels (including *1984*), the role of surveillance in creating political compliance, which in turn allows the totalitarian regime to maintain its

control over its population. Similarly, focusing on how propaganda and surveillance work in tandem to create social control of behavior and thought, Michael Yeo views Orwell's *1984* as "an important point of reference in both literatures [of propaganda and surveillance]" (49). Farah's *Variations* is comparable to *1984* as a work of fiction in many respects. Some of the most obvious similarities between both works center around themes such as surveillance, torture, and propaganda.

Interestingly, in his Foucauldian reading of Farah's oeuvre in *The Disorder of Things*, John Masterson not only sees many similarities between Orwell's *1984* and Farah's *Variations* trilogy but also establishes a dialogue between "Foucault's reflections on power, body, resistance, disciplinary institutions and biopower" and "some of the most urgent concerns of Farah's oeuvre" (Chapter 1, n. pag.) Masterson's Foucauldian reading applies several of Foucault's critical reflections to Farah's three novels, with a different topical focus from one to the next. For my part, I am only interested in what Masterson has to say about the *Variations* trilogy. Masterson makes some engaging propositions that go in the direction of my argumentation regarding the issue of surveillance in this chapter and of torture in the next one. Masterson's appeal to Foucault to make sense of Farah is amply justified by the panoptic and labyrinthine mechanisms that allow the General in the *Variations* trilogy to secure his hold on power:

The carceral environs of the *Variations* series demonstrate how and why Farah is equally preoccupied with circuitous, surveying systems of power. The individual novels, however, return the reader to this very 'dark room', suggesting that tyranny can flourish when panoptic and labyrinthine disciplinary schemes fuse. (Chapter 1, n. pag.)

Jeremy Bentham is credited with coining the term panopticon. However, Foucault's theoretical propositions on the new modes of power enabled by Bentham's invention make the concept of panoptic power a cornerstone in understanding the foundations of surveillance

and control mechanisms. Designed in the eighteenth century, the theory of panoptical control advocates for an architectural design and a control mechanism intended to obtain discipline.⁴¹ For Bentham, the panopticon will have multiple applications. It can be used in “all establishments whatsoever, in which, within a space not too large to be covered or commanded by buildings, a number of persons are meant to be kept under” (4). Though the purposes vary from one institution to the other, the panopticon, in all its applications, will invariably pursue one main goal: self-discipline.⁴² This will be achieved, not so much because the prisoners are under continuous scrutiny but because they will have been made to believe so.

In *Discipline and Punish*, Michel Foucault builds upon Bentham’s architectural design and suggests that the panopticon represents an essential transformation of the discipline program. For Foucault, the panopticon also marks a radical shift in how power is exercised and maintained in society. The application of the panoptic design, which advocates for more humane practices in the treatment of criminals, was a departure from public executions and other corporal punishments as a means to correct and fashion the individual’s behavior.⁴³ Power was then exercised more diffusely by isolating criminals from the rest of society and segmenting the carceral population so they could be easily controlled. In Foucault’s terms, Bentham’s panopticon individualizes power by separating the crowd into a collection of

⁴¹ Architecturally, the panopticon takes the form of a prison building with the cells arranged in a circle facing the center. In the center is placed an observation tower from which an in. Inversely, the design is made so as not to allow the prisoner to see the inspector inside the tower or any other prisoner in their cell.

⁴² Bentham acknowledges that each establishment may have its own purpose for using the panopticon, which may be different or even opposite to the purposes of other bodies:

No matter how different, or even opposite the purpose: whether it be that of punishing the incorrigible, guarding the insane, reforming the vicious, confining the suspected, employing the idle, maintaining the helpless, curing the sick, instructing the willing in any branch of industry, or training the rising race in the path of education: in a word, whether it be applied to the purposes of perpetual prisons in the room of death, or prisons for confinement before trial, or penitentiary-houses, or houses of correction, or work-houses, or manufactories, or mad-houses, or hospitals, or schools. (3)

⁴³ However, as Foucault suggests, public execution must not be seen only as a judicial ritual, but also as a political one. Because every order being enforced in the kingdom comes from the king or be approved by him, breaking any such law is also considered an attack on the king’s dignity (*Discipline* 47).

separated individualities. Owing to the architectural design of the panopticon, the exercise of power becomes automatic and continuous. As far as the prisoners are concerned, they are incapable of knowing the times they are being watched from the moments they are not being watched. An impression of constant surveillance is thus instilled in the convicts who will behave with self-discipline.

Bentham believed that the apparent omnipresence of the inspector, coupled with the facility of his actual presence, would make the panopticon “the noblest and brightest engine of discipline” (124-25). For Foucault, however, the panopticon represents an ingenious but cruel cage. It is a cruel means of retribution not because it inflicts physical pain on the bodies of the criminals but because while possessing their bodies, it acts on their minds. Its ingenuity lies in putting the condemned in “a power situation of which they are themselves the bearers” (*Discipline* 201). Foucault coined the term *panopticism* to designate this new physics of power, “a physics of relational and multiple power, which has its maximum intensity not in the body of the king, but in the bodies that can be individualized by these relations” (208). With individualization of power relation, Foucault emphasizes, the individual becomes a subject of information. This is made possible through surveillance mechanisms and instruments that analyze and document as much information as possible on every individual. Undeniably, the purposes that Bentham assigned to the panopticon were noble, and the mechanisms of surveillance that it gave birth to were meant to be democratically controlled to prevent any abuse of power.⁴⁴ But in practice, these noble purposes have, in many cases, been redefined to suit the needs and fancies of tyrannical regimes across the globe. As I will discuss below, this also happens in Farah’s *Variations* trilogy.

⁴⁴ The control by the public and democratic hierarchy of supervision is intended to prevent abuse. In the novels we study, however, we see that there is no supervision from the public. In worst-case scenarios, the family of the incarcerated individual will not even know where they are being held.

Surveillance in Sweet and Sour Milk

Before discussing how Farah approaches authoritarian surveillance through fiction, I would like to take a few sentences to explain why dictatorships, like the one that is the subject of Farah's trilogy, heavily rely on surveillance and investigative torture. According to Raul Magni Berton and Sophie Panel, opposition parties in democracies are more likely to wait than to rebel against an unwanted leader "because they are aware that an institutional mechanism exists to get rid of the leader" (3). In dictatorships, on the other hand, people are more likely to rebel and take arms since the prospect of removing the dictator through elections is virtually nil. In the absence of free and transparent elections, Magni Berton and Panel contend, a "change in leader can be expected to occur only through the leader's death or through a revolution" (3). By leader's death, the authors primarily emphasize the natural death of the dictator since their study centers around aging dictators. However, the case scenario we have in the *Variations* trilogy points to the possibility of an assassination of the tyrant as the only way of removing him from power. Because the General in the trilogy is relatively young and is not likely to die naturally anytime, some characters have decided to take the matter into their own hands and kill him. And since no dictator wants to be removed from power, let alone assassinated, he naturally employs surveillance and torture to gather information about any plan of rebellion or assassination.

Thus, the need for surveillance in a totalitarian country can have many justifications, including those that are considered salutary in democracies—preventing crime or protecting state interests. However, in addition to practice or surveillance for noble causes, authoritarian states often surveil their citizens for more sinister reasons. As against Foucault and Bentham's belief that there is no risk that "the increase of power created by the panoptic machine may degenerate into tyranny" (Foucault, *Discipline* 207), the *Variations* trilogy presents the reader with an authoritarian regime that uses part of the panoptic mechanism in a tyrannical fashion

in combination with newer techniques of surveillance such as wiretapping and shadowing. For instance, during a discussion between Loyaan and Margaritta, we learn that the late Soyaan's telephone was "under control" and that "his movements had been bugged" (127). These two surveillance techniques show us that the general's surveillance apparatus does not rely on panoptic mechanisms, which essentially rely on optics. The methods of the General are more modern and are based on the technological possibilities of the epoch. For example, an unsigned piece of writing found in the fold of a pillowcase Soyaan has used makes a solid case against the General's methods of ruling: how he relies on tribal affiliations to secure his power, the Security Service's abduction of political opponents, and the regime's primitive torture techniques. The document's author was also sure about one thing: "The methods of the General and of the KGB are not dissimilar, I can tell you" (36-37). The comparison is not anodyne: on the one hand, it justifiably points to a similarity in methods, and on the other, it also exposes Russia's influence in the fictional Somalia of the *Variations* trilogy.

The awareness that the regime uses modern KGB-like techniques such as wiretapping and shadowing puts informed characters constantly on the lookout. The alertness of the protagonist in *Sweet and Sour Milk* is evidence of the extent to which the General's surveillance methods can render the population suspicious, mistrusting, and even paranoid. The primary object of Soyaan's alertness is a one-armed beggar who seems to follow him everywhere. Loyaan sees the man for the second time at his brother's burial:

Loyaan's noble hand extended forward to the beggar nearest him. The receiver stretched toward him a left hand. A weird specimen of a beggar, thought Loyaan as he took, with a grain of sand, the insolence of the left hand which the beggar had brought out to receive charity. The man didn't have the pose of a beggar. When all movement had ceased, when Loyaan's suspended right hand weighed upon the air and the beggar's left hand held what had remained of it, there crossed a flash of

understanding across the man's face: he displayed the stump of his amputated right arm. Loyaan dropped his guard and smiled. (47)

In this scene, we can see that the beggar arouses Loyaan's suspicion when he uses his left hand to receive his donation. When he senses that Loyaan is displeased with his lack of respect, the beggar tries to lessen the malaise by showing his benefactor that he has only one arm. But Loyaan is not entirely convinced and is "[s]erious to the point of wanting to touch the amputated arm" before presenting his apologies to the man (48). But Loyaan's doubts about the one-armed beggar only grow firmer after he comes across the same man on other occasions in different locations: "Loyaan saw the one-armed man whom he twice previously had encountered. But why, why would a one-armed man follow him everywhere he went? He reminded himself that he shouldn't become paranoid" (78). But is Loyaan just being paranoid, or are his suspicions founded? The one-armed man has made such an impression on Loyaan that he starts having nightmares about him: "He started, and woke up lying in sweat just before dawn break. He was being pursued, he was being chased by a one-armed beggar in green tatters, wearing a starry uniform of some sort" (139).

Two reasons can answer the question. First, as the novel unfolds, readers are led to believe that Loyaan is being followed because of his questions about his twin brother's death and that the surveillance began only after the tragedy. However, the regime's surveillance of Loyaan could also have begun earlier. The second reason the regime would want Loyaan followed relates to his twin brother's political projects. Soyaan belonged to a clandestine intellectual movement plotting a coup against the regime. As we delve deeper into the other novels of the *Variations* trilogy, we learn that the regime knows about the underground group's intention and has devised some mechanisms to counter their activities. Surveillance, thus, comes in handy for any government that suspects some individuals of preparing a crime against the state. Not only will the government find it necessary to keep a close watch on suspected individuals and their places of gathering, but it will also monitor their closest

relatives and even their homes. This suggests that Loyaan was already followed long before his brother's death. Considering these reasons, we understand how the surveillance apparatus works in *Variations*.

Farah's criticism of the abusive surveillance in *Sweet and Sour Milk* also points to a similarity between the General and Dionysus, the Syracusan tyrant who built a cave in the form of an ear to secretly listen to what the prisoners say to one another. Commenting on a memorandum titled "Dionysus's Ear," Ibrahim, a friend of Soyaan's, argues that this surveillance mode is comparable to that of the General as information on suspected dissidents is collected mainly by word of mouth. For the General's Security Service to fulfill its missions, they "recruit their main corps from illiterates, men and women who belong to an oral tradition, and who neither read nor write but report daily, report what they hear as they hear it, word by word" (148). Commenting further on the techniques of the General, Ibrahim sadly remarks that people have been made suspicious of one another because of the "security system whose planted ears have sprouted in every homestead" (151).⁴⁵ In *Sweet and Sour Milk*, it is no secret for the characters that the General has a surveillance apparatus that includes not only police officers in plain clothes but also ordinary people whose task is to report the actions and the words of suspected enemies and their close collaborators. The citizens' knowledge of this fact hence creates not only attitudes of self-discipline but also an atmosphere of suspicion, mistrust, and fear, which the regime fosters through repression, as Felix Mnthali notes (56), or the physical manifestation of power as Foucault would call it (57). Part of the self-discipline means not talking too loudly in public when discussing matters relating to the General's tyrannical rule. In such an oppressive environment, the family circle becomes the only safe place where characters confide without fearing for their lives. Thus, in

⁴⁵ Also in *Matigari*, the Minister for Truth and Justice confirms during his visit that the government has eyes and ears everywhere (104).

discussion of the relationship between brothers and sisters in Farah's works, Jacqueline Bardolph sees the home as a closed space. Family members share secrets in this refuge, "where rumors and propaganda are assessed and where ethical and practical modes of survival are contemplated" (728). Bardolph's assessment of the protective sphere beyond family members is that it is dangerous to share one's ideas because it is difficult to know with certainty whom the regime employs as an informer.

The deceased Soyaan is the twin brother of our protagonist. He is mainly known to be an official in the General's government. However, his public position is at odds with his private political views. He does work for the General, but he also belongs to the underground movement conspiring to topple the regime. His political views are known inside the family and accepted to various degrees by its members. His twin brother, Loyaan, and his sister, Ladan, know and accept his views. Their father, Keynaan, also knows but cannot understand why his son would want to risk his life for his political ideals. Their mother, Qumman, seems ignorant of Soyaan's genuine political stance before his death. But as I will discuss later in Chapter Ten, the problem with her is that she refuses to see the truth about Soyaan's disapproval of the General politics when Loyaan tries to explain the situation. A short while after his twin brother has died, Loyaan starts reflecting on the possible causes of his death. However, based on what he knows about his deceased brother's political affiliations, on the one hand, and pieces of writing found in his belongings, on the other, Loyaan begins suspecting that the government might have killed Soyaan for his political views and underground activities. This is the lead that he follows throughout the novel, and it is, indeed, a serious accusation to make against a government that does not tolerate adverse publicity. If Loyaan wants answers, he must investigate and talk to people without drawing unnecessary attention from the regime. The deceased Soyaan had friends, many of whom Loyaan is acquainted with. The problem that Loyaan now faces is to know which of his brother's friends

he can share his hypotheses, suspicions, and findings with. Besides the abusive surveillance tactics deployed by the General, trust issues are further complicated by the tribal affiliations that the General skillfully exploits.

The atmosphere of suspicion and mistrust exposed above calls for a certain verbal selectiveness. Let us here recall the piece of advice Matigari has received from the murderer: “The forest in the heart is never cleared of all the wood. One carefully selects what to cut and what to leave. I do not know you, and you do not know me. There are a lot of police informers in the country” (*Matigari* 63-64). What the murderer says about his country in *Matigari* is equally valid in Farah’s fictional Somalia in the *Variations* trilogy. For instance, Loyaan’s mother plays the safeguarding role in *Sweet and Sour Milk*. She has been particularly suspicious of Loyaan’s frequentations after Soyaan’s death. One is Ahmed-Wellie, a friend of Soyaan’s, who is tribally related to the General. Another is Margaritta, Soyaan’s secret lover and mother of his child. The third person Qumman cautions Loyaan not to see is Beydan, her younger co-wife, whom she accuses of poisoning Soyaan.

But all these characters, whom Qumman warns Loyaan not to see, hold the keys that could help him unravel his brother’s death mystery. It seems that Loyaan cannot talk to these people without exposing himself. But then, how can he do so without getting misled? For Loyaan, one solution to this puzzle is prudence. He understands that he can talk to these people he does not know intimately without saying too much:

Prudenza! He wouldn’t tell him all that she had said. He wouldn’t show him any of the papers the family had found in Soyaan’s pockets, either. Nor would he share with him all those confidential things he had been told. A friend of Soyaan’s, yes. But so was Ahmed-Wellie. And Qumman had suspicions he might be up to something wicked. *Prudenza paga!* Just as he hadn’t told anybody anything so far. (*Sweet* 150, original capitals)

As we see in this passage taken from a conversation between Loyaan and Ibrahim, another friend of the late Soyaan's, the protagonist does not trust his brother's friends. And even though he has decided to go against his mother's advice, he always has her warning somewhere in his mind. The lack of trust induced by the surveillance mechanisms of the regime thus leads the protagonist to observe a certain kind of protective silence, which consists in speaking selectively.

But as cautious as Loyaan has been throughout his investigative journey, he cannot escape the eyes and ears of the regime. One day, while participating in a communal street-sweeping activity, Loyaan's suspicion about the strange beggar following him everywhere is confirmed. In the crowd, he sees three men "in neatly pressed trousers, three men who had each borrowed a broom from the women. Behind them was the one-armed man" who has been following him everywhere (213). They ask Loyaan to follow them quietly and take him to a secret place after blindfolding him and confusing his senses by driving in circles (215). But for what reason did the regime order Loyaan's abduction? After letting Loyaan sit in a dark room for a while, a man enters, asks if the man in front of him is Loyaan Keynaan, and claims he is a friend of Soyaan's. After this brief introduction, the man does not beat around the bush and goes straight to the point: "My superiors have been angered by the adverse publicity you've given to Soyaan's name. I've been asked to speak to you," the man first says. He then takes his cigar out of his mouth, licks his lips, replaces it in his mouth, and says, "My superiors are disturbed by what you have said. My men have reported back indiscretions: 'Loyaan this, Loyaan that'. The Minister to the Presidency has asked me to tell you that we've not seen nor heard of the memorandums, nor of Mulki" (218). As the man's words show, Loyaan was not paranoid when he previously felt someone was following him. As soon as he has the opportunity, Loyaan asks his interlocutor: "Why does a one-armed man follow me everywhere I go?" (223). After describing the man, Loyaan has his suspicion confirmed, but

only partly: yes, the regime has assigned a couple of men with shadowing him, but the one-armed man is not one of them. “Maybe from another service,” his interlocutor adds (223). The fact that this man does not even try to deny the allegations of surveillance shows how confident the regime is about its intrusive methods. But Loyaan’s abduction shows another important thing about the General’s regime: it not only has eyes and ears that report the movements and words of its suspected enemies but also hands that can get hold of bodies and bring them to secret prisons where they are tortured.

Chapter Eight

Torture and Silence in *Sweet and Sour Milk*

When the surveillance of suspected dissenters fails to produce the information needed, a more direct method may be called into play to make the victims talk. Torture can be defined as intentionally inflicting extreme physical or mental pain on someone for many reasons, including, but not limited to, revenge, extortion, punishment, intimidation, coercion, or any sadistic practice. The United Nations Convention against Torture is particularly concerned with torture in the political realm. It defines political torture as any of the acts described above perpetrated “by or at the instigation of or with the consent or acquiescence of a public official or other person acting in an official capacity” (Article 1). Though my research focuses on authoritarian regimes, it shall be necessary to state from the outset that torture is not exclusive to such regimes. As Tracy Lightcap states in *The Politics of Torture*, recent comparative and quantitative studies of torture show that autocratic and democratic regimes resort to torture under specific threats. Except for the fact that democratic regimes are “less likely to engage in torture when not under threat,” its use is identical in both types of regimes (7-8). As Lightcap’s words show, even though democratic and dictatorial regimes use torture, the latter are more characterized by the use of torture on a routine basis. But why would an

authoritarian government torture its citizens?

Political torture always happens for many different reasons. In his analysis of judicial procedure and punishment in eighteenth-century France, then a kingdom, Foucault states that there were two kinds of political torture: judicial torture, which served to produce the truth of the crime, and public torture, which served as punishment for a crime (*Discipline* 39, 44). Nowadays, most kingdoms have given way to republics, and the exercise of power and the administration of justice are no longer the exclusive domains of royalty. The new modes of governance, i.e., republicanism and democracy, have tremendously impacted the judicial procedure and crime punishment, which are now more “humane.” From the end of the eighteenth century, torture ceased being a judicial procedure and became a practice prohibited and punished by the law.⁴⁶ But this does in no way mean that states no longer practice torture. As the Council of the European Union sadly notes in a 2012 update of the E.U. guidelines on torture, despite “the efforts by the international community, torture and other ill-treatment persist in all parts of the world. Impunity for the perpetrators of torture and other ill-treatment continues to prevail in many countries” (3). Because of national and international prohibitions, torture became a shameful practice that governments worldwide deny practicing. At best, some governments partly acknowledge practicing torture by invoking state reasons and scenarios of extreme necessity or by replacing the term “torture” with other words less evocative of the horrors of the act—for example, officials in the Bush administration often employed the term “enhanced interrogation” to minimize public consternation and international condemnation after the torturing of detainees at Guantanamo Bay was revealed.⁴⁷

This attempt to lessen the horrifying evocations of the word “torture” is a common

⁴⁶ The United Nations Declaration of Human Rights prohibits torture, which is recognized as a crime by most countries today.

⁴⁷ See Human Rights Watch’s 2011 report on the Bush Administration’s Mistreatment of Detainees.

tactic Farah's fictional Somalia of *Sweet and Sour Milk*, where the regime and its collaborators try to minimize the gravity of torture by simply referring to it as *interrogation*. This is not even shocking, for the constitution punishes by death those who try to damage the authority of the Somali state. In some cases, as I shall discuss shortly, the regime goes so far in denying allegations of torture as to force the victim to say that he or she has not been tortured. Torture can include punishing and coercing political adversaries and intimidating aspiring dissenters into silence or inaction when it is carried out to obtain discipline. It seems evident from its wording that *disciplinary torture* aims at obtaining self-discipline. It is also true, especially under an authoritarian government, that part of that discipline may consist of keeping one's lips sealed. However, this is not the type of torture I wish to discuss in *Sweet and Sour Milk* because, as discussed earlier, the form of silence it elicits is reprehensible and benefits the authorities rather than the victim. As for *interrogative torture*, it is mainly used to extort information about genuine or imaginary plots involving the overthrowing of the government. Briefly put, its purpose is to make the victim talk. In that case, however, if the victim decides to remain silent instead of giving away information, such silence can be considered a salutary action from a moral point of view. As far as silence is concerned, I believe both types of torture oppose each other in their goals. While *disciplinary torture* aims to intimidate the individual into silence, interrogative torture is carried out to make the victim talk. I want to discuss this second type of torture and the form of silence it generates in Farah's *Sweet and Sour Milk*.

In *Sweet and Sour Milk*, the General's Security Services practice torture routinely. As mentioned above, we can identify two main types of torture in *Sweet and Sour Milk*. The first type is punitive and conducted privately but serves the same political purpose as public executions. It aims to discipline the tortured victim. The regime achieves its political goal of

control through the mechanisms of conditioning that I have discussed above in *Matigari*.⁴⁸ I have also argued that a particular form of silence may arise due to such conditioning. However, I do not wish to review, as we did in *Matigari*, all instances in which this form of silence occurs. One example will suffice, allowing us to reveal the effect of conditioning and illustrate a significant difference between fearful silence and *protective silence*.

After the Security services take a man away, his wife seeks help from the victim's brother. Unfortunately, the brother has also been previously detained and tortured without trial: "Has been through water—and other primitive methods of torture. The triumph of fear over anger engages his pensée, whereas the flames of rage indulge the understanding sympathy of his sister-in-law. Will he do something to avenge his brother's unfair detention? 'Go home and don't worry,' is all he says" (37-38). The man's reaction in this passage demonstrates the effect of successful conditioning through torture. We can see that he is overtaken by fear even though he is angry about his brother's situation. He chooses to remain silent in the face of injustice because he does not want to endure the same ordeal again. We do not know for which purpose (disciplinary, interrogative, or both) he has been tortured. Still, we can see that torture transformed him into an obedient citizen, now too afraid to protest his brother's unlawful arrest.

Although we do not personally witness torture in action, many scenes discuss interrogational torture in *Sweet and Sour Milk*. One example of them is particularly illustrative of the relationship between torture and silence. While searching for the truth about his brother's death, Loyaan discovers that his brother had been working on writing a memorandum whose actual location and content are shrouded in mystery. What is the document about? What are the plans of its sponsors? Who are they? These questions arouse interest in many characters in the novel, including the General, who has the typist of the

⁴⁸ See above, Chapter Six.

document detained for interrogation. In a discussion between Loyaan and his father, Keynaan, we learn that two security men “have interrogated Soyaan’s secretary/typist and reported that she typed the manuscript of a Memorandum. She would not reveal its exact content even under torture” (97). Later, when he meets Ibrahim, the secretary’s brother, Loyaan pushes his inquiries further:

‘Well, well. What about Mulki?’

‘She was informed of the risk involved when she accepted to type the manuscript. We told her, both of us did.’

‘Which one did she type?’

‘Dionysius’s Ear.’

‘And she won’t speak?’

‘No fear of that.’

‘The KGB-trained torturers know how to make a person surrender all secrets; I am told.’

‘Now that Soyaan is dead, she knows it is me they are after. No, she won’t speak. But will that stop them from coming to me?’ (155)

By connecting the dots between various conversations throughout the novel, we can see that they not only establish a relationship between torture and silence but also discern what the primary purpose of torturing Mulki is—to make her reveal precious information. For example, the link between torture and silence is demonstrated through Keynaan’s and Ibrahim’s use of the term “speak.” Speech and silence, as shown in the first pages of this chapter, are often considered opposite notions in such a way that the absence of the other can define one. Therefore, by reassuring Loyaan that Mulki will not speak even under torture, Ibrahim probably means to say she will remain silent.

Confessing under torture is human

Remaining silent in this case is not to be taken literally but intrinsically related to targeted information, whose revelation is the primary purpose of this type of torture. For, even though Mulki might respond to her torturers with phrases like, “I don’t know what’s in the manuscript” or “Please, stop torturing me,” she will be considered to have remained silent as long as she does not concede the information required of her. Silence becomes an invaluable asset, much appreciated as an irrefutable demonstration of loyalty and a form of resistance.⁴⁹ When individuals involved in an unauthorized enterprise face the prospect of torture, they must answer whether they will be able to endure torture without giving up sensitive information. Thus, in a letter celebrating the courage of those who fought against the Nazi occupation of France during the Second World War, French philosopher Jean-Paul Sartre remarks that people who knew any details whatsoever about the *Résistance* always had this question in mind (*The Aftermath*, 5). The events in our novels do not unfold in wartime, but the question of confession under torture is also recurrent.

Most of the time, the question of whether one could hold out or confess under torture is a personal interrogation with which everyone involved in a resistance movement is confronted. There are some instances where the question is subject to group discussion, as in George Orwell’s *1984*.⁵⁰ Yet, in some other cases, group members can be made to profess

⁴⁹ This is especially emphasized in *Close Sesame*. A young boy entrusted with the delivery of sensitive information is tricked by a relative who then reveals the content of the message to the Italian officers: “The ways of the traitor are mysterious. When I saw Haji Omer and he asked me where I was running to and what message I was carrying, it didn’t occur to me that he hadn’t known. So, when later it became clear that *someone had talked*, sold information to the Italian and that it was Haji Omer, well, there was enough evidence” (184, my italics). In this quote, the meaning of the word “talk” is not literal but refers to someone who has betrayed his community by telling the Italian officers where to find the man they are looking for. In *Close Sesame*, even though the protagonist has spoken with the Italians, he has not “talked” because he has not given them the information they wanted.

⁵⁰ When Winston and Julia first go to O’Brien’s house, he asks them questions to ensure they will be loyal to the cause. He even asks them whether they will commit suicide if ordered to do so—to which they respond in the affirmative. They have also discussed what will happen after the thought police catch them. O’Brien tells

their loyalty by taking an oath. Such is the case in Ngugi's *A Grain of Wheat*, where *Mau Mau* fighters have taken the *oath*, an initiatory ritual during which the fighters profess their loyalty to the movement and pledge never to confess that one has taken the oath, and never to reveal any details about the resistance.⁵¹ Therefore, the oath imposes on the fighter a certain kind of silence that he should not break under any circumstance, not even torture. Breaking the oath will expose the contravener to a curse, which makes it all the more terrifying. *A Grain of Wheat* recounts a protagonist's journey and his efforts to deal with guilt after betraying the oath. In Farah's *Variations* trilogy, there is no such oath or loyalty pledge, but the issue of betrayal is equally concerning, especially in *Close Sesame*.

For example, at one point in the novel, rumors start circulating that Mukhtaar, a member of the clandestine group conspiring to dethrone the General, has betrayed his companions. But Mursal, another member of the movement and the protagonist's son, is convinced that those are only "wicked rumors [that] help discredit Mahad and Mukhtaar; they paint all dissident movements in unfavorable colors" (*Sesame* 96). In *Sweet and Sour Milk*, the narrator also raises the issue of torture in a series of questions after Ahmed-Wellie tells Loyaan that the Security has "taken Ibrahim for an interrogation" (172). The narrator questions whether Ibrahim will survive his interrogation: "Would Ibrahim? Would they torture him to make him tell all that they are interested in? Would they crush his balls, would they screw nails into his fingernails?" (172). As these questions suggest, "interrogation" is a euphemism for interrogative torture. If the Security tortures Ibrahim, it is because they want him to speak. In addition, the narrator's questions give us a glimpse into the painful horror of

Winston that he will confess after his capture and that this is unavoidable—but the sort of contacts he has with other members of the Brotherhood will not allow him to betray many important persons (221-25).

⁵¹ To understand the rationale behind the oath-taking, see Mickie Mwanzia Koster's *The Power of the Oath: Mau Mau Nationalism in Kenya, 1952-1960*.

torture.⁵² Here, the issue of torture raises the question of ethics, a question even more unsettling when governments practice torture against their own citizens, as in our novels.

Whether we call it interrogation or torture, the goal pursued by the regime is to retrieve information by making the victim “talk.” But we must make a difference between “talking” by confessing only useless details and “talking” by revealing essential details that can prompt the arrest of other members of a dissident movement. We can look at another example from the Second World War to understand this distinction. As Olivier Wieviorka argues in his book *The French Resistance*, it was a common practice for underground groups during the Second World War to ask their members to keep silent for at least twenty-four to forty-eight hours. Some resistance fighters played, with their torturers, “a cat-and-mouse game, trying to release information they hoped would be inconsequential” (433).⁵³ The post-war accounts of Claude Bourdet and Pierre Georges reveal how they outplayed their torturers by downplaying their role in the movement or revealing information the Gestapo already possessed. While the first tactic offers some form of consolation, the author of a partial truth may, nonetheless, have to deal with a crisis of conscience. This crisis of conscience arises from the possibility that one’s revelations under torture may not be as inconsequential as they appeared at the moment. The victims will wonder whether their half-truths are as inconsequential as they thought or whether they have endangered other comrades. In the *Résistance*, if the information that the torture victim surrendered was useless and did not

⁵² Because of the pain and humiliation that the inhumane practice of torture inflicts on victims, individuals react in different ways when the advent of torture seems inevitable. Some individuals who believe they will probably crack have their conception of resistance, which consists in committing suicide before they are caught. This act, of which numerous examples from the Second World War can be cited, was committed not so much because of the fear of torture itself but because of the fear of giving in to torture and betraying one’s comrades. Of course, committing suicide before capture or before or amid episodes of torture may serve also purposes other than protecting information. These include saving face and avoiding pain.

⁵³ A scene of such a cat-and-mouse game between tortured and torturer as mentioned above appears, for instance, in Ngugi’s *Wizard of the Crow* where Sikiokuu, Minister of State in the Ruler’s office, has Titus Tajirika tortured to have a false confession with which to implicate his archenemy in a coup against the Ruler (see pp. 327-39).

endanger the movement, it was considered that they had not talked. Unfortunately, and contrary to legend, Wieviorka remarks, “many talked.” Here, the meaning attached to the word *talk* is not the same as when a victim talks under torture only to give away unimportant information.

In *Sweet and Sour Milk*, when Loyaan asks Ahmed-Wellie if he knows anything about Mulki, we learn that she did not withstand her torment, as the following conversation shows:

They’d taken Ibrahim for interrogation when ...! Don’t lose your calm. Think.

What about his sister? Did Ahmed-Wellie know anything about her?

‘Yes.

‘What?

‘She broke under torture.’

‘She mentioned names?’

‘Yes.’

‘And the Memorandum?’

‘I don’t know.’

‘And the Memorandum?’

‘I don’t know.’

‘You think that that is in their hands?’

‘Everything is possible.’ (173)

Mulki’s reaction in the above is at odds with what we have seen in an earlier passage where Ibrahim assured Loyaan that she would not reveal information under torture. However, we can conclude from Ahmed-Wellie’s revelations that Mulki reached such a level of suffering that she broke her silence and gave up precious information. But Mulki can be considered to have talked only if the names she has mentioned can lead to new arrests.

Could her revelations have led to the arrest of Ibrahim, her brother, and Ahmed-Wellie? Sadly, there are enough reasons to believe so, as the regime takes Ibrahim and

Ahmed-Wellie for interrogation after Mulki has talked. But can we accuse her of betraying her brother and the cause he stands for? What else could she have done except confess what she knows and even confess things she did not know? Some would say that she should have remained silent. As we have seen with Mulki and many others, remaining silent is what they wish to do until pain and humiliation make them surrender. While Mulki seems hardly condemnable for her words under torture, those who have effectively remained silent through their ordeal will become heroic figures, and their loyalty and devotion to the cause they defend will be remembered across generations. In Farah's *Sweet and Sour Milk*, however, no such heroic characters endure torture without talking. Even in the context of the Second World War, although remaining silent under torture seemed ideal, French resistance fighters were asked to do so only for at least twenty-four hours (Wieviorka 433). In no way was it expected of captured members to remain silent forever. This shows how delicate judging issues of loyalty and betrayal in the case of torture can be. Farah seems to apprehend this complexity by abstaining from issuing any moral judgment about the torture. Neither does Farah seem to suggest through his texts what the reaction of the tortured ought to be.

In my discussion of surveillance, I have described a scene in which Loyaan is abducted and brought to a secret prison. The man who speaks to him says that Loyaan has been saying things and asking questions that annoy the regime. As they know that he has been walking around asking about Soyaan's memorandum and the secretary who has typed the document, Loyaan's interlocutor tells him that he said this without even being asked by Loyaan: "The Minister to the Presidency has asked me to tell you that we've not seen nor heard of the memorandums, nor of Mulki" (218). Although we already know this is a lie, what happens next irrefutably reveals the inconsistency in the regime's narrative. Loyaan and his interlocutor have hardly exchanged a few sentences when Loyaan can hear

Boots outside. Boots that approached and stopped in front of the entrance to

the room in which Loyaan and the man were. The door opened. A woman in a veil was pushed in. The door was closed. The man went to the woman and led her closer.

‘This is Mulki. Mulki, this is Loyaan’

The man helped her peel off the dark veil with the same care as one would uncover a wound, or royalty a monument. But she kept a safe distance, wouldn’t come any nearer. Loyaan had never seen Mulki before and couldn’t, for sure, say whether this woman was Mulki; whether she had lost weight; whether she had suffered or anything. The man signalled to her to speak. She said:

‘I’ve been brought here to tell you that I typed no Memorandum for Soyaan or my brother; that I’ve nothing whatsoever to do with either of them or politics. I have been brought here to tell you that I haven’t been tortured, that nothing has been extracted from me by force.’ (219)

But has the man not told Loyaan that they have never seen or heard of memorandums or Mulki one minute ago? And now they bring a woman to Loyaan and tell him she is Mulki? But how can Loyaan be sure she is Mulki when he has never seen her before? She has barely finished speaking when the man leads her away without even giving Loyaan a chance to ask her a question to confirm her identity. Supposing that that woman is Mulki, what she tells Loyaan shows how some victims of torture will confess to anything to make their torment stop.⁵⁴ For example, she says she has not been tortured. But we know from at least two sources (Keynaan and Ahmed-Wellie) that she has. The content of her speech in itself gives away valuable information. First, we can infer from her choice of words that Mulki has no agency. She does not claim that she came to tell Soyaan these things but that she has been brought there to tell them. The way she talks also suggests that her words are not hers. We

⁵⁴ In *1984*, Winston is tortured by O’Brien to make him say that two plus two make five. At first, Winston maintains that the result of two plus two is four, but when he realizes that the torment will not stop unless he says what is expected of him, he answers “Five! Five! Five” (328).

need not go into sophisticated discourse analysis here to demonstrate this. In what seems to be a forced confession, we see that Mulki, whose torture Kaynan and Ahmed-Wellie have confirmed, only repeats what her torturers told her to say.

The absence of moral judgment in *Sweet and Sour Milk* regarding torture victims can be put in perspective with what Nancy Gates-Madsen views as an ethic of representation. In her article exploring the relationship between torture and silence in three Latin American plays, Nancy Gates-Madsen notes that texts and plays “about torture that explore the charged relationship between victim and victimizer walk a veritable knife’s edge between a moral imperative to condemn the practice and a dangerous tendency toward oversimplification” (6). For Gates-Madsen, every author who deals with historical violence also faces an ethical dilemma regarding the fictional representation of historical events. Only when the author avoids a simplistic representation of complex issues can such an ethic be attained. Unfortunately, it happens, however, that authors can easily fall prey to an oversimplistic representation of torture, as she argues below:

Such an ethic of representation seems especially appropriate in the case of the plays under consideration here, for all three depict the torture experience in rather unambiguously heroic terms. Each play features a victim who refuses to reveal information about his or her comrades despite suffering the most horrendous torments. In refusing to speak, the victims undermine the purported object of the practice of torture by exercising free will in the face of ostensibly complete domination, thus preserving their humanity in an inhuman situation. However, choosing to portray fictional characters who suffer torture in heroic terms risks betraying the memory of those who suffered the torments of torture in the real world. (7)

In light of these remarks, we can better understand Farah's decision to avoid portraying heroic characters who remain silent while suffering immense pain. Instead, Farah's tortured victims are portrayed as mere mortals who reveal secrets despite a solid determination to protect their comrades from repression. In the same way that a doctor like Ahmed-Wellie is responsible for treating torture victims physically, the writer has the responsibility to allow them to heal psychologically by speaking for them without betraying their memory.

Farah ambivalent position on practicing torture

In *Sweet and Sour Milk*, the dramatization of torture only reaches its paroxysm when Loyaan uses silence to squeeze some answers out of the Minister to the Presidency. Before engaging the minister with matters concerning Soyaan's death, Loyaan reflects in his mind that he should make the minister "*nervous, give him no chance to know what you've come for. He will speak. He will begin fidgeting in his throne of temporary convenience. He will tremble with worry. Start with silence. End with silence*" (190, original italics). Loyaan is correct to adopt such a strategy. After a few questions from Loyaan, the minister becomes uneasy with his interlocutor's silent responses and gets so nervous that he throws his "pen across the room in rage" (196-97). Now, Loyaan is satisfied to see the minister's reaction to his questions and perversely enjoys himself looking at the minister lose his composure. It makes Loyaan see "himself as the torturer, as the powerful pervert who puts the needle between the flesh of the thumb and the nail, screws it in harder, deeper, further and further, until it draws blood, not innocent blood, but just blood, red blood" (196). When Loyaan senses that the minister is still resisting, after his questions, silences, and diversions, he feels "challenged like a torturer who couldn't make the tortured confess after the umpteenth piercing of the needle" (198). The narrator then suggests that Loyaan should "[c]hange method. Think of something that would work on him. Twist his testicles, saw them off, humiliate him. Mention names, drop them and

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before he had thought of picking them up, change topic, method, style.” Here, even though the narrator’s suggestion is not literal, they raise essential questions about the justifiability of torture: is the narrator implying that the end, in this case discovering the truth about Soyaan’s death, justifies the means, i.e., torture? Would the narrator or Loyaan physically torture someone to retrieve information if they had the power to do so?

Regarding the morality of torture, the main question is whether there are instances in which torture can ever be morally justifiable. Although it is overwhelmingly admitted that torture is a hideous thing to do to a person, certain paradox cases are often presented to provide a morally acceptable justification. The most famous of such cases is the ticking bomb scenario, in which the only way to prevent a bomb from exploding and killing millions of innocent people is to torture a terrorist to extract information about the location of the bomb.⁵⁵ In *Sweet and Sour Milk*, Farah does not directly address the morality of torture. However, his characterization discusses the doctor’s ethics regarding tortured victims. Should the doctor treat these victims when the torturers ask him to, thereby becoming a collaborator? Or should the doctor refuse, let the victim die, and risk coming under the regime’s fire himself? Ahmed-Wellie explains his dilemma to Loyaan:

When he was unable to urinate with fear would they go and wake Dr. Ahmed-Wellie, blindfold him into a car, confuse his sense of direction by driving up and

⁵⁵ In *The Prohibition of Torture in Exceptional Circumstances*, Michelle Farrell addresses the three academic positions on the question of the exceptional use of torture. For proponents of the first approach, the *qualified torture prohibition*, torture may be used in extraordinary cases defined by the law. This stance is mainly supported by Alan Dershowitz, whose torture warrant proposal suggests that if torture would occur in a real ticking bomb situation, it is better to regulate such torture “by some kind of warrant, with accountability, record-keeping, standards, and limitations” (176). The second position, the *pragmatic absolute torture prohibition*, thinks that the legal prohibition of torture should be absolute while acknowledging that a person may need to violate the law and practice torture in certain situations. Thus, according to Jeff McMahan, a person guilty of such an act cannot claim a “legal justification, in the way that someone who is charged with homicide may claim a justification of self-defence. For we do not want the law to contain provisions for the recognition of justified torture” (247). The person should, therefore, face the law and be punished. The third, *absolute torture prohibition*, maintains that no exception should be made for the prohibition of torture even in extraordinary circumstances (Farrell 175). The first two approaches, which adopt utilitarian and consequentialist points of view, envisage that torture may be legally or morally justifiable because of a cost-benefit reasoning.

down a sandy street, would they then produce Ibrahim as the patient: cure him? Did ethics enter here? You said no to them and therefore risked your own life stupidly and left another person to suffer for lack of medical care. You accepted the dictates of human need, and dealt with your patient as if he or she were brought to you at your clinic or hospital. (172-73)

This quote shows that Farah does not condemn Dr. Ahmed-Wellie's collaboration with a regime torturing its political opponents. Instead, Farah lets him present the situation from a doctor's perspective. Ahmed-Wellie is facing a moral dilemma that can cost him his life if he makes the wrong choice.

It follows from the above that Farah essentially avoids oversimplifying the relationship between monstrous torturer and human torture victim, not only by discarding heroic victims of torture but also by depicting a protagonist who sees himself as a torturer who perversely enjoys the domination and control that he exercises over his victim. Loyaan's encounter with the Minister provides other subjects for discussion as well: the cruelty of torture, the perversity of the torturer, and the combativeness of the torture victim, among other things. The scene also shows an inversion motif in which *the terms interrogation and torture are semantically inverted*. For instance, Loyaan is interrogating the Minister and sees himself as a torturer, while the men of Security torture citizens literally but claim they are interrogating them. Through this inversion, Farah enables the reader to put both terms in their proper meanings. By responding to the torturer's cruelty with silence, the victim engages in a power struggle with the torturer. Silence, thus, becomes an act of resistance.

Conclusion

In Part Two of this study, I have discussed how Farah and Ngugi allegorize certain aspects and forms of silence in *Matigari* and Farah's *Sweet and Sour Milk*. While theoretical

background provides a general understanding of silence, literary criticism in both novels allows us to see how specific forms of silence work in dictatorial environments. Focusing on the importance of information in politics, I argue that *referential silence* is an implicit type of silence defined not so much by the mere act of talking, but by the kind of subject we avoid discussing or the kind of information we carefully withhold during conversations. Emphasizing the judgmental function of silence proposed by Jensen, I suggest that two forms of referential silence are recurrent in our novels. In *Matigari*, I discussed the correlation between the use of force, fear, and silence. It is sometimes counterproductive when a government, such as the one in the novel, uses violence to obtain consent and obedience. While characters such as the teacher and the student act out of fear and take refuge in silence, others like Ngaruro and Matigari persist in demanding truth and justice. The latter, in particular, is highly critical, not only of the incompetent and exploitative government but even more so of the fearful lot that allows such a government to continue to act with impunity. This is why we can argue that this form of silence is *fearful* and *complicit*.

In my analysis of Farah's *Sweet and Sour Milk*, I paid more attention to *protective silence*, concluding that when torture is carried out to extract information, victims always have a difficult decision to make. They can choose the path of resistance; in this case, they will suffer many horrible and inhumane abuses. While this may be the idealist form of resistance, some victims resist by killing themselves, which is also a form of silence if one thinks about it. However, both acts of resistance take superhuman courage to accomplish. Farah seems to apprehend this complexity and imagines tortured victims who react humanely by revealing information after suffering. Unfortunately, those who lack such courage end up breaking under torture. Some reveal only unimportant details. Sadly, however, others reveal information that can lead to the arrest of their comrades. And although some can see this as betrayal, there will always be worse traitors than those who reveal sensitive information under

torture. As I shall discuss in Part Three, some characters are ready to lie or betray for money.

To sum up, both Farah and Ngugi demonstrate a certain realism in their approach to silence in the political realm. Their novels depict characters who behave humanely in the face of repression by remaining silent. The two forms of *referential silence* discussed in *Matigari* and *Sweet and Sour Milk*, i.e., fearful and protective silence, are similar in many respects but also different in others. They both revolve around information and are elicited by the use or threat of violence against political activists. However, they differ because they are motivated by different reasons. *Fearful silence*, as the name implies, is motivated by the fear of violence. Such a silence, as has been discussed in *Matigari*, is reprehensible because it allows social and political injustices to endure. On the other hand, *protective silence* is motivated by the desire to protect others. A character's silence in the face of surveillance or torture is synonymous with bravery and loyalty. But whatever the reason and the judgmental value, *fearful* and *protective* silences imply refusal to acknowledge. This leads us to the notion of denial, which is closely related to the notion of distortion, the main subject of the forthcoming Part Three.

PART THREE

DISTORTION: FROM SILENCE TO LYING AND RUMORMONGERING

Every human communication can be either a report of straight facts or an attempt to suggest things and situations as they do not exist. Such distortion and perversion of facts strike at the core of human communication. The verbal battle against man's concept of truth and against his mind seems to be ceaseless.

Joost Meerloo—*The Rape of the Mind*

Introduction

In the previous chapters, I discussed two forms of silence elicited by state violence in Ngugi's *Matigari* and Farah's *Sweet and Sour Milk*. On the one hand, I argued that a repressive regime could resort to violence to drive their citizens into *fearful silence*, a form of silence that *Matigari* categorically condemns because it allows social injustices and government incompetence to endure. But I also note that *Matigari* has been imprudent by saying too much about his future actions, although he has been expressly told to remain silent. The silence he should have observed is *protective* and emerges from some characters' desire to remain silent in the face of surveillance or torture to protect a project or a person they care about. *Protective silence* is not the same as fearful silence. But whichever of both forms of silence the individual adopts, they are, nonetheless, refusing to acknowledge something, be it a painful social reality they refuse to admit or a secret they don't want to reveal. In other words, their silence is also a form of denial.

As a form of denial, silence can be studied from a psychological point of view as a defense mechanism. This is also where silence enters the picture as the first component of the spiral of madness, which can be regarded as a system of behavior patterns evolving from the undue exercise of power that produces either acquiescence through denial of reality in silence, distortion, and madness, or resistance in various forms, such as speaking where some remain silent and telling the truth where other distort reality. In any case, as I will argue in Part Six of this study, dictatorial governments often redefine these acts of resistance as madness, thus placing the political subject in an almost inescapable spiral of madness. In Part Three of this study, however, I explore the representation of distortion in our novels. But before doing so, it appears essential to lay down the theoretical foundations for my argument. Consequently, the first chapter of this part reconsiders silence as a form of denial.

The scenes in our novels also show that silence is the most common form of denial, sociologically speaking. It is simply the refusal to acknowledge a painful or uncomfortable reality publicly. Denial can be discussed from a psychological perspective as a defensive mechanism and as the first stage of grief and mourning proposed by Elisabeth Kübler-Ross. Seeing silence this way brings some clarifications to Farah's portrayal of the Keynaan family's mourning of Soyaan in *Sweet and Sour Milk*. However, another interesting aspect of Kübler-Ross's stages of grief and mourning is that it can also be metaphorically applied to the betrayal and disenchantment in many postcolonial nations. But silence can also be analyzed as a social phenomenon through the notion of denial. This perspective provides more insight into Farah and Ngugi's characterization of fearful silence in the novels.

From here, it is only a small step to engage in distortion. Thus, while many refuse to acknowledge the painful reality of dictatorship, others willingly profess a reality that does not exist. In this case, admitting something untrue is a form of distortion because it is a deformation of the truth. After discussing how silence and distortion are related and how we move from one to the other, I will focus on Farah's *Sweet and Sour Milk*, in which I explore distortion in the form of political lies. I will also analyze some of the stratagems that the General uses to make his collaborators distort their political opinions through the instrumentalization of tribal allegiances and material incentives in the novel. Here, distortion mostly appears as a deliberate act motivated by material benefits. But in Farah's fictional Somalia, things are not always straight. Indeed, material advantages appear to be the primary motivation of political liars, and the General tactically exploits this weakness to solidify his power. But sometimes, the carrot does not work, in which case the General resorts to intimidation to force his opponents to accept his offers. As I will later discuss in Chapter Eleven, the tyrant's reliance on bribery becomes even more problematic when tribal allegiances enter the picture.

In Chapter Twelve, I will turn my attention to Ngugi's portrayal of distortion as something that can happen unintentionally. I will first focus on the notion of storytelling on the premise that distortion is inherent to storytelling, whether conscious or not. Thus, in Ngugi's *Wizard of the Crow*, we encounter not only a main narrator who uses hyperbole to deliver his story but also a character who disproportionately exaggerates his accounts of actual events. I propose that exaggeration is tolerable when we consciously use it as a narrative technique but not when it pathologically develops in our witness accounts. In the second case, it is legitimate to question the mental causes of such a distortion of reality—which ultimately leads us to the issue of pathological lying. But as we will discover, Ngugi's portrayal of pathological lying does more than describe an abnormal behavior. His character, Arigaigai Gatherer, who always distorts the events he has witnessed, gives substance to rumors that contradict the dictator's narrative and threaten his power.

Chapter Nine

From Silence to Distortion: A Theoretical and Contextual Foundation

As I have indicated in my general introduction, most observers are unanimous about the case of Postcolonial Africa: the hopes entertained by the people at independence have been betrayed by the ruling class that took the reins of power after the independence victories. Whereas Fanon rightly notes that “decolonization is quite simply the substitution of one ‘species’ of mankind by another” (29), George Ayittey argues that “the nationalists who took over from the departing colonialists were worse” (460). Besides being torn between Western imperialist standards and their ancestral traditions, the masses must now face the harsh conditions meted out to them by their own black leaders. This situation can be socially and psychologically challenging for the individual. In the face of political injustices and other social and economic pressures, people’s reactions vary, depending on how they manage the discomfort. Two types of strategies are generally used toward such ends. We can talk about *coping strategies* when the individual consciously tries to minimize the problem. On the other

hand, when the individual uses unconscious strategies to deal with harsh reality, we are in the presence of *defense mechanisms*.

As Paulhus et al. succinctly put it, *coping* “reflects purposeful, adaptive, conscious, flexible, and present-oriented behavior choices that adhere to reality and logic and are morally superior,” while *defenses* “are compelled, maladaptive, rigid, distorted, and past-oriented behaviors that distort reality” (552). It is in the latter category that I will later situate silence as a form of denial. Let us consider some of the situations discussed in Part Two. Matigari’s defense of Guthera and his other confrontations with various regime actors can be considered purposeful and conscious behavior consistent with reality. In the *Variations* trilogy, too, we witness the use of silence as a strategy of resistance against authoritarian intrusion and terror. But we can define the silence of the masses and characters like the teacher and the student as maladaptive because it is motivated by the emotion of fear. Psychological defense mechanisms are often differentiated and categorized into hierarchical levels. American psychiatrist George Eman Vaillant provides one of the most accepted categorizations in four levels: Pathological Defenses, Immature Defenses, Neurotic Defenses, and Mature Defenses. My point of interest, however, exclusively rests on the first level, especially on its mechanisms of denial and distortion.⁵⁶

Postcolonial mourning: understanding silence as a form of denial

In our novels, the notion of denial is present at many levels and in many forms. Though my aim is to reconsider silence as a form of denial, I would first like to talk about it in relation to

⁵⁶ It is important to signal that these two mechanisms can be found in other typologies, although they may appear under different classifications. For example, Berney et al. have developed a “Hierarchy of Defense Levels and Individual Defense Mechanisms” by combining the Defense Mechanisms Rating Scales and the Psychotic-Defense Mechanisms Rating classifications. In their categorization, denial and distortion are labeled psychotic defenses.

death and mourning. The primary reason for this choice is that it will help us understand not only how the Keynaan family deals with Soyaan's death in *Sweet and Sour Milk* but also how pain and discomfort give rise to denial—sometimes in the form of silence. Death and mourning also relate to the present study not only because they are present in our novels but also because the postcolonial situation out of which they emerged and which brilliantly represent is characterized by loss and mourning. As Simon Gikandi rightly notes about Farah, “the primary subject of his novels has consistently been the process by which nationalist euphoria became transformed into a discourse of loss and mourning” (“Postcolonial Textuality” 753). What Gikandi says here is equally true for the novels of Ngugi, especially *Matigari*, in which the reader becomes progressively aware of this sense of disenchantment as the protagonist advances in his quest for truth and justice.

Generally speaking, denial implies rejection, be it of a statement, a health problem, or an uncomfortable truth. Denial is often attributed to an unpleasant reality or emotional state that is too difficult and painful to accept. In *The Ego and the Mechanisms of Defense*, Anna Freud explains that the ability to deny reality develops in infancy as the child learns not to be “aware of some painful impression from without” (89). Denial, which can also be manifested in words, remains normal in children. It can, however, reach obsessional proportion if the child reacts with restlessness and ill-humor whenever they are forced to acknowledge the reality they wish to ignore (88). However, as Sigmund Freud asserts in *The Interpretation of Dreams*, much of the “avoidance of what is distressing—this ostrich policy—is still to be seen in the normal mental life of adults” (596). As such, an individual in denial will avoid coping with a personal problem or stressful reality by claiming that it does not exist or distorting it. The postcolonial individuals, as depicted by both Ngugi and Farah, face many such painful realities.

Although there are many causes for denial, commonly cited ones include the loss of a loved one, traumatic events, and fear. Denial has received much scholarly attention, especially concerning death, dying, and mourning. In her highly appraised book *On Death and Dying*, Kübler-Ross focuses primarily on dying people diagnosed with terminal illnesses while considering the needs of doctors and grieving families. The author posits that people generally go through five typical stages of grief after receiving the news of their illness. Those are denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance. Denial, the first stage of that process, is interesting and can help us understand not only the grief of those who have lost loved ones in our novels but also the grief of the postcolonial individual betrayed by his own black leaders.⁵⁷ A psychological reading of the *Variations* trilogy reveals that some of these stages in the fictional characters' coping not only with the death of a loved one but also with the prospect of their own death. In the first category, we may put the grieving Keynaan family in *Sweet and Sour Milk*, who have just lost Soyaan, and Deeriye, who continues having visions about his late wife, Nadifa, in *Close Sesame*. In the case of Soyaan's death, for example, there is not much place for denial, or at least, it does not last long. One clue of this short-lived stage of denial may be gleaned from Loyaan's expression of disbelief after the already overcome initial denial when he responds to his friend Ahmed-Wellie's "I can't believe he's dead," with the statement, "Neither could I when it happened" (*Sweet* 35). Here, we can see that Loyaan now fully accepts that his brother has died. Another reason that leads us to conclude that the family did not dwell long in denial is that they relatively quickly dispose of Soyaan's belongings, which they give to those in need (50). However, the reactions exhibited by various family members may be categorized under other stages. The anger stage is primarily

⁵⁷ Though Kübler-Ross's five stages of grief are mainly intended to be a "discussion of some key emotional reactions to the experience of dying," they have also been used to help those who have lost loved ones (*On Death*, "Introduction"). For instance, in "Finding Meaning: The Sixth Stage of Grief," David Kessler builds upon Kübler-Ross's legacy by adding another stage: finding meaning.

personified in their mother, who curses her husband's new wife, whom she accuses of having poisoned Soyaan (22). For Loyaan, the main protagonist, the quest for the truth about his brother's death is the only way to mourn effectively. As Sarah Nagaty Abdelhafez argues, his journey is an attempt to "work through the trauma of the death of his brother and the distortion of his history by getting the truth about his brother's past told and acknowledged" (55). For Loyaan, fighting for the truth becomes an effective means to mourn his brother.

As these examples from *Sweet and Sour Milk* show, characters initially deny their painful condition by rejecting it.⁵⁸ Whereas we have seen in *Sweet and Sour Milk* that characters express their denial in words, there is a more straightforward way to deny reality: to remain silent. Following Gikandi's previously cited observation that "nationalist euphoria became transformed into a discourse of loss and mourning," I would like to consider Kübler-Ross's stages of grief beyond the realm of physical death, as shown in *Sweet and Sour Milk*, and suggest that these stages can also be used figuratively to analyze the death of peoples' hopes and dreams of freedom following their betrayal by postcolonial elites. In a sense, we witness this in the postcolonial African states as portrayed in our novels. Different categories of characters can be said to be at different stages of their mourning process. For instance, in *Matigari*, the protagonist seems to have accepted that the dreams of freedom and prosperity that have driven patriots to fight in the forests have been crushed by the new elite. Others, such as the teacher and the student, are in denial and refuse to acknowledge and talk about this betrayal because they are afraid. Therefore, they stick their heads in the sand, hoping all will be fine afterward. This psychological interpretation of silence as denial falls, more or less, in line with my primary analysis of silence as a behavioral phenomenon in the previous

⁵⁸ This is also what Kübler-Ross notes about people who have received the news of a fatal disease: "Among the over two hundred dying patients we have interviewed, most reacted to the awareness of a terminal illness at first with the statement, 'No, not me, it cannot be true'" (31). Kübler-Ross provides the example of a woman who sought means to support her denial by claiming that her diagnosis was mixed and by consulting other doctors for reassurance.

chapter: in both cases, we can view silence as a defense mechanism resulting from fear, pain, or discomfort. And since talking is a social phenomenon, remaining silent in the face of uncomfortable and painful situations is no longer only a problem of personal psychology but also a social concern.

Silence as the most public form of denial

In the novels I have discussed so far, *referential silence* has a mostly social and public dimension. Both Farah and Ngugi use the trope of silence to denounce passivity and acquiescence to dictatorship. This form of silence, which ignores and allows political injustice to endure, is a common form of denial. In *The Elephant in the Room: Silence and Denial in Everyday Life*, Eviatar Zerubavel offers an in-depth sociological analysis of silence as a form of denial that fits most of the scenes of social silence witnessed in our novels. For Zerubavel, the silence of denial “certainly helps us avoid pain. The fact that something is considered ‘too terrible for words’ indeed often makes it literally unspeakable. That explains the heavy silence that usually surrounds atrocities” (5). Denial thus intervenes as the discrepancy between the individual’s awareness of a problem and their acknowledgment of it (Zerubavel 16). Denial can be studied as a psychological process when people are taken individually. However, it becomes a social phenomenon when it involves more than one person. On the sociological level, denial comes in various categories: avoidance, minimization, rationalization, etc. In the avoidance category, we can classify the *fearful silence* of characters such as the teacher and the student in *Matigari*.

When dealing with the sociological and political aspects of silence, concepts such as “conspiracy of silence” and “spiral of silence” are recurrently used. I have previously used the latter to explain why some characters avoid discussing certain topics in *Matigari*. According to Zerubavel, a conspiracy of silence implies a collective “endeavor, and it involves a

collaborative effort on the parts of both the potential generator and recipient of a given piece of information to stay away from it” (48). This collective effort is well exemplified in *Sweet and Sour Milk*, not only in society concerning political issues such as the absence of justice but also at home, especially regarding the probable causes of Soyaan’s death. The deceased’s family members refuse to consider that the General might have ordered his poisoning, except for his twin brother. Using the analogy of the three wise monkeys, Zerubavel further explains that conspiracies of silence not only entail the non-disclosure of information but may require that some things not be seen or heard. In this respect, Loyaan’s younger sister, Ladan, is a good example. She seems deeply affected by her brother’s death and can be heard sobbing uncontrollably, even after promising to stop crying. One day, when Loyaan tries to find out what she thinks about their father’s interview in the newspapers, she responds: “I see nothing. I hear nothing. I think nothing. I am nothing” (108). Ladan’s response is a typical example of denial in the form of silence. As for Ngugi’s *Matigari*, I have previously mentioned the existence of a *conspiracy of silence* and a *spiral of silence* around topics relating to issues such as Marxism and government accountability. In his analysis of the repressive and exploitative postcolonial regimes in *Maigari* and *Devil on the Cross*, Saliou Dione and Mamadou Diop also conclude that the elites have successfully imposed “a culture of forced silence” on the masses (229). But to thrive, conspiracies need co-deniers who collectively strive towards avoiding unacceptable subjects.

As Zerubavel rightly notes, it is only when the elephant in the room “is jointly avoided by everyone around it, indeed, [that we] are actually dealing with a ‘conspiracy’ of silence” (47). This is also what happens in *Matigari*. After spending so many years in the forest, Matigari has become a stranger in his own society. We can see that he is also unaware of the changes that have occurred during his absence, including conspiracies of silence in which all members of society partake. As the phrase goes, they have learned to ignore the elephant in

the room. Matigari, on the other hand, threatens to lift the veil off their delusions when he openly asks questions about state truth and justice. At first, he does not even know that such questions are taboo. Typical responses to his questions, often consisting of warnings, also prove the existence of such a conspiracy. For example, when Matigari asks his cellmates where one can find truth and justice, the answer he gets from the thief is: “If you continue asking questions of that kind, you will find yourself in a mental hospital or in a pit of everlasting darkness” (61).⁵⁹ After breaking out of prison, Matigari goes to the courts of law, looking for truth and justice. But when he interrupts the assembly with his greeting, someone points his finger at him and tells him to “go away” (82). Nevertheless, his question, which he is allowed to pose, is equally met with much disdain as one of the men tells him: “Let me give you a bit of advice, then. Go get a rope and hang yourself immediately ... For your kind of questions will lead you to the grave.” These are not just warnings issued to signal to the careless Matigari that he should seal his mouth. In a way, they are also an invitation sent to Matigari to become part of the conspiracy and ignore the elephant he sees. After learning that the questions he asks are a breach of the conspiracy of silence, Matigari consistently refuses to be a co-denier throughout the story and proceeds to issue his own warning “that too much fear breeds misery in the land” (31). But in his endeavor to expose the truth, Matigari also discovers that the conspiracy is not sustained by those who remain silent. Some even actively collaborate with the regime to enforce such a conspiracy.

Informant and Collaborators

Another essential word to retain from Zerubavel’s sociological assessment of the phenomenon of denial—which we also observe in our novels—is *collaboration*. For conspiracies to live on,

⁵⁹ See below, Chapter Twenty for some explanation of why asking some questions is seen as a sign of insanity.

there needs to be a collaborative effort. For colonial and postcolonial regimes to thrive, they must rely on certain types of people who collaborate directly or indirectly. In *The Ostrich Effect: Solving Destructive Patterns at Work*, William Kahn, commenting on Zerubavel's concept of co-denial, contends that "silence and deception require collaboration, the tacit agreement to look away from that which is disturbing" (Chapter 1). Later, he writes that collaboration

has both benign and malignant meanings. The benign version of collaboration involves people joining with others, pooling their resources in order to move ahead on their projects, tasks, and goals. The malignant version of collaboration is shaped insidiously by power: people collaborate with those in power by spying on their own people in order to gain favor for themselves. (Chapter 7)

What Kahn refers to as "malignant" collaboration fully resonates with some events we have already witnessed in both *Matigari* and *Sweet and Sour Milk* regarding the use of surveillance and the silence it provokes. Let us recall, for instance, that in both novels, the governments have informants everywhere who report the actions and words of people suspected of dissidence.

With the notions of conspiracy of silence and malignant collaboration, we now understand that when our characters resort to silence, they fear two things. The first one is repression, which can only happen if the words and actions of the suspected dissident are reported back to the people in power by an informer. This is another fear anyone who criticizes a dictatorial regime must face. In *Sweet and Sour Milk*, Keynaan, the twins' father, tells Loyaan not to shout during their disagreement over Soyaan's last words. As they both mark a pause, Keynaan casts a "furtive look to this and that side" to see whether someone is observing them (96). In another dialogue between Loyaan and Margaritta, the latter character looks "to this side and that side as if suspicious" (133). These two cases also remind us of the teacher's words in *Matigari*: "Ssssshhh, stop talking so loudly" (92). He utters these words as

our protagonist starts talking about truth and justice. The teacher is afraid that an informer can be listening from the next room. In both cases, the cautious attitude we witness is provoked by the fear of spies, which is even more justified since nobody knows who amongst them is a spy and who is not. By collaborating with governments, spies create an atmosphere of suspicion in the public sphere that is favorable for the endurance of conspiracies of silence and the denial of social and political injustices. This is also the impression we get by reading the words of Dutch psychoanalyst Joost Meerloo in his classic *The Rape of the Mind: The Psychology of Thought Control, Menticide, and Brainwashing*: “The secret police create awe and panic inside the country, while the army serves to create awe and panic outside. Just the thought of an outbreak of terror—of even a possible future terror—makes men unwilling to express their opinions and expose themselves” (126). Meerloo’s contention accurately describes the atmosphere of suspicion and terror that characterizes the *Variations* trilogy. It also shows that spies and informers play a significant role in totalitarian control.

Although informers have the same role and methods of reporting in both *Matigari* and *Sweet and Sour Milk*, there is at least one difference between them. In the latter novel, for instance, informers of the Security Services, recruited from among the unemployable and illiterate lot, are portrayed to be very accurate in their reporting. Here, we can remember the conversation between Loyaan and Ibrahim, where the latter asserts that the informers the Security Services employ cannot read nor write but can repeat “word for word. They report verbatim what they think they heard when they walked into a restaurant” (148). From Ibrahim’s words, we understand why Keynaan cautioned his son to keep his voice low before surveying his surroundings during their interchange regarding Soyaan’s last words.⁶⁰ However, Ibrahim also puts his finger on the risk of distortion when the ears of the regime report “what

⁶⁰ Also see below, p. 185.

they think they heard” instead of what a person has indeed said. This suggests that even if the regime’s informers report inaccurate facts, they do so honestly.

Unlike Farah’s informants who report with verbatim what they hear or with flawed honesty what they believe they hear. Ngugi’s spies actively distort the events they witness in *Matigari*. When the teacher is arrested for the first time for teaching Marxism, the police must have based their allegations on the words of an informer who was present in his class. The teacher tells a different version, as he complains: “Do you know what they based the allegations on? The fact that I stated that the political and economic systems of countries like the Soviet Union, China, Cuba, and many other socialist countries are based on the teachings of Marx and Lenin” (54). There is no valuation in these observations, and therefore, no allegation to be made. Later in the novel, we see the hooded justice confusing who did and said what in prison. He says that Matigari “shared his bread in goal in clear imitation of Christ’s Last Supper” (123). But it was the drunkard who did so in prison. The question, now, is: why do these informers report a distorted version of what they witness? Do they do it intentionally? Or is it something that happens unconsciously? There are instances of distortion that can either be categorized as conscious or unconscious in the novels under discussion. In *Sweet and Sour Milk*, Farah’s plot revolves around a dictatorial regime’s transformation of an opponent into a national hero after his death. The regime rewrites the history of the dead and substitutes his last words with a propagandistic motto. But when the father of the dead Soyaan corroborates the big lie, his twin brother starts asking questions about why the regime has lied about his dissident brother and why his father has betrayed the memory of his son. Farah’s message is not simple and goes beyond the common belief that the civil servants of the country always lie in the pursuit of material comfort in the *Variations* trilogy. Loyaan’s investigative journey uncovers the different reasons why the elite collaborates with the General.

Chapter Ten

Political Lies and Preference Falsification in the *Variations* trilogy

In Carroll Quigley's definition of politics, the second way a government can obtain obeisance from its citizens is to use wealth. The present chapter discusses what happens when a regime attempts to obtain obedience using material incentives in examples from the *Variations* trilogy. My primary goal is not merely to demonstrate that the regime's use of wealth to buy consent often forces people to distort their political views. Above all, this chapter intends to show how Farah mitigates the moral condemnation toward collaborators of the regime by revealing that there are motives other than material benefits behind the lies of the elite. As portrayed in Farah's trilogy, most characters lie to have a job in the administration of the government. Consequently, it is unsurprising to see some characters criticize the regime privately while supporting in publicly, an instance of *preference falsification*, as Timur Kuran has termed it. I also argue that deliberate distortion, or lying, does not benefit only the liar but also the government. While the elite's lies serve their personal interests, they also help support the supreme leader's power. Here, I am not proposing something new by arguing that the use of wealth invites the elite to lie. My goal is merely to demonstrate that materially

motivated political lies also participate in the mass psychosis that characterizes the dictatorships fictionalized by Farah and Ngugi.

Distortion is a typical behavior pattern we observe in our novels. In its general sense, distortion refers to the act of transforming something, an object, or a fact so that it becomes different in form or meaning. In our case, we are mainly concerned with how characters report facts. The term “distortion” appears intimidating, especially from a purely psychological perspective. However, multiple dictionaries and thesaurus entries of the term “distortion” reveal many synonyms that make the phenomenon look more familiar. One such synonym is the phenomenon known in plain language and everyday life as *lying*. Looking back at the hooded justice’s false testimony against Matigari, we can now qualify his reporting of facts as a distortion and a lie. With the notion of lying in mind, we have moved from the simple refusal to admit the truth of something to the statement of something untrue. But before analyzing the mechanism of distortion and its implication in our novels, we need a working definition for the different kinds of distortion I will discuss in *Sweet and Sour Milk* and *Wizard of the Crow*.

Distortion is a psychological phenomenon, and more precisely, a defense mechanism, which Vaillant defines as the act of “grossly reshaping of reality to suit internal needs” (81). However, this definition of distortion is from an entirely psychological perspective and cannot explain some cases of distortion portrayed in our novels. The *APA Dictionary of Psychology* provides a definition that proposes many types of distortion:

1. any inaccuracy [sic] of perception, cognition, memory, and so forth.
2. either the unconscious process of altering emotions and thoughts that are unacceptable in the individual’s psyche or the conscious misrepresentation of facts, which often serves the same underlying purpose of disguising that which is unacceptable to or in the self.

3. in psychoanalytic theory, the outcome of the DREAM-WORK that modifies forbidden thoughts and wishes to make them more acceptable to the EGO. Such distortion of the dream WISH through the use of substitutes and symbols means that only an act of INTERPRETATION can uncover the true meaning of the dream. (326, original capitals)

We can see from these definitions that distortion has many forms. In my literary analysis, I will focus on the second set of sub-definitions because they describe distortion as something that can be either conscious or unconscious. The first definition of the *APA Dictionary* will be more helpful in explaining the phenomenon of distortion in storytelling, which I will discuss in Chapter Twelve.

Concerning the second definition of distortion given by the *APA Dictionary of Psychology*, it is common to use the factor of intentionality to judge whether a person is lying. In *Crises of the Republic*, Hannah Arendt distinguishes between lying as an active, aggressive capability to deny facts and lying as the consequence of the failing of our sensual and mental apparatus (5). Using a similar argument, Donald Cozzens adds to the intentional dimension of distortion the notion of bad faith, which he defines as “a conscious sleight of hand that keeps ‘secret’ a reality we are unwilling to acknowledge” (27). The author’s description is derived from Jean-Paul Sartre’s notion of *mauvaise foi*, which Sartre identifies with falsehood. For Sartre, lying is the deliberate act of hiding the truth that one possesses: “A man does not lie about what he is ignorant of; he does not lie when he spreads an error of which he himself is the dupe; he does not lie when he is mistaken” (*Being* 48). Sartre’s perspective is moral, for he views lying as a “negative attitude.” The distinction between lying deliberately and lying by ignorance is crucial at all levels of society, notably in interpersonal relationships and the juridic legal system. Above all, it poses a crucial question: Is the lying person evil, i.e., is he lying intentionally, or is the person ill or not well informed, i.e., is he lying unintentionally? In *Sweet and Sour Milk*, Farah’s critique of Siad Barre’s dictatorship puts the reader face to face

with the moral and material concerns underlying the political lies of a regime that stops at nothing to transform a political dissident into a national hero.

The big lie in *Sweet and Sour Milk*

In *Sweet and Sour Milk*, Farah's portrayal of political lies supported by the elite reveals a moral ambivalence. The narrator's condemnation of the elite's acquiescence and collaboration with the regime is undermined by the private lives of many characters who lie and support the regime for multiple reasons that are not always easily condemnable. Loyaan's investigative journey starts with his intention not only to discover the truth about the death of his brother but also to expose the fabrication of lies that his father and the General have propagated about his twin brother's political commitment and, more importantly, the words he pronounced before breathing his last. Since he was the only person present in the room when his brother died, Loyaan is in the best position to report those last words. From what he recollects from those last moments he spent with his brother, Loyaan honestly believes that Soyaan's last words were his (Loyaan's) name. As the narrator insists, "Loyaan was honest: 'He called my name three times. He hiccupped and hiccupped and hiccupped. Then he starts calling my name repeatedly, agitatedly. Those were his last words'" (46). This is what Loyaan replies to the minister to the Presidency when asked what his brother's last words were. Here, the narrator plays a reassuring role in stressing that Loyaan was honest. The main effect of this is the dissipation of the reader's doubt about Soyaan's last moment—the reader has not been with the two brothers all the time and cannot be certain of what Soyaan has said.

But the minister is unsatisfied with Loyaan's answer and replies: "We were given a different version. We prefer that" (46). At this point in the plot, the distortion of Soyaan's last words begins. The minister, using a psychosocial trick, or a soft interrogation technique, on

Loyaan, suggests and insists that the deceased must have said something else before he called his brother's name or the name of a woman: "Before he called your name or the name of that woman, did Soyaan—God bless his soul—not stumble on the words 'LABOUR IS HONOUR,' just before he breathed his last? Did he not?," the minister further inquires (47, original capitals). Upon insisting multiple times, the Minister finally succeeds in leading Loyaan to partially admit that his late brother "may have said that." On the spot, Loyaan does not give much thought to the words the Minister is trying to put in his late brother's mouth. But why is the minister attributing to the late Soyaan words he did not utter? This issue will be addressed in due time.

For now, we can learn a few more things from the rest of the conversation between Loyaan and the minister. For instance, after talking about Soyaan's last words, the minister now mentions the memorandum, which will soon become center of everyone's attention. But at the time of this exchange, Loyaan has never previously heard of a memorandum written by his brother and is utterly unsuspecting of its political significance. However, as he later discovers, the government wants to lay its hands on it at all costs. Let us recall that they arrested and tortured Mulki to find its location and to know its content. They also forced Margarita's bank locker open for the same purpose (179). The memorandum, if the government ever finds it, would probably be destroyed because as long as it exists, it threatens the General's carefully constructed lies. As Arendt argues, lying also requires an act of "radical destruction—as in the case of the murderer who *says* that Mrs Smith has died and then goes and kills her" (*Crises* 13). Finding and destroying the memorandum is necessary so that the lies of the regime may become reality.⁶¹ For Abdelhafez, Soyaan's memory is encapsulated in the memorandum. Although he has ceased to exist as an individual, he

⁶¹ This process of destruction of evidence inconsistent with the actual political line is also to be found at the core of Eurasia's propaganda machine in George Orwell's *1984*.

nevertheless continues to live as an idea, and the truth of his memory “jeopardizes the General’s rule” (54). Similarly, Derek Wright states that the “written sign and its objective notation of reality would appear, in theory, to pose to an oral-based power system the greatest challenge, for the sign certifies reality by keeping an evidential record of people and events which insists that things happened” (“Oligarchy” 90). The existence of Soyaan’s memorandum poses an immense threat to the regime’s narrative. This is why it is ready to go to extreme lengths to destroy the documents that prove Soyaan’s detestation of the General and any other person who tries to expose that memory.

However, the General’s government does more than destroy Soyaan’s history. They also fabricate a new past for him, for the one that once existed does not suit their purposes. These actions of the regime and Loyaan’s desire to restore the true history of his brother exemplify a form of imposition of silence “through mechanisms such as official historiographies” (Williams 163). It comes, therefore, as a shock to Loyaan when he reads the daily paper in which their father paints Soyaan as follows:

A carrier of the Revolutionary Torch: the standard-bearer of scientific socialism; an advocate of Justice and Social Equality; a believer in the General’s interpretation of the country’s needs: Soyaan Keynaan, Allah bless him, died two days ago. He died a premature death. He died serving the Revolution. He died and his last words were praiseful of policies: ‘Labour is Honour and there is no other General but our General.’ (105)

Many facts are distorted in this interview, among which are the political convictions of the deceased. Soyaan worked in the government, but his political views differed from the General’s. Except for his mother, Soyaan’s family has known how much he hated the General and what he stood for. Some also know he belonged to an underground group working to undermine the General’s regime.

Another striking element of the interview is the addition to the initial version, which the Minister tried to force upon Loyaan: “As for his last words, I was there by his bedside when he said them when he spoke these words of wisdom. I was there. ‘LABOUR IS HONOUR. THERE IS NO OTHER GENERAL BUT OUR GENERAL.’ Those were his last words” (106, original capitals). This is quite different from the first version, which claims: “LABOUR IS HONOUR” (47, original capitals). John Williams notes that “the reconstruction of Soyaan’s final words becomes progressively articulate and metaphorically propagandistic” (168). The new addition to what now becomes the motto of the General’s Revolution bears significant relevance in the Islamic religion, which I will address in Part Five as part of the regime’s indoctrination and propaganda.

But for the time being, two questions come to our minds. The first one poses the problem of the origins of the supposed last words, whereas the second one questions the motives of both their originator and the people who repeat them. Regarding the question of where those words came from, when we go to the most plausible hypothesis, the General appears as the great mastermind behind all these machinations. In an interview on the representation of dictatorship in his novels, Farah comments that Somalia was a badly written play in which Siyad Barre, whom Farah portrays as the General in the novels, “played all the available roles”(“Why I Write” 10).⁶² This is why, from this point on, we will consider the General the inventor of the lies, while Keynaan, the father, will be considered a messenger who repeats what he is told to say. This forces us to find reasons behind those lies. And this demands that we analyze the General and Keynaan separately.

⁶² As Farah states in an essay, “Somalia was a badly written play, I had thought, and Siyad Barre was its author. To our chagrin, he was also the play’s main actor, its centre and theme; as an actor-producer, he played all the available roles. He did not think anyone was as good as he, so he was its stage-designer and light technician, as well as the audience” (10).

Before tackling the specific motives for which the General may want his fabrication of lies to spread, discussing some generalities of political lies is essential. We need further clarification on the intentional character of lying and a more suitable definition. In his doctoral thesis, *Lying, Deception and Strategic Omission: Definition & Evaluation*, Benjamin Icard comprehensively analyzes the debate around basic elements constituting lies and other deceptive attitudes. One such question that often arises in attempts to define the notion of lying is whether the speaker's intention to deceive is a necessary condition of every lie. James Mahon seems to respond to this question in the affirmative when he proposes four required conditions for lying:

First, lying requires that a person make a statement (statement condition). Second, lying requires that the person believe the statement to be false; that is, lying requires that the statement be untruthful (untruthfulness condition). Third, lying requires that the untruthful statement be made to another person (addressee condition). Fourth, lying requires that the person intend that that other person believe the untruthful statement to be true (intention to deceive the addressee condition). (2)

I previously tackled the first two of these four conditions when we demonstrated that Keynaan, the addresser speaking the words of the General, reported untrue facts about his son's political convictions and last words. Assuming now that there is some intention to deceive behind these lies, the question remains unanswered: to know whom the General wishes to deceive.

Here, I will start my argumentation by stating that two categories of the addressee will be considered: following from our remark about the public character of politics, we argue that the primary target of political discourse is the masses whose consent or acquiescence

politicians seek to obtain.⁶³ Having established that the General has lied about Soyaan's political positions with the help of Keynaan and having demonstrated that the public is one of the targets of his fabrications of lies, it now remains to determine why exactly they have lied. Although these issues will be dealt with in greater detail in the next chapter, it can, nonetheless, be stated at this point that, in the *Variations* novels, the General has one main reason to lie to the people about Soyaan's convictions, which is to maintain himself in power; and accessorially, to revive faith in his ideology and maintain public order. Based on Loyaan's insinuations and what we know about Soyaan's political project, it seems reasonable to affirm that General must have known about Soyaan's underground group's project to undermine his regime.

By killing Soyaan and then making him a "Hero of the Revolution," the regime probably intends to show the masses that everyone loves the General.⁶⁴ Everyone, especially government officials, must appear to approve of the General's philosophy, that the General's politics is perfect, and that no one disagrees with it. By knighting Soyaan, the General seeks to stimulate devotion to his ideology. The message is clear: if you support the General and die serving his cause, you can be sanctified, too. Unfortunately for the totalitarian regime, no matter how forcefully it wishes to deny the existence of legitimate opposition, there will always be dissenting individuals like Loyaan and his brother, who will seek truth and justice. Consequently, these characters who reject the lies of the regime become the enemies of the

⁶³ Arendt gives a similar conclusion concerning the release of the Pentagon papers in the Vietnam War. In her view, the lying that took place during the war "was hardly aimed at the enemy [...], but was destined chiefly, if not exclusively, for domestic consumption, for propaganda at home, and especially for the purpose of deceiving Congress" (*Crises* 14). That politicians lie to the people they rule over is no secret. Against Emmanuel Kant's assertion that lying is always morally wrong, there is even a philosophical line supporting lying in politics and lying in general. This "noble lie" includes the writings of philosophers such as Plato and theorists such as Machiavelli. "Truthfulness has never been counted among the political virtues, and lies have always been regarded as a justifiable tool in political dealings," writes Arendt in her chapter entitled "Lying in Politics" (*Crises* 4).

⁶⁴ The instrumentalization of Soyaan's death is comparable to that of the German Nazi Field Marshall Rommel. He had turned against Hitler and was forced to kill himself, but he got a big state funeral because he was a war hero!

General and his Revolution. I have discussed the fate of enemies—those who criticize the General and those who plot against his regime in Part Two. They deserve the stick, which comes in various forms, including prison, torture, and death, as we have seen in the chapter on silence. Now, let us discuss what the regime does to its supporters.

The “carrot and stick” metaphor, which I previously mentioned in passing,⁶⁵ stands for a system of motivation in which good behavior is elicited and rewarded by the offering of privileges while bad behavior is repressed through punishment. Though not characteristic of authoritarian regimes, the carrot and stick management has often been associated with specific means whereby support is sustained and dissent repressed in many undemocratic countries (Gallagher & Hanson 1). In his assessment of ethnicity and state formation in Africa, which my next chapter discusses, Messay Kebede makes an interesting note on the use of wealth to win consent and suppress dissent: “In conditions of scarcity, ruling elites are inclined to use the centralized power of the state to fashion a social system all geared toward the reward of supporters and the repression of competitors” (185). In many aspects, what Kebede describes here is similar to the General’s system of ruling in Farah’s *Variations*. The carrot, which stands for political and economic privileges of all sorts, is a central issue in autocratic governance, as exemplified in all the novels under our scrutiny.

The “carrot and stick” method also finds its application in the *Variations* trilogy. Commenting on the General’s handling of tribal chieftains and other elderly people, Keynaan observes that “[h]e has some in prison; he appoints some as ambassadors; he bribes some with the portfolio of banana sales; he forces some to retire; he has some of them tortured” (100). We can identify two groups of people in Keynaan’s observation. There are those to whom the General gives privileges and those he punishes. If we already know the reasons that have

⁶⁵ See my discussion on the role of reward and punishment in behavior conditioning. Above, Chapter Si, subchapter “How does fear lead to silence?”

earned the unfortunate lot their misfortunes, what remains to be answered now is the question of what those who belong to the fortunate have done to earn their privileges. The carrot can be offered in two ways. The first is to grant all kinds of favors for services to support the dictator's ideology. At its most basic level, it is closely related to the notion of reward, such as giving someone a post or money for helping throughout an election. In the second situation, the dictator may even give the carrot to someone who is not on his side, this time in anticipation of the latter's cooperation and acquiescence. In this case, offering the carrot to someone relates to the notion of bribery.

To the dictator belong the spoils

Using wealth to reward political support is a common practice in politics. It is not typical of undemocratic regimes although it takes multiple forms, such as appointing political supporters to hold public office. The practice, which came to be known in the United States as the *spoils system*, is often said to have originated with President Andrew Jackson's administration, but it has of course been implemented before him (Baerga & Cruz 1330-31).⁶⁶ It is a system that allows elected officials to appoint their friends, family members, and supporters in their administrations (Barbour & Wright 306). In itself, the spoils system is neither illegal nor immoral since top ranking officials are allowed to freely choose their collaborator.⁶⁷ Its application varies country to country. In the United States, more than in any other modern democracy, politicians have always had great latitude in appointing their collaborators and there has always been greater tolerance of the spoils system. Advocates of the spoils system

⁶⁶ Another American president who marked the history of the spoils system in the United States was Ulysses Grant. During his presidency, the spoils system attained proportions never observed before. His detractors even coined the term *grantism* to denounce the corruption in his administration.

⁶⁷ *The spoils of war*: in politics, the election campaigns are metaphorically seen as a war at the end of which key positions become spoils that the victor can distribute to his loyalists.

often argue that it contributes to a more cohesive administration by surrounding the president with officials who will defend his policies rather than oppose him. However, this implies that when there is a change in administration, federal workers appointed by the previous government must be removed from office and replaced by the new president's loyalists.

These examples from American politics are a useful detour on our road to understanding Farah's representation of the intricacies of African politics. Of course, both kinds of politics are different, but postcolonial African nations have been most often modeled on American and Western political systems. Nowadays, Western democracies have legal dispositions that restrict the extent of the spoils.⁶⁸ In theory, most African states have similar restrictions. At the time of the Moi and Barre regimes allegorized by Farah and Ngugi, both Somalia and Kenya—and probably the rest of African countries—had legal civil service reforms. But as I previously demonstrated regarding constitutional provisions, authoritarian regimes often show little commitment to the democratic measures they have adopted.

In their novels, Farah and Ngugi show that African countries practice the spoils systems more unbridled. To begin with, as in Western democracies, it is commonplace for a newly self-appointed dictator to replace top senior workers in their administration. The manner in which the dictator replaces members of the previous administration depends on how he came to power. First, there is the eventuality of peaceful succession, be it through legal processes or rigged elections. Secondly, and more characteristic of autocratic regimes,

⁶⁸ Early legal attempts to reform the Civil Service were made during Grant's presidency, who established the Civil Service Commission in 1871. However, comprehensive reform would not take place until after the assassination of President James Garfield by a disgruntled office seeker in 1881. Besides this unfortunate consequence, the spoils system bred corruption and incompetence in the government and the administration. The subsequent action resulted in the 1883 Civil Service Reform Act. Also called the Pendleton Act, the federal law introduced a merit-based system attributing of federal jobs. Since then, the tendency has been to minimize the number of positions that fall within the scope of the spoils system. Conversely, the number of government jobs subjected to the law has increased from ten percent to reach ninety percent at its culminating point in the 1950s (Mitnick n. pag.). Chester Lloyd Jones makes an interesting remark about the progress made towards the elimination of the spoils system when he observed that the overwhelming majority of jobs secured under the merit-based system are in the middle and lower strata, while the "higher, better paid, supervisory positions are to a greater degree still the prize of victory at the spoils" (67).

there is the violent power grab by a military junta, as is the case in Farah's *Variations*. These military coups, which are predominantly violent, are followed by a similarly chaotic turnover. Senior officers are not just substituted, but they are imprisoned, chased into exile or even executed, in some cases. This pattern often remains in place throughout the dictator's rule. Not only can any individual senior worker be replaced, but more shocking still, we see frequent ministerial reshuffles. But on what basis does Farah's dictator allocate these spoils and other resources of his country? How does the elite react to his material incentives? How does Farah approach the question of moral responsibility of the elite and intellectuals?

Before setting to answer these questions, two points of comparison between a dictatorial regime and a democratic one need to be addressed. Firstly, in an ideal democracy, the president's will is also the will of the people who elected him. When both parties disagree on any matter, the fundamental principle of democratic freedom would guarantee that the people express their discontent without fear of reprisals. By voicing their opinion, citizens will do nothing less than express the truth about an existing problem. The expressed opinion is necessarily consistent with the individual's political view, and there is no need for silence of the kind I have discussed in Part Two. Secondly, in a democracy, the spoils system only concerns the high-ranking government positions. The only thing required of those who covet these positions is to be on the same political side as the president. However, this obligation does not apply to ordinary government jobs, which are granted based on merit.

In the opposite universe, that of dictators, a president imposes his will on the people. Whenever a problem arises, everyone in the country is expected to keep their opinion to themselves. To do so, they resort to various forms of denial. While many of them find refuge in silence, many others indulge in distortion as a more severe type of denial. Hence in a dictatorship, there is a connection between the spoils system and the use of distortion. Unlike our democratic universe, where the spoils system is restricted to top-level jobs, the spoils

system of the dictator is generalized to almost the entire public service. This generalization comes very close to Mbembe's idea transforming of the salary into a claim. By doing so, Mbembe writes, the government uses the salary as a resource "to buy obedience and gratitude and to break the population to habits of discipline" (Mbembe 45). There is merit to Mbembe's claim in that it links wealth and consent. However, he does not specify in what forms the dictator expects this consent or obedience—or by what concrete action the individual who wants a salary has to demonstrate his obedience. Here, I believe obedience may take the form of silence, distortion, and madness when wealth is involved. But as suggested in my chapter on silence, remaining silent in the face of oppression is literally *doing nothing* and is, therefore, generally not rewarded. As for madness, I will demonstrate in my next chapter how it is caused by the dictator's attempt to obtain consent through propaganda and indoctrination. That is why I suggest that the primary form of consent that a dictator seeks to obtain through the distribution of wealth is distortion.

In the context of a generalized spoils system, individuals who desire to hold public office must express the same political opinion as the president. And since there is dissimilarity between the dictator's political views and the people's vision, only a tiny portion of the population will naturally qualify for those jobs if they choose to remain loyal to their private political convictions. This, in turn, leads to a discrepancy between the individual's public discourse and their private political beliefs. This phenomenon fits into the basic definition of what Timur Kuran has termed *preference falsification* in his book with the evocative title *Private Truths, Public Lies: The Social Consequences of Preference Falsification*. Kuran defines *preference falsification* as the "act of misrepresenting one's wants under perceived social pressures" (3). Here, the suggestion is that the extension of the spoils to all public offices leads most office seekers to falsify their political preferences by distorting their political view in public so that it is consistent with the ruling party's view. This form of

distortion, which is essentially conscious, raises questions about the individual's moral integrity. But Farah's treatment of the theme of political lies goes beyond this simplistic conception.

Throughout the *Variations* trilogy, integrity and morality remain constant themes. In *Sweet and Sour Milk*, in particular, both the protagonist and the narrator seem to possess a visceral detestation for those who stoop so low as to prostrate themselves before the General to secure a job. While awaiting his turn to enter the office of the director of the department of death certificates, the voice in Loyaan's head argues in the following terms:

Members of the *priviligentzia* who work for this régime fall into five categories—and here I exclude *a priori* the *parvenu*, the unmasked clown, i.e., the *arriviste*. First: there are the misled technocrats who believe that politics is, in essence, the false utterances politicians make in the presence of trusting crowds and hence wouldn't wish to have anything to do with it themselves; they prefer to stay away. Secondly: there are the bureaucrats who have no political ambitions nor social awareness but who reason thus 'I have a wife and children. It is for their sake I serve this régime in order that I have a means of earning a living; it is for their sake that I prostrate myself, that I accept to be humiliated.' Thirdly: there are the most interesting and the most daring of the lot, i.e., the saboteurs, men like Soyaan, women like Mulki, again men like Dr. Ahmed-Wellie, like Xassan.... (114, original italics)

Unfortunately, the voice is unable to finish the list as Loyaan is interrupted. It would have been instructive to know whether Loyaan himself and his father are also part of the list and in which category they belong. From what is there for us to analyze, it seems quite clear that Loyaan does not think very highly of those who betray their political convictions for material comfort. Also, whenever the narrator mentions people of that kind, he speaks of them as upstarts and clowns (113-14). But this quote is more revealing in that it shows that people

who work with the General have their reasons. Some do so because they want to feed their families.

The category of saboteurs works in the General's administration so that they can undermine it from within. Although this is a morally laudable enterprise, it benefits the regime all the same since everything ultimately comes down to the image they show publicly. How can one tell who is a true believer in the General from who is a pretender? In this authoritarian context where people are not allowed to criticize the General in public, the pretender cannot go about publicly telling others something to this effect: "I do not really approve of the General I am only pretending." Since this is only possible in private and not in public, the only thing people see is that such and such work for the General. Therefore they must approve of him. For example, Soyaan's mother, who does not know that her late son detested the General privately, firmly believes that he was an authentic supporter of the General. This is why she vehemently rejects Loyaan's suggestion that the family should not accept the General's generosity: "The government of this country (yes, the régime of this country, whether you like it or not—but that is another point) has offered your brother the honour due him: what do you do? With little thought and as though acting on advice given by enemies of this family, you refuse to behave sensibly" (84). And later, she states: "Soyaan worked for the General, he worked in the presidency. I am not convinced by your random taking of positions. The General has offered posthumous honour and perhaps a more lucrative gratuity for the family" (85). As we see in both passages, since Soyaan did not tell his mother the beliefs he holds privately, she takes his collaboration with the regime at face value as an approval of the General's ideology. In other words, since the pretender cannot speak his true intention, his action—working with the General—does it for him. In Soyaan's case, the fact that he was working with the General before he died will also allow the regime to speak for him and to write another history of his life.

The use of wealth to ensure and reward political compliance holds an important position in Farah's critique of the General's regime. This is not necessarily illegal because even Western democracies rely on such a practice. But if, in most cases, a political appointment evokes the notion of reward, there are also multiple instances where the dictator grants public office to individuals who he knows do not hold the same political belief as he does, which would suggest the notion of bribery. As stated earlier, the dictator is not the only person who benefits from the lies propagated by his regime. Malignant collaborators who join hands with the regime benefit as well, and Keynaan is the archetype of this class of collaborators in *Sweet and Sour Milk*. I have previously discussed how Farah uses this character to expose factual distortion in politics. The fact that the late Soyaan's father has sold these lies to the public only makes Farah's message more poignant. But the reasons why he has lied remain to be elucidated. Has he been pressured or threatened with reprisal of any sort by the General? Or has he just succumbed to the temptation of money? The first suggestion Farah offers his readers is that Keynaan's collaboration with the regime is materially motivated. For many decades, he worked for successive colonial and postcolonial governments, first as a soldier and then as a police officer:

One of your cases died under torture, Father. The story leaked. One of the Junior officers who had *worked* the man told on you all. It created a scandal. The general feared this would end in a tribal mutiny, that the tribe from which this man hailed would take revenge on his government of tribal hegemony. To prove that his own tribesmen were innocent, the general had all accusing fingers pointed at you and the other two, all three of you in the service of his hegemony. Having exposed you, he was left with no other choice than sack you. (94)

Loyaan's response to his father's self-congratulatory words again exposes the regime's widespread use of torture, an issue I have already discussed in the previous chapter. What I am interested in here, however, is not only how the collaboration of people like Keynaan helps the general maintain his hegemony, but also how unscrupulously he disposes of his collaborators when their actions threaten this hegemony. As a result of a man dying under his custody, Keynaan is deprived of his salary and put on a meager pension. As I suggested earlier, quoting Mbembe, the salary in the postcolonial state is not just the fruit of labor but a reward for political obedience. Therefore, to earn a decent living, one has to collaborate with the regime in one way or another.

Although Keynaan has been fired because of the scandal he created, he remains influential enough in the eyes of the General, to whom he can appeal at will. As he tells Loyaan, he once "went and appealed to the General not to take Soyaan for interrogation" (101). After Soyaan's death, the General allows Keynaan to redeem himself: he makes him corroborate the lies of the regime to get his job back. In retrospect, it becomes clear that when the Minister to the Presidency has first spoken to Loyaan about Soyaan's last words, the General has already decided to exploit the tragedy to his own advantage. Now, it suddenly appears that the General has sent the minister to seek the family's cooperation. With Loyaan, he approached the matter cautiously, but he must have been rather straightforward with Keynaan, telling him what to say and what he would gain from his collaboration. During their conversation, Keynaan also tells Loyaan that he has been reinstated: "The commission appointed by the General has freed me from blame. I was called in this afternoon and told so. I can have my job again. The same as before if I so wish" (94). But why has the General reinstated Keynaan? Pure generosity, is there another reason? For Loyaan, this cannot be a coincidental act of benevolence. He suspects that his father has lied to get his job back:

'Did you hear this morning's news?'

He took a sip of tea.

‘Yes.’

Loyaan dragged on his cigarette and filled his lungs with smoke he wouldn’t exhale, he decided.

‘Soyaan never said that. Nor did he die serving the General’s idea of revolution. I was there with him when he hiccupped his last. And I have proof that he opposed this régime’s dictatorship until the last second of his life.’

‘Labour is Honour’: these were Soyaan’s last words.’

‘But you were not there, Father.’

‘Does it matter?’

‘Yes, it does.’

‘I was there when he said it. I will say I was there when he said it.’

‘He said my name three times. You were not there. I was. He said my name three times just before the warmth went out of his hands.’

‘Why would he say your name three times?’

‘But you were not there. You weren’t there when he hiccupped his last.’

‘I was there. You weren’t.’

‘WHEN?’

‘Don’t shout.’

A pause. A furtive look to this and that side.

‘When?’ asked Loyaan.

‘I answered that very question in an interview which will be published in tomorrow’s daily. I also gave them the right photograph of Soyaan. Yes, I offered the right photograph of the Martyr of the Revolution and an interview. A photograph of mine as well.’

Loyaan stared at his father. He could not take his eyes off him. To what depths would he not descend to discredit his own son Soyaan?

‘Did you give the interview on condition that you get the job again?’

‘No.’

‘But you know it is dishonest of you to say that Soyaan died serving the General's régime? You know that he opposed it by whatever means were possible and within his powers. You know that.’ (95-96)

This conversation says a lot about the character of Keynaan and his moral decay. His behavior is disturbing. Were it not for his professional experience as a torturer, readers might be legitimate to question his mental sanity instead of moral integrity. Even though Keynaan is not interrogating his son, his words and questions seem to rely on the Security Service interrogative techniques destined to make Loyaan doubt what he has witnessed. Here, it would not be difficult to envision Keynaan torturing a political opponent, trying to force an alternate reality into his head and make him admit to plotting a supposed coup.

But in the present case, Keynaan and Loyaan disagree on what Soyaan has last said before breathing his last. First, both Loyaan and his father claim to have been there when Soyaan died. But we know that only Loyaan was. Yet, Keynaan cold-bloodedly turns the truth around and takes Loyaan's place. Another critical moment in this conversation is when Loyaan asks his father whether he has lied to get his job back. Keynaan's answer to the question is a “no”—which probably does not convince his son. As legitimate as Loyaan's question is, his father's response seems all the less convincing. As Keynaan's case shows, people who collaborate with the dictator benefit from distorting their private political views in public or distorting other people's history, as evidenced in the case of Soyaan. However, political loyalty is not the only parameter most African dictators consider when distributing material and other advantages. The quote I have just analyzed above also reveals that tribal allegiances also account for much of the General's politics. Sometimes, these allegiances determine who is given the stick or the carrot. For example, According to Loyaan's

interpretation of why his father has been fired in the first place,⁶⁹ we see that when the man died under torture, the General did not punish his tribesmen who were involved. However, Keynaan and his two colleagues, who are not from the dictator's tribe, were fired and humiliated. This is what Loyaan means when he talks of the general's "government of tribal hegemony." In *Sardines*, the character of Samater suggests that to "complete the picture [the General's authoritarian rule], you must superimpose the tribal motif on the tapestry of African politics" (*Sardines* 76). This is why it is important to look at the influence of tribalism on African to properly grasp Farah's portrayal of postcolonial Somalia.

⁶⁹ See the quote above, p183.

Chapter Eleven

Tribalism and the Allocation of Resources in *Variations*

Tribalism on ethnic grounds is a central theme in Farah's *Variations* trilogy.⁷⁰ Farah's emphasis on tribalism stems from his personal experience with Siad Barre's regime, which, as John Hawley rightly notes, "became symbolic in Farah's mind for all such rulers throughout Africa—men who played one faction against another to maintain personal power, and who encouraged narrow tribal interests in opposition to the broader national concerns" (191). Farah's view of tribalism as opposed to nationalism is noticeable in his novels, notably through the narrator's comments in *Sweet and Sour Milk* and the nationalistic principles of his protagonist in *Close Sesame*. His exploration of the intricacies of tribal dissensions allows readers to understand that the ethnic factor affects social relations and determines how the regime distributes the country's resources. In the scholarship on tribalism, three main theories

⁷⁰ The term "tribalism" first suggests discrimination along units of tribe and ethnicity. But it is also often used to denote any human grouping sharing the same interests, whether political, professional, etc. In Somalia, as in many parts of the world including even the United States of America, politics has been tribalized. In *Political Tribes: Group Instinct and the Fate of Nations*, Amy Chua argues that the US is not spared by the gangrene of political tribalism, whose most divisive attribute is race (Chapter One). In other countries, where race is not a marker, religion and tribe can be the causes of divisiveness.

compete to make sense of the formation and functioning of tribes in Africa and around the globe. These approaches to tribalism are primordialism, constructivism, and instrumentalism.

Primordialists, such as Frederik Barth and Clifford Geertz, view ethnicity as inherent to human nature and associate it with primordial elements such as blood, language, custom, and religion, all of which Geertz referred to as the “givens of social existence” (109). An individual’s affiliation with a particular ethnic entity, Geertz argues, generally results from “being born into a particular religious community, speaking a particular language, or even a dialect of a language, and following particular social practices.” In the primordialism conception, ethnicity and the ethnic identities of groups are considered fixed and natural. The constructivist theory of ethnicity rejects the idea of fixedness and hypothesizes ethnicity and ethnic identity as the product of historical development and social interactions. Nevertheless, constructivists do not wholeheartedly reject the idea that ethnicity relies on the “givens” because they, too, propose that ethnic membership requires some descent-based attributes such as race, religion, and language. However, rather than seeing descent-based attributes as fixed, constructivists argue that they are characterized by an intrinsic stickiness, making them hard “but not impossible to change. Thus, taking the notions of change and fluidity as central characteristics of ethnicity, constructivists hold that ethnic identities can and do change over time.⁷¹ The third theoretical approach to ethnicity, instrumentalism, also rejects the primordialist conception of ethnicity and defines it, in rational terms, as a tool that members of ethnic groups use to attain their goals.

⁷¹ First, the Constructivist concepts of nominal and activated ethnic identity seem relevant to grasp the intricacies of African ethnic interactions. They explain how people are able to see themselves as a nation, as Christians, or as an ethnic group in the presence of foreign powers at certain historical moments. But as soon as the contrast brought about by the stranger disappears, these individuals can activate their other identities against members of the same religion or nation. Frederick Cooper argues that “there was indeed effective mobilization in those years that cut across ethnic divisions and urban/rural distinctions, through which Africans made strong claims to citizenship, which African politicians used against colonial regimes. But once in power, such leaders understood all too well the danger such claims represented” to them (406).

While proponents of each approach strive to refute the other's argument, many have suggested combining two or more of these theories to explain the formation and interaction between ethnic groups. For example, by applying these theories to the cases of Moldova, Georgia, and Azerbaijan, Laura Yeghiazaryan concludes that "the primordialist theory has the least amount of explanatory power when it comes to explaining the causes of ethnic conflicts" (61). When considered separately in the case of Moldova, Georgia, and Azerbaijan, Yeghiazaryan suggests that the constructivist and instrumentalist theories provide accurate explanations of some factors leading to ethnic conflicts in those three states. However, only when both theories are combined can a more comprehensive account of the situation be given (61).⁷² Can these approaches to ethnicity also explain the African situation, and how do both Farah and Ngugi deal with the instrumentalization of ethnicity in their novels? As our two authors portray, the explanatory models vary in the cases of Somalia and Kenya. For instance, Farah's depiction of tribalism in the *Variations* trilogy seems to align primarily with primordialist and instrumentalist theorizations. Ngugi's position on the place of tribalism in African politics is more delicate to discuss because tribalism has no place in his novels.

The myth of tribalism: why there are no ethnic tribes in Ngugi's novels

In reading our novels, we find that both authors have different outlooks on the importance of ethnicity in social and political life in postcolonial Africa. In *Matigari* and *Wizard of the Crow*, Ngugi does not tackle tribalism and its consequences in politics. While this may seem a mere matter of thematic choice, further reading of Ngugi's non-fictional writings shows that his dismissal of such an essential aspect of African social and political life derives mainly

⁷² Constructivists share many points with primordialists, for instance, the idea that some inherited attributes shape ethnic identities. Constructivists also acknowledge that ethnic groups can be subject to instrumental manipulation for material or psychic gains (Chandra 14)

from his ideological point of view. Some constructivists, such as Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger, claim that ethnicity and ethnic groups are the creation of colonial intervention in Africa. Their thesis on the invention of tradition primarily focuses on the way colonial administrations in concert with local elites created traditions on supposedly historic foundations. In the introduction to *The Invention of Tradition*, Hobsbawm takes invented tradition to represent “a set of practices, normally governed by overtly or tacitly accepted rules and of a ritual or symbolic nature, which seek to inculcate certain values and norms of behaviour by repetition, which automatically implies continuity with the past” (1). Insisting on the idea of continuity with the past, Ranger argues that ethnic groups and tribalism arose from colonial powers’ attempts to return Africans to their imagined tribal identities; ethnicity thus became the basis of geographical demarcation, administrative units, and associations (249). For Ranger, then, “[t]he most far-reaching inventions of tradition in colonial Africa took place when the Europeans believed themselves to be respecting age-old African custom. What were called customary law, customary land-rights, customary political structure and so on, were in fact all invented by colonial codification” (250). In Ranger’s words, what colonial administrators saw as traditions were their own creations born out of their desire to restore practices and customs that did not exist.

Ngugi also seems to subscribe to the constructivist approach to ethnicity and the theory of colonial invention of tribe and tribalism in Africa. In his article, “The Myth of Tribe in African Politics,” he tackles the issue of otherness and binary oppositionalism, especially how the term *tribe* and its derivatives have been discriminately applied to African communities. For Ngugi, these words seem problematic because they are often associated with the pejorative connotations of the primitive and pre-modern. Ngugi further decries the current usages of the term tribe, “where thirty million Yorubas are referred to as a tribe, but

four million Danes as a nation” (17). Ngugi’s concern in this quote is similar to what Ioan Lewis states below:

It is also, I consider, equally pointless to debate whether the Somali people are a ‘tribe’ or a ‘nation’. While in political rhetoric the first is currently a term of abuse and the second of approbation, this simply serves to highlight the essential relativity of the two concepts which is indeed self-evident when one considers the meaning attached to the term nation in an inter-national context. Clearly both words connote the same thing—a group—and the only significant distinction which might be considered is of scale; in that case, ‘tribes’ are little nations and ‘nations’ are big tribes. (*Modern History* 385)

As this quote shows, Ngugi’s denunciation of this demeaning attitude toward African institutions and practices is legitimate and acknowledged by other scholars. It is, thus, based on a similar observation that Ngugi contends that tribes were colonial inventions and proceeds to support his claim with a few arguments.

Firstly, he argues that most African languages do not have the equivalent of the English word *tribe*. Secondly, he points out the colonial practice of *divide and rule*, in which colonial administrations deliberately favored one community over the others. The least favored population would generally accumulate resentment, not toward the colonizers but vis-à-vis other indigenous communities. Many scholars, such as Richard Morrock and Ray Subhasish, have even tried to determine whether there is a correlation between colonial ethnic favoritism and postcolonial ethnic conflicts and political crises across the continent. For Ngugi, too, this colonial tactic of pitting ethnic groups against each other indeed continues to haunt postcolonial Africa. However, he maintains that those ethnic rivalries in Africa’s social, political, and economic stagnation have all too often been overemphasized, while graver concerns such as the uneven development between West and South, weak democratic

institutions, and neocolonialism are overshadowed (22). Ngugi's minimization of the ethnic problem is even noticeable in many of his novels and political writings.

Already in *Devil on the Cross*, Ngugi's views on ethnic divisions are displayed when he makes Muturi wa Kahonia appeal to all workers as belonging to one clan: "Friends—or perhaps I should call you clansmen, for we who are gathered here now belong to one clan: the clan of workers" (236). Not surprisingly, in *Matigari* and *Wizard of the Crow*, ethnic groups are even irrelevant. Nowhere in these two novels is the ethnic dimension of African politics mentioned through words such as "clan" or "tribe." This is because, through his Marxist lens, Ngugi only sees two categories of people on the Kenyan postcolonial stage: the rich and the poor, the workers and the capitalists, the haves and the have-nots (Ngugi, "The Myth" 22). In the everyday life of real Kenyans, however, ethnic rivalries are a tangible reality, which reached its paroxysm during the 2007 presidential elections. It follows from the above that Ngugi's constructivist conception of ethnicity has a noticeable influence on how he portrays postcolonial Africa. In his novels, especially *Matigari* and *Wizard of the Crow*, tribalism plays no part either in politics or the distribution of resources. This situation makes Ngugi's novels inadequate for my analysis of the relationship between tribalism and the act of buying consent by wealth. On the other hand, Farah's trilogy is so thematically dominated by tribalism that all aspects of social, political, and economic life seem to be regulated by the specter of tribal affinities.

Tribalism in Farah's *Variations* trilogy

In *Variations*, Farah captures the ethnic fracture that plagues Somali society in many of its complexities. The theme of tribal division is so omnipresent throughout the trilogy that, at times, a reader without a proper historical background might be tempted to think that Farah

exaggerates tribalism's impact on Somalia. Here, we will focus only on some specific aspects of ethnicity as theorized by the approaches mentioned above to provide more insight into the role of tribalism and clannism on the fictional Somali political scene. Tribal politics can lead to devastating effects impacting a state's political, economic, and social functioning. Among the consequences of political tribalism are weak democratic institutions, poor economic development, and violent conflicts that can result in full-blown civil wars. This is, for instance, the case of Somalia, which is often cited as a textbook case on ethnic conflicts.⁷³

Socially, political tribalism can affect interpersonal relationships between people of different ethnic backgrounds. In the chapter on silence, I have cited the case of Qumman, in *Sweet and Sour Milk*, who cautions Soyaan to be careful about his contacts with Ahmed-Wellie. We can complement this picture by clarifying that the main reason for this piece of advice is Ahmed-Wellie's tribal affiliation because he and the General are from the same clan. One day, while he is in Ahmed-Wellie's car, Loyaan remembers that his mother "had warned him to be cautious; Ahmed-Wellie belonged to the same clan as the General" (79). But will Loyaan heed his mother's advice? After Ahmed-Wellie drops Loyaan off at home, his mother, seeing him in the company of the very man she cautioned him not to frequent, feels as though her warning had not been clear enough. Immediately afterward, a tense discussion ensues between mother and son on several matters, including Ahmed-Wellie's tribal affiliation with the General. During their argument, Qumman suggests that Loyaan has been "acting on the advice given by the enemies of this family" by refusing the money and honors the General

⁷³ Located in the Horn of Africa, Somalia has been described by many observers as one of the most ethnically homogenous countries in sub-Saharan Africa. The overwhelming majority of country belongs to the Somali tribe, which further breaks down into clan families and clans (.ee Rinehart). Besides the Somali majority clan, there are other ethnic minorities whose status and rights are less protected. According to a 2010 Minority Rights Group International report, majority groups "benefit from a traditional clan structure that has afforded them protection and privilege not available to minorities, who, regardless of the conflict, already suffered marginalization and exclusion from mainstream economic, social and political life, thanks to a legacy of slavery, customary segregation, dispossession and displacement" (Hill 3).

paid their family, trusting a woman who claims to have born Soyaan a child. When pressed to make her case clearer, she finally puts the following question to Loyaan:

‘Do you know Ahmed-Wellie?’

‘How do you mean?’

‘Do you?’

‘Are you asking, Mother, if I know what the tribal allegiances of Ahmed-Wellie are? I don’t even know what tribe he belongs to. He may be related to the General tribally. So what? I don’t care. The régime, if we come to that, bestows only dishonour on one, never honour.’

Not challenging him on the latter part of the statement, she went on:

‘On his spindle side, Ahmed-Wellie is related to the former civilian president. On his father’s, to the (present military) president. How can you be so naïve? Soyaan, too, trusted everybody. And she poisoned him.’ (84-85)

We can see that the mother does not take tribalism as lightly as her son since she only dwells on her son’s part of the statement where he dismisses the importance of tribal allegiances in interpersonal relationships. And she is not done with him on the matter. A few lines down, she continues:

‘Whereas he never mentioned that woman’s name to me or to anybody I know of, Soyaan worked for the General, he worked in the presidency. I am not convinced by your random taking of positions. The General has offered posthumous honour and perhaps a more lucrative gratuity for the family. There must be many things in this world I know nothing about. Allow me to use the concepts with which I am familiar. The General. That woman with her child. Dr. Ahmed-Wellie. Always trusting, Soyaan. And you, too. Stay away from that man.’

‘Who?’

‘Ahmed-Wellie’.

A pain such as that of haemorrhage: that was how Loyaan's entrails, when he pressed his stomach, pained. He listened to her eager voice comment:

'Cousins only twice removed, that man's father and the General.'

'Things aren't that simple, Mother. Things aren't tribally straight either.'

(85)

As it transpires from the above, tribalism can hamper social cohesion, especially when it comes to trusting individuals and accepting them into our circle of trust, family, or group. In the eyes of Qumman, the fact that Ahmed-Wellie is tribally related to the General signifies that his primordial sentiments will ultimately commend him to follow his herd instinct, report everything to the General, and, therefore, betray Loyaan.⁷⁴ From information gathered from the other two novels of the trilogy, we can understand that Qumman has been right about Ahmed-Wellie all along. In *Close Sesame*, for example, we learn that he, although a medical doctor, became the General's minister of information. For Felix Mnthali, "Soyaan's group has been out-manuevered at every turn in its struggle against the regime by forces which were not carefully taken into account when the group formed" (60). One reason for the failure of Soyaan's group to topple the regime is the General's use of ethnic differences to divide and rule. Mnthali's assertion is coherent if we consider, retrospectively, how Loyaan in *Sweet and Sour Milk*, and Samater in *Sardines* naively belittle the role of tribalism in society and politics.⁷⁵ In sum, it appears that the clan system regulates numerous aspects of life in postcolonial Somalia even though the country has modern political, judiciary, and social mechanisms and institutions.⁷⁶ It also transpires that the clan system does not just operate

⁷⁴ The argument between mother and son also shows the generational gap between older and younger generations. The younger generation dismisses tribal allegiances as unimportant in interpersonal relationships, while for the older generation, a person's tribal affiliation is crucial. Many other issues divide parents and children, such as men's attitude toward women (89-90), and even questions of the flatness or roundness of the earth (89-90).

⁷⁵ See below page 198 on Samater's disapproval of tribal allegiances.

⁷⁶ Before colonization—and to a lesser extent afterward, clan members decided political and legal matters based on customary laws known as *xeer*. During colonial times, the clan was led by an elder whose authority was

independently alongside the political system but permeates its core functioning mechanisms.⁷⁷

But why is ethnicity so predominant in African countries in general, and in particular in Somalia as portrayed by Farah?

In trying to explain the causes of tribal conflicts in Africa, scholars such as Akinsola Akiwowo, Robert Bates, and Carola Lentz advance various reasons, but the notion of competition comes up as a common denominator. Akiwowo, for example, views tribalism as one of the consequences of the processes of nation-building, which created, among other things, a “competition for the scarce economic and political advantages of society” (162). For Akiwowo, tribalism then “exists when members of tribal groups must compete as groups for places in the class status and power systems of the new nation.” While acknowledging Akiwowo’s proposition, Bates, for his part, uses the notion of modernity to explain how unequal spatial modernization across one country can lead to tribalism. Bates’s assumption derives from a simple chain of logical arguments. First, he argues that, like most people, Africans desire the benefits of modernity, such as education and jobs. The second argument is that since these benefits “are scarce in proportion to the demand for them,” it is inevitable that people compete for them (461). However, many have noted a problem on the African continent: people do not compete as individuals but as groups who differentiate themselves on ethnic grounds. Therefore, it is only legitimate to ask, as Bates wonders: “Why should the competition for the components of modernity and for status positions as defined by modernity

revered by all Somalis and acknowledged by the Italian colonial administration. As argues Reviglio Della Veneria, the Italian government had to rely on local chieftains to maintain order. Our protagonist in *Close Sesame* became Sultan at the age of twenty-two after his father passed away. His troubles with the Italians arose precisely from a clan-related incident during which an Italian soldier had been killed by a member of the clan adjacent to our protagonist’s—the initiating event of it all being that the other clan’s sultan defied “an ordinance issued by the Italian *Residente* of the region, refused to comply with instructions to appoint stipended chieftains who would be answerable to the head of the regional administration” (35, original italics). Put another way, all this started because the Italian colonial administration tried to overstep the Somali traditional political authority.

⁷⁷ In Somalia, as in many parts of the world including even the United States of America, politics has been tribalized. In *Political Tribes: Group Instinct and the Fate of Nations*, Amy Chua argues that the US is not spared by the gangrene of political tribalism whose most divisive attribute is race (Chapter One). In other countries, where race is not a marker, religion and tribe can be the causes of divisiveness.

involve ethnic groups at all?” (464). Lentz asks the same question differently: “why did competition for education, income, status, infrastructure and political influence occur on the battleground of ethnicity rather than class struggle or religion?” (313). In their answers to these questions, both Bates and Lentz mention the part played by colonization and emphasize the effects of spatial differentiation resulting from modernization (Lentz 313; Bates 464-65). Bates’ answer, for instance, highlights some interesting elements:

At least three answers can be given to this question. The first is that both the distribution of modernity and ethnic groups tends to be governed by the factor of space. *Where* modernization takes place often largely determines *who* gets modernized. The second is that administrative and ethnic areas often coincide. And the third is that it is often useful for those engaged in the competition for modernity to generate and mobilize the support of ethnic groupings. (464, original italics)

There are at least two main claims in Bates’ third approach to ethnicity from the point of view of competing interests. The first is that ethnic groups compete for resources, and second, that politicians often instrumentalize this competition to their own advantage. The second claim, however, raises another crucial question: What makes ethnicity more likely to be instrumentalized on the African continent than in the West? This question also appears legitimate in our novels, especially after considering the following scene.

One day, Samater returns from a trip earlier than expected and finds out that his mother has brought one of his distant cousins to work as a second maid in the house. He disapproves of his mother’s decision and thinks to himself: “*I must detribalize this house*” (78, original italics). At first, it may seem slightly exaggerated to talk about “detribalizing” a house because of just one cousin. But Samater’s fear is justified because he remembers something similar that had happened at his sister’s home:

His mother had filled Xaddia’s place with tribeswomen and tribesmen of hers. It was during the worst period of famine and all the malnourished clansmen and

clanswomen who managed to run away from the camps especially erected for them went and were given shelter there as though Xaddia's was a rehabilitation center.

(78)

After looking at this scene, one can only wonder why Samater's mother feels the need to assist her tribespeople when nothing obliges her to do so in the first place. But why? Here, I believe that part of the answer lies in the distinction between the two values of individualism and collectivism. This contrast, Kronenfeld argues, has become a touchstone of the West's appraisal of African ways of life, for the values of collectivism and individualism also distinguish between the traditional and the modern, the rural and the urban (199). The values of collectivism and individualism are considered crucial determinants of personality as well as "the most significant cultural difference among cultures" (Triandis 907). Similarly, Patricia Greenfield considers collectivism and individualism as "a universal deep structure of cultural differentiation" (230). A significant body of research on cultural and personality differences suggests that, in general, Western individuals and cultures lean more towards individualism while individuals and cultures in Africa, the Middle East, and East Asia exhibit collectivistic tendencies.⁷⁸

Collectivism, which is found to be more characteristic of Africa and other non-Western societies, presupposes that people who live according to this value generally tend to be interdependent within their in-groups, prioritize in-group goals and norms, and live in a communal way (Triandis 909). This dedication to in-group norms and goals also entails for every individual of the group some rights and duties regarding other members of the group. Mbembe, for example, posits is an implicit right to protection, security, and assistance based on arrangements and customary rules that govern collectivistic societies (48). Concerning the issue of ethnic tribalism, the collectivist leaning of African societies plays a crucial role in the

⁷⁸ See Triandis et al.

competition for resources of modernity, especially when individuals move to the city for wage-labor. In their initial contact with the unfamiliar urban setting, the individual can lay claim to his right to security and assistance to find some sense of security in members of their family, clan, or tribe already established in the city.⁷⁹ However, the right to protection and assistance is not gratuitous, for it is not only subordinated to prevailing rules but also accompanied by duties. Thus, from the help received in his initial days in the city ensues some sort of tacit obligation to render assistance in return when one's situation improves. And the cycle never ends. Mbembe sees this implicit obligation as "a social tax or a multifaceted, never-ending debt owed to the community" (47).

A common form of assistance we see some characters render to those who move to urban areas for a better living is housing. Farah, for instance, vividly portrays this in *Sardines* through the characters of Samater and Medina, who not only have succeeded in securing high-paying jobs but also managed to build their own house in the city. Samater's mother has a strong sense of tribal loyalty. She often uses the fact that she raised her son on her own to blackmail him into complying with her demands regarding herself and her clan members. This correlates with what Mbembe suggests in his book when he writes: "A child one has supported through his studies and who, once he has succeeded, will be expected to help not just his parents and siblings, but also the extended family, and his clan and village if he has secured a high-paying position" (47). What Mbembe describes regarding Cameroonian society, here, is a pervasive practice throughout the African continent and is also brilliantly depicted by Farah through Samater and his sister's case. With this clarification, we now understand that Samater and his sister have to support members of their tribe not only because of their social status but also because of this tacit obligation to support their tribe members.

⁷⁹ See Akiwowo, Bates, and Lentz.

However, behind Samater's detestation of ethnic tribalism lies another more sinister reason, which I shall come to shortly.

For the time being, I would like to focus on how Farah apprehends the effects of tribalism on the establishment of civil society and the institution of a merit-based civil service. To this latter concern, our focus must turn here since it gives us crucial insights into the plot lines of the novels we are discussing, especially how tribal allegiances override the legal basis of the civil service.⁸⁰ Bates's contention that the competition for the resources of modernity is best illustrated in the search for land, markets, and jobs finds some validation in our novels, especially regarding the third resource. In *Sweet and Sour Milk*, for example, we learn that access to jobs, especially top civil offices, is often subject to political and tribal allegiances. We read in a letter (a piece of paper found in the fold of his pillowcase) the deceased Soyaan sent to his twin brother that the country's civil service is composed of clowns, cowards, and tribal upstarts:

Clowns. Cowards. And (tribal) upstarts: these are who I work with. The top civil service in this country is composed of them. Men and women with no sense of dignity, nor integrity; men and women whose pride has been broken by the General's Security; men and women who have succumbed and accepted to be humiliated. Are you married? Do you have children? How many? Five? A wife and a mistress? Plus the tribal hangers-on who have just arrived and whom you support? (36)

Soyaan's remark is remarkable in that it accurately captures the part tribalism plays in the allocation of resources—administrative jobs in the present case. As we have seen earlier, the civil service is mainly governed by merit in Western democracies, with only a tiny percentage of public offices that belong to the electoral spoils system. Their distribution is based on

⁸⁰ Scholars are not unanimous on whether tribalism is diametrically opposed to democratic society. See Tsosie and Antoun.

political affiliation. In postcolonial Africa, the distribution of civil offices is similar but different in proportion and functioning. It is similar to Western democracies' spoils system in that political affiliation remains the most significant selection criterion. But, at the same time, it is different in many ways. First, political conformity is not necessarily limited to top-level civil offices. It may also extend to other lower-paying public jobs. In most cases, this requirement is implicit, and applicants are not officially obliged to prove their political allegiance to the powers in place. As I shall discuss in Chapter Seventeen, potential public servants must undergo political training in rarer circumstances.

Second, I believe that the spoils system in Africa is different because, in addition to the political criterion, tribal affiliations play a crucial role in managing the spoils. Just as the accusation can be leveled against a president that he disproportionately appoints his political loyalists to key positions, it has also become common, in ethnically diverse third-world countries, to accuse a president of ethnic favoritism. The validity of this claim may be disputed nowadays, but it did hold much water in the first two decades following independence, as portrayed by Farah. Soyaan's remark makes obvious not only that it is the General who distributes the top civil offices but also that he does so according to his own tribal affiliation. In *Sardines*, Medina states the facts even more explicitly when she observes that the tribal oligarchy that rules the country recruits its "members from the General's clan and those related to this tribal oligarchy through marriage" (92). From these examples, we understand that the General favors members of his own clan in the allocation of privileges.⁸¹ Soyaan's comment about tribal hangers-on also demonstrates how family and clan loyalties contribute to advancing one's clan socially and economically by assisting those less fortunate.

⁸¹ What Farah wants to reflect here, through Medina, is the general feeling among the Somali population that General Siad Barre disproportionately appointed people connected to his own clan. For instance, the three clans that held the majority of prominent offices came from his father's *Marehaan*, his mother's *Ogaden*, and his son-in-law's *Dulbahante* clans (Samatar, "Historical setting" 42; Lewis, *Modern History* 222).

As Bates argues, “family loyalties are activated to secure jobs. The income of the more prosperous is claimed by kin, often to meet school fees that will in turn secure future prosperity; and urban dwellers find their households being used by country folk in search of urban employment” (468). This quote fully resonates with what we see in Samater’s case. As he has a comfortable social and economic status, his tribesmen who live in the village look up to him as a purveyor. As I shall discuss shortly, those same clan loyalties are exploited by political actors to gain access to power and secure it once they have it. Thus, besides using violence to secure political obedience, the General’s politics in *Variations* relies on allocating resources, using ministerial positions, and other strategic jobs based on ethnicity to remain in power.

When explaining how ethnicity became so captivating for political subjects and actors, several other reasons must be added to what I previously discussed. The first one leads us back to colonization. In their effort to prevent indigenous populations from developing a national consciousness, colonial administrations only allowed them to form political and other unions on a local level (Ngugi, “The Myth” 21). As those restricted geographical locations coincided with culturally homogenous populations, i.e., tribes or ethnic groups, political parties formed during the colonization era organized around ethnic identity instead of ideas. Postcolonial parties were also modeled on this type of formation. As Calestous Juma rightly observes in his analysis of the Kenyan 2007 electoral and post-electoral violence, “in the absence of efforts to build genuine political parties that compete on the basis of ideas, many African countries have reverted to tribal identities as foundations for political competition” (n. pag.). In *Why Ethnic Parties Succeed*, Kanchan Chandra expresses the same concern when she notes that voters in *patronage-democracies* “choose between parties by conducting ethnic head counts rather than by comparing policy platforms or ideological positions” (7).

Secondly, ethnicity became central in African politics simply because political actors come from somewhere. This “somewhere,” while in the West it may simply mean the place where one is born and raised, always reaches back to the place of ancestors in the African context—in such a way that one might never have set foot there but still legitimately claim it as one’s village. It is only natural that political subjects prefer political actors they most closely identify with. People also tend to act according to their primordial sentiments regarding party support and voting habits. Ben Reilly and Andrew Reynolds advance a similar argument in their chapter entitled “Electoral Systems and Conflict in Divided Societies,” where they focus their attention on the effect of the choice of an electoral system on the probability of violent conflict in multiethnic societies. However, as the authors also observe, it would be erroneous to explain correlations between voting behavior and ethnicity through “primordial ethnicity alone, the knee-jerk reaction to vote for ‘your group’s party’ regardless of other factors” (430). Reilly and Reynolds are rightly cautious because the part ethnicity plays in African politics is so determinant that one could be tempted to explain every political choice through tribal affiliations.

Third, the competition for the resources of modernity seems a useful concept because people want to reap the benefits of modernity not only for themselves but for their clan or tribe as well. Since resources are limited, the competition arises and intensifies the more tribes there are. Rodney Hoab argues that with more than three thousand tribes in Africa, it is “a very challenging quest to promote equitable economic distribution for everyone” (3). In the modern nation-states of Africa, governments are responsible for allocating the resources of modernity, and people become dissatisfied when they perceive that their tribe does not benefit as much as some other tribes do. This dissatisfaction, in turn, may lead to disapproval—or even contestation—of the government by tribe members, which may lead to the government’s loss of political legitimacy. It is thus in anticipation of, or response to this contestation, that

leaders in some African countries engage in tribal politics. This last assumption aligns with the instrumentalist conception of ethnicity as a means toward an end. The instrumentalization of ethnicity for personal gains concerns political subjects and actors. On the one hand, people support political actors from their tribe because they expect some benefit when their tribe members are elected or appointed to prominent positions. Political actors in turn appeal to tribal identities by preying on this expectation. And this further contributes to exacerbating the competition for resources among different tribes.⁸²

The *Variations* trilogy also shows that different clans compete for political, social, and economic gains. The General favors members of his own clan by appointing them to strategic positions. These positions usually give their holder the highest political, social, and economic power. The most obvious example of this is given in Soyaan's writing, which we have used in an earlier illustration. After complaining about the abundance of tribal upstarts in the top civil service, he goes on to warn his brother to keep his profile low in their presence: "When in the company of the newly groomed upstarts (the men whom the General's sense of tribal priorities have supplied with the unquestioned authority to do what he pleases, when and where they please), make sure your profile is kept low" (*Sweet* 37). Just as wealth is used to reward affiliated and friendly clans, barring other clans from enjoying the resources of the state constitutes a certain form of punishment. In Siad Barre's stick and carrot management of the country, the *Isaaq* and *Majeerteen* clans, who opposed his regime, suffered severe consequences not only because they were met with repression but also because they were not given a fair opportunity to compete for the resources of modernity (Samatar, "Historical

⁸² As far as the direct consequences of tribal politics are concerned, most scholars point out rampant patronage, nepotism, corruption, and bribery that paralyze the functioning of the executive and the civil service. According to Lentz, for example, ethnic loyalties in modern African nations brought with them "the apparently inevitable phenomena of nepotism and corruption, and in some cases secessionist movements, which stood in the way of national integration" (311). As Daniel Compagnon remarks regarding Somalia, Siad Barre's personal rule was characterized by "concentration of power in the hands of the ruler, and private appropriation of state resources through corruption, patronage, and prebends" (8). This obviously exacerbated the competition between clans.

Setting” 93). In *Variations*, the General’s method is similar regarding the management of the resources of Somalia. However, a specific situation in *Sardines* suggests that opposing clans are not hopelessly doomed to suffer.

Bribery imposed: a gift one cannot refuse

In *Sardines*, Samater’s position as a minister of the General shows us another facet of the cynicism of a regime. From what we understand from a discussion between Ebla and Sagal when the General first offered Samater the position of Minister of Constructions, he intended to decline the offer. The story goes that faced with Samater’s reluctance, the General threatened to imprison his clansmen: “Compromise and accept my nomination or I will imprison all your clansmen” (44). He also urged the clansmen to convince Samater, their co-ethnic, to accept his nomination and “convince him to take the ministerial position, or else I will destroy you one and all.” The two legitimate questions that may arise at this point are why would the General force Samater to accept this nomination, and why would Samater refuse such a prestigious position? The answer to the second question concerns Samater’s disapproval of the General’s regime. Pieces of information collected from the three books allow us to argue that Samater opposes the General’s regime for many reasons. First, his wife Medina, the editor of the only daily in the country, has just been put under a ban by the General. Second, it also turns out that both Samater and Medina belong to Soyaan’s clandestine movement working to overthrow the regime. A third reason may have to do with Samater’s clan allegiances. But this last idea seems less probable if we consider Samater’s wish to detribalize his house. We have many reasons to suppose that he does not define his identity in terms of his clan allegiances. And this, precisely, may explain his final refusal.

However, when we transpose the same idea to the reasons why the General wants to appoint Samater, it is not a wild guess to suggest that the General places Samater's clan identity above his occupational identity. He appoints him primarily because he belongs to a particular clan, and only secondarily because he is a highly qualified architect. Accepting the nomination on this precept means that Samater's clan will be accountable for his wrongdoings. For the General, Samater's acceptance of the ministerial position would win the loyalty of the whole clan. At the same, it would impose on Samater's clan the jealousy of the other clans. Samater's dilemma shows how the General pressures prominent members from different family clans to accept his spoils with the sole aim of sowing division. But this situation also reflects Farah's own experience with the historical General, Siad Barre.

In an interview with Ahmed Samatar, Farah laments the devastating effects of clan politics in Somalia. He expresses his disappointment at Somali intellectuals and clan elders who have allowed themselves to be manipulated by Siad Barre. For Farah, Somali intellectuals should focus on ideological identification instead of tribal loyalty, for "[t]his is the way to avoid tactics of divide-and-rule, playing into the hands of the likes of Siad Barre. What he wants is his opponents not be identified with an ideology. Barre always dealt with people in terms of families" (99). Farah feels that these intellectuals failed the Somali state by collaborating with Barre's regime. We can see the translation of this sentiment in such characters as Samater and Ahmed-Wellie, who try as best as they can to convince themselves and others that by collaborating with the regime, they can redress a few wrongs and mend a few wounds that the regime has caused. Although he does not deny his collaboration with the regime, Ahmed-Wellie, for instance, nevertheless tries to alleviate his conscience by providing his own justification: "Against the ethics of political violence, the weak have no means of survival other than to collaborate, up to a point, with the powerful. It is while

collaborating that strategies are studied” (*Sweet* 175). Samater, on the other hand, acknowledges the intellectual’s failure to stand against the bane of dictatorship:

Truth must he owned, he finally said to himself. We the intellectuals are the betrayers; Thee, the so-called intellectuals, are the entrance the foreign powers use so as to dominate, designate, name and label; we the intellectuals are the ones who tell our people lies; we tell them that we cannot make our bricks in home-made kilns whose fire has died. And when the fire of enthusiasm has diminished, what do we do? We don’t replace the kiln but those who work it. Then we explain and tell more and more lies. We are the ones that keep dictators in power. (76-77)

These words, which Samater says to himself in front of a mirror, are profound. He is honest enough with himself to accept his responsibility in the deplorable state of his country. It emerges from Samater’s case that some individuals who are known to oppose the dictator’s rule are presented with both the carrot and the stick, the first serving as a bribe and the second brandished as a threat. The General has used the same tactic with Soyaan’s mourning family. Keynaan, the father, is given back his job after confirming the lies of the regime about his own late son. Qumman, the mother, receives a handsome donation from the General’s Minister to the Presidency. To crown everything, the dead himself is given national honors. The tactic has indeed proved efficient in all three cases: the father and the mother voice no accusatory opinion regarding the General. As for the dead, he is dead and buried and, therefore, silent forever. The General does the same thing to entire tribes.

Unlike Ngugi, who seems to downplay the weight of tribalism on postcolonial power dynamics, Farah effectively captures in his texts the General’s reliance on clan affiliations to maintain his grip on power. For John Masterson, “[t]he strength of Farah’s critique of power lies in demonstrating how the Syracusan tyrant utilizes the essentially cellular base of power in Somalia, manipulating its oral networks and distorting clan logic to retain control” (Chapter 2). Farah’s critique of the General’s instrumentalization of tribal sentiment is compelling and

consistent throughout the entire *Variations* trilogy. But perhaps, Farah's use of intertextuality by having his character Deeriye in *Close Sesame* paraphrase a quote from a "philosopher whose name eluded him: *"In the figure of the chieftain, the authoritarian state has its representative in every clan or tribe so the elders of the clan become its most important instrument of power"* (*Sesame* 114, original italics). Deeriye's words might indeed sound familiar because the quote alluded to here is Wilhelm Reich's sentence, which Farah has used as epigraph to the second part of *Sweet and Sour Milk*.⁸³ Through this paraphrased version of Reich's quote, Farah draws parallels between the General's exploitation of the traditional clan system and his distortion of familial traditional values to secure his power.

By exploiting Samater's tribal ties, the General has succeeded in subduing not only him, but Samater's entire tribe. And in the case of Loyaan, the General will rely on the authoritarian state's representative in the family: the patriarch. I have already discussed how Keynaan, Loyaan and Soyaan's father, has used his authoritative weight to impose a false narrative about Soyaan's loyalty to the regime. He has been rewarded with a job for his lies. The regime has also approached Loyaan, but he is not prepared to collaborate in any way and is determined to uncover the reason for his brother's death. Investigating the death of his twin brother, he goes even further to insinuate that the General may have had a hand in it. As his quest for the truth inconveniences the regime, the General will again appeal to the father of the family. One day, Loyaan is abducted by plain-clothed officers and brought to a secret place. There he is told that he has been a great nuisance to the government and that he should stop his investigations. The man tells him: "I hate to tell you that I once ordered that you be arrested. But for Soyaan's sake and your father's, and because of other considerations, we thought perhaps it would be more convenient for you, for us, for your father and the General if you are offered Soyaan's post" (219). The interrogator then informs Loyaan that the

⁸³ See above, p. 46.

General has signed a decree to appoint him Somalia's Councilor in Belgrade and that he is bound to board a plane the next day in the evening. Not surprisingly, his father has already approved the General's decision. Loyaan sees the offer as a bribery attempt, as a means to silence him, as illustrated below:

'I am being deported, am I?'

'No one is ever deported from his own country.'

'Bribed with a post, silenced, got rid of?' (219-20)

As we can see from the interaction between Loyaan and his interrogator, the General has decided to win Loyaan's acquiescence by using wealth instead of violence. We also learn that the late Soyaan has been offered the same post before his death. And we can assume that the purpose was the same and that Soyaan must have refused to accept the bribe as well. In the face of such a recalcitrant individual, the General must have felt that he had no other choice than kill him. What choice, then, does Loyaan have? Can he afford to refuse the nomination?

'Suppose I say I won't go?'

'No. You won't say that.'

'How do you mean?'

'We'll put you on that plane. We'll make sure you go with it.' (221)

As we can see from this exchange, the regime has a unique way of curbing dissent among the educated class. Loyaan's case resembles what happened to Samater because they only give him deportation as a choice. These cases also allow Farah to relativize the moral judgment readers can cast upon characters collaborating with the regime. Many are motivated by greed, as seems to be the case with Keynaan, but some are simply caught in the General's instrumentalization of traditional clannish and familial structures.

The themes and concepts investigated in this chapter allow us to draw important conclusions. First, Farah's portrayals of tribal relations in our novels show that ethnicity is a powerful identity marker on the African continent. In contexts of conflict and competition, the

affirmation of ethnic identity tends to solidify so as to override other forms of identity. Ethnic identity has been found to trump even national identity in the modern nation-states of Africa. This is something that the protagonist in *Close Sesame* cannot seem to fully understand. The primacy accorded to ethnicity has led to the tribalization of politics, which in turn greatly impacts how the resources of a country are allocated. Second, we find that the allocation of a country's resources, whether based on tribal allegiances, political compliance, or both, performs certain functions, such as inflaming ethnic and political passions to divert the masses' attention from the shortcomings of the government. But most importantly, I argue that some political regimes use wealth in its various forms to manage consent. By using the resources of a country to reward political allies and punish opponents, governments are engaging in material persuasion with the aim of changing individual and group perceptions. Consequently, individuals who are fundamentally driven by material wealth and those who just want to eke out a living readily betray their political convictions and distort their private disapproval of a government to conform to the public expectation of approval. Such factual distortion is, however, not always motivated by the pursuit of material gain. Certain forms of distortion are not the result of deliberate calculations, and these causes stem from psychological mechanisms of the individual's unconscious.

Chapter Twelve

From Storytelling to Pathological Lying in *Wizard of the Crow*: When Stories Compete for Dominance

In the present chapter, I will investigate the notion of distortion in Ngugi's *Wizard of the Crow* from a psychological and cognitive point of view. This chapter aims to explore the processes involved in the creation of rumors and present distortion as something that can also be independent of the conscious human will. Rather than condemning lying from a moral and material point of view, as has been discussed regarding the *Variations* trilogy, I will look at the phenomenon through a more comprehensive, psychological lens. I will accord particular attention to storytelling for several reasons. The first reason is that the texts I analyze are stories. The second reason is that I view storytelling as a human activity inherently prone to distortion, either for good or bad. In *Wizard of the Crow*, which is a story itself, some stories easily turn into rumors that threaten the carefully constructed lies of the regime while strengthening the legend of the Wizard of the Crow.

Storytelling and distortion: why do we distort the stories we tell?

In its broadest sense, *storytelling* is defined as the act of telling stories. This will include anything from written text to oral narration or digital storytelling, which may combine multiple media and techniques. More inclusive definitions variably mention the means or purposes of storytelling. Thus, for Olivier Serrat, storytelling can be defined as follows: “Storytelling is the vivid description of ideas, beliefs, personal experiences, and life-lessons through stories or narratives that evoke powerful emotions and insights” (1). As regards the means or the traditions of storytelling, two main types are generally cited—oral and written storytelling. In its strictest sense, however, storytelling is also contrasted with writing. In that case, storytelling is considered from the perspective of oral performance. Accordingly, Farzaneh Khodabandeh defines *storytelling* as “the telling of stories through the use of words and actions ... in order to engage an audience” (24). Shawn Callahan also distinguishes between storytelling and story writing when he describes the former as a spontaneous activity that “relies on a range of human faculties: gestures, tone, volume, pace, facial expressions,” whereas story writing is a calculated and measured enterprise which “relies on just words, fonts, and punctuation to convey the full emotional impact and context of the story” (n. pag.). Caitlin Berve provides another crucial distinction between oral and written stories. An oral story is dynamic and will be most likely subject to changes, even if the same person retells the same story. A written story, on the other hand, is static; no changes can occur in the text that someone has in their hands. Although both forms of stories are works of art, a “written story is less of a performance and more of an artifact like a painting or sculpture,” Berve argues (n. pag.). The dynamism of oral stories is what makes them susceptible to changes over time.

Of course, my material for analysis consists of written stories. However, the distinction between oral and written stories is tricky in our case, especially when it comes to Ngugi’s *Matigari* and *Wizard of the Crow*. These texts, like the modern African novel in

general, rely on many features of oral literature—so-called “orature.” The French literary critical world became familiar with the term *oraliture*, coined by Ernst Mirville to oppose the all too often denigrating comparison between oral literature and literature, i.e., written literature, insinuating that only the latter is true literature. Mirville’s renaming was motivated by the desire to put oral literature on the same level of prestige as written literature, writes Virginie Turcotte (56). In Maximilien Laroche’s *La Double Scène de la Représentation. Oraliture et Littérature dans la Caraïbe*, the term undoubtedly stands as the counterpart of “literature.” As the title of the book suggests, the comparison here is not between oral literature and written literature but between *oraliture* and literature.

One of Laroche’s main objectives is to demonstrate that, instead of opposing and excluding one another, orality and literality often combine to create hybrid forms of literature that blend elements of the Western novel and the African oral tradition (21). As Virginie Turcotte so brilliantly puts it, Antillean written literature, although relatively new, “retains multiple traces of the oral tradition that have allowed it to see the light of day. As a way to preserve memory, like a voice that refuses to be silent, orality has slipped into the words written on paper, to settle comfortably between the lines of a literature that, little by little, takes its place in the literary panorama” (10-11, my translation). Ngugi’s novels under analysis pertain to this tradition of African writers who borrow techniques and content from African popular culture. In his analysis of components of orality in *Wizard of the Crow*, Mustapha Ruma Bala contends that the “relationship between oral and written literature in Africa is that of adoption and adaptation,” a process that occurs on different levels in the novel (197). One way Ngugi does this is by stating the following in the preface of the novel:

In the spirit of the dead, the living, and the unborn,
Empty your ears of all impunities, o listener,
That you may hear my story. (Preface)

As Bala writes, “the story invites the reader to be a ‘listener’ rather than simply a reader” (199). We also find a similar introductory comment in the preface to *Matigari*, where Ngugi signals that the novel is “partly based on an oral story about a man looking for a cure for an illness” (vii). On the next page, the narrator makes it quite clear that his story will follow patterns of oral tradition by addressing a note to the reader and the listener (x).

Certainly, orality holds an appreciable importance in Farah’s work as well. As Farah himself acknowledges in an interview with Robert Moss, one can hardly “divorce the oral and the literary from one another” in African literature (qtd. in Wright “Oligarchy” 87). Farah’s preoccupation with the oral nature of African societies does not reflect in the form but remains predominantly present in the lives of the fictional characters. Farah’s *Variations* novels, for instance, are not meant to be listened to in the same way Ngugi composed his *Wizard of the Crow*. Whereas Ngugi’s treatment of orality transpires through content and form, Farah’s is more of a thematic issue, as features of orality are shown in his fiction rather than used to shape his writing style as an aesthetic element. I suspect that is the reason why in his article on oligarchy and orature in Farah’s novels, which I have already mentioned in my review of literature, Wright concentrates on how orality functions in “the Somalia of *Sweet and Sour Milk* and *Sardines* [where] power is still largely oral-based” (89). As stated in the literature review, both the people’s and the government’s reliance on oral communication yield, in most cases, untraceable and unreliable information, ultimately allowing the phenomenon of rumor to become a typical marker of Somali society. This is chiefly possible due to the dynamic property of storytelling, as opposed to written records, where information is fixed and unchangeable once people have it in their possession.

My focus on *Wizard of the Crow* for the analysis of unconscious distortion is also motivated by this dynamism that characterizes storytelling. Although Ngugi composed the novel to be received as an oral narrative, the fact nonetheless remains that it is a printed piece

of writing. Yet, what is left as an oral narrative is to be found in the stories the characters tell in the fictional world of Aburiria. Bala's exploration of elements of orality in *Wizard of the Crow* has many merits in this regard. Another key point that he addresses concerns the existence of multiple narrators that sometimes compete for dominance. In addition to the "the semi-omniscient narrator that relies on rumors for the conflicting details he furnishes to the reader," there is, for instance, Arigaigai Gatherer, whose accounts have given rise to the very legend of the Wizard of the Crow (198). Ruma also identifies "other multiple and faceless narrators who are themselves either witnesses to the events or are downright rumor mongers that transform a story heard from someone who had probably never witnessed the events narrated." My endeavor to demonstrate processes of unconscious distortion arising from the very nature of the storytelling activity will rely on accounts by the first two narrators in Ngugi's book, the main narrator and Arigaigai Gatherer. My goal is to demonstrate that both narrators' stories are affected by two different forms of distortion, one of which seems acceptable while the other is not. However, before comparing the stories of these narrators and the functions Ngugi assigns to rumors that we create through our stories, it is important to discuss how the functions and purposes the storyteller has in mind can affect the story's form and content.

Storytelling, distortion, and the birth of rumors

Storytelling has a wide range of applications across various disciplines, ranging from the transmission of culture to education and entertainment. These applications have evolved throughout history. Many scholars argue that people originally told stories to preserve human culture. As time passed, stories acquired other functions, such as instruction and resolving personal social problems. Although most agree that a story can perform many functions,

controversy nevertheless arises on which function of the story is to be established as the main one. Responding to Brewer and Lichtenstein's claim that stories are primarily told to entertain, Nancy Stein argues that stories can also arouse emotions such as pain, anger, embarrassment, and grief. Moreover, one story can stir different emotions in different individuals depending on their background and how they understand the story personally. One person may feel embarrassed while someone else may find the story funny. Peter Schraeder makes an interesting case about Farah's writing and how the regime and its opponents receive it: "While the Barre government may state that it has banned Farah's novels because they misrepresent Somali society, Barre's opponents may note that they have been banned because they represent Somali society all too well" (23). As we see here, different interest groups interpret the same work differently. In the context of disproportionately unbalanced power relations, the person who feels humiliated and exposed may react aggressively against the storyteller or audience members who endorse the story. This attitude accurately sums up the story of dictators' visceral grudge against writers. If writers like Ngugi and Farah were forced into exile, it is precisely because their stories, although they entertain many, they also provoke hostile sentiments in a certain category of people powerful enough to threaten these authors' lives.

The entertaining function of storytelling has received considerable attention and is often contrasted with other functions. For example, Lugmayr et al. distinguish between storytelling for entertainment purposes and its use in serious non-fictional contexts. The second category, *serious storytelling* is defined as storytelling "outside the context of entertainment, where the narration progresses as a sequence of patterns impressive in quality, relates to a serious context, and is a matter of thoughtful process" (15709). As we shall see later, this distinction is crucial because context determines how a story is told and what elements are stressed in a story. On this issue, Nicole Dudukovic et al. have conducted a study

about memory focusing on two key elements in storytelling: entertainment and accuracy. The two experiments described in the study—story retelling and free recall—aimed to capture how differently people retell stories depending on whether their goal is to be accurate or entertaining. The retellings and free recalls were evaluated on numerous points for comparison, ranging from word count to the number of story events recalled to accuracy rating and exaggeration rating. On the issue of exaggeration, which will be my focus in the next few lines, the experiment found that items recalled by the entertainment participants were more exaggerated than those by the accuracy group (137). The study arrived at a certain number of conclusions. First, the experimenters have found that memory is affected by the primary function of a particular retelling or recall. For example, recall of story events was greater in accurate rehearsals than in entertaining retellings. Second, it appeared that what makes a story entertaining is more the way it is told than what it contains. The entertainment participants made their retelling more entertaining by exaggerating the same events and adding their personal details. On the whole, the researchers contend that exaggeration “is part of recalling a story unless one has specifically practised not doing so” (142). Participants in both the entertainment and accuracy conditions showed distorted memory even when they consciously tried to be accurate.

Seeing Ngugi and Farah through the experiments highlighted above would be easy here. They are like the participants in those experiments, whom the experimenters have given different goals. They both tell stories about dictators. But one is hilarious while the other is sharp and down to the point. For instance, Farah is praised for creating realistic “characters who move about in the mainstream of politics within a realistic setting” (Okonkwo, “Literature and Politics” 57). In *Realism, Form and The Postcolonial Novel*, Nicholas Robinette has also noted that Farah’s writing has been marked by realism in “complex and often misunderstood ways” (35). On the other hand, one feature that most critics highlight

about Ngugi's *Wizard of the Crow* is his combination of many lighthearted techniques such as satire, humor, hyperbole, and the grotesque, all concurring in the concoction of a hilariously exaggerated but realistically evocative and entertaining account of many African flamboyant dictatorships.

Ngugi's use of synecdoche is particularly relevant in his criticism of the excess of power and the distortions some politicians are ready to create for their personal interests.

Three of the Ruler's ministers are depicted with exaggerated physical traits:

The story goes that Markus used to be an ordinary member of Parliament. Then one day he flew to England, where under the glare of publicity he entered a major London hospital not because he was ill but because he wanted to have his eyes enlarged, to make them ferociously sharp, or as he put it in Kiswahili, *Yawe Macho Kali*, so that they would be able to spot the enemies of the Ruler no matter how far their hiding places. Enlarged to the size of electric bulbs, his eyes were now the most prominent feature of his face, dwarfing his nose, cheeks, and forehead. The Ruler was so touched by his devotion and public expression of loyalty that even before the MP returned home from England the Ruler had given him the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, an important Cabinet post, so that Machokali would be his representative eye wherever, in whatever corner of the globe lay the Ruler's interests. (13, original italics)

Here, we note that Ngugi uses hyperbole and synecdoche to characterize the Ruler's Minister for Foreign Affairs. First, there is exaggeration because the minister's eyes are not only larger than ordinary but as large as light bulbs. Second, Ngugi goes beyond this hyperbolic depiction and correlates the exaggerated body parts with government functions.

Sikiokuu, a second member of the cabinet has done as Machokali and has had his ears stretched larger than a rabbit's so that he can "hear better and therefore be privy to the most private of conversations between husband and wife, children and their parents, students and

teachers, priests and their flock, psychiatrists and their patients— all in the service of the Ruler” (14). He, too, has been rewarded with a post that gives utility to his large ears as “he was made Minister of State in charge of spying on the citizenry. The secret police machine known as M5 was now under his direction.” Mambo, a third minister has chosen to elongate his tongue “so that in echoing the Ruler’s command his words would reach every soldier in the country and his threats to his enemies before they could reach the Aburirian borders” (15). But the doctors have misunderstood how large he wanted his tongue and have elongated it so much that now it hangs “out way beyond his lips, rendering speech impossible.” He had to undergo a second surgical operation to correct the failure of the first. The doctors pulled and elongated his lips to cover the tongue, which still protrudes just a little. To crown Mambo’s misfortunes, the Ruler has ministered his gesture and has given him the Ministry of Information instead of the Defense. By undergoing these bodily changes, the three have effectively become the eyes, the ears, and the mouthpiece of the Ruler, who uses them to spot and confuse his enemies. We can also add Ngugi’s use of the grotesque to the two techniques of hyperbole and synecdoche. In their analysis of style and language in *Wizard of the Crow*, Emmanuela Asadu and Cajetan Ikechukwu Egbe justly note how Ngugi’s depiction of a leader “surrounded by a trio of preposterous ministers whose sycophancy culminates to grotesque body modifications” (551) accurately satirizes “sycophancy, which is the bane of African politics” (553). Ultimately, for Asadu and Egbe, these body modifications show that “praise singers and sycophants can go to any length to keep themselves in power.” The body modifications are the physical manifestations of these characters’ deformation of reality.

In *Wizard of the Crow*, although the character Arigaigai Gatherere and the main narrator indulge in some forms of distortion in the stories they tell, the role the respective stories play in the novel leads us to judge them differently. The main narrator is a storyteller performing his art. As such, he can make structural changes to the story to render it more entertaining and

instructive. When the main narrator describes ministers with exaggerated physical traits, he is not perceived as a liar but as an entertainer. Arigaigai Gatherere, on the other hand, acts as a witness to the unfolding of the drama. This is evidenced not only in the fact that he views himself as “a daily witness to workings of power,” but also in his “conferring authenticity and authority” upon his accounts of the event through his famous formula, “True, Haki ya Mungu” (Ruma 200). At one point in the novel, the main narrator even questions Gatherere’s credibility regarding the rumors of a special place in which the Ruler keeps the bodies of his victims: “Let me say as the narrator that I cannot confirm the truth or falsity of the existence of the chamber; it may turn into a mere rumor or tale from the mouth of Askari Arigaigai Gatherere” (11). Later in the novel, after rumors concerning some *djinns* spread throughout the country, another character by the name of Kaniuru calls the veracity of Gatherere’s accounts into question: “My own view is that those djinns are fake, mortals pretending to be djinns. And the policeman—what is his name? Gatherere, Ariga, or something—is just a storyteller” (145). We can see from the narrator and Kaniuru’s use of terms such as rumor, tale, and storyteller that Gatherere’s stories should be accorded no credibility. The narrator, in particular, is rightly cautious not to confirm or deny the existence of the Ruler’s secret chamber because Arigaigai Gatherere would distort the truth all the same. At least at two points in *Wizard of the Crow*, the main narrator agrees that any story, even if it is true, “may turn into a rumor or tale from the mouth of Askari Arigaigai Gatherere” (11). Later in the novel, the narrator also tells us that after the rumor spreads that the Ruler is pregnant, Arigaigai Gatherere “did not know that he himself had somehow been the source” after seeing a poster caricaturing the rumor (571). But why does Arigaigai Gatherere distort every story he hears? And what role does he play in the story?

In his classic *Remembering: A Study in Experimental and Social Psychology*, Frederic Bartlett conducts a set of experiments in an attempt to provide some insight into the internal,

psychological processes and external, social, factors involved in remembering (10). Some of his conclusions can help us understand how Arigaigai Gatherer's distorted accounts of events come into being. For Bartlett, much of what we remember, or recall, depends on a variety of mental processes such as perception, imaging, reproduction, and reconstruction. Regarding the effects of perception on memory, Bartlett writes:

Some scene is presented for observation, and a little of it is actually perceived. But the observer reports much more than this. He fills up the gap of his perception by the aid of what he has experienced before in similar situations, or, though this comes to much the same thing in the end, by describing what he takes to be 'fit', or suitable, to such conditions. He may do this without being in the least aware that he is either supplementing or falsifying the data of perception. (14)

Like the other studies mentioned above, this passage shows that data distortion or falsification may occur without the individual's awareness of it. What seems particularly relevant for the case of our character, however, lies in how an observer tries, at all costs, to make sense of a situation by filling the gaps in their perception. In *Wizard of the Crow*, we can see Arigaigai Gatherer proceed in a similar fashion to connect elements of his faulty perception. For example, this explains how Arigaigai Gatherer is able to conclude that the Wizard of the Crow can assume the form of a woman, rather than thinking that he is dealing with two people.⁸⁴

Bartlett's experiments on remembering were conducted using a variety of methods, such as the *method of description*, the *method of repeated reproduction*, the *method of picture writing*, and the *method of serial reproduction*. The last method is particularly helpful in

⁸⁴ Bartlett also found, in some individuals, a tendency to multiply or diminish details of their stories: some people always try to react to all that they perceive with a confident attitude. They justify themselves by providing more details than actually present (21). While internal factors such as temperament and attitude have great functional importance, what is remembered is also determined by an individual's social background, "for, against any distortion of facts which may be produced, we have to set the consideration that the greatest wealth of custom, institution, and tradition will lie along the direction of a group's preferred persistent tendencies" (264). Bartlett's remark also accurately describes Gatherer's interpretation of events. Here, it is also possible to suggest that he believes that the Wizard of the Crow can transform into any shape because he is superstitious.

explaining how stories go through a process of transformation. In the method of serial reproduction, an observer is made to reproduce picture material, a folk tale, or a piece of argumentative prose. This reproduction is then resubmitted to listeners for reproduction, one after the other. As regards the folk stories, Bartlett justifies their relevance for the experiment for many reasons, some of which we can observe in the fictional everyday life of Ngugi's characters: first, stories are easy to transmit from one social group to another; second, people find them interesting; and lastly, "both as to form and as to content, they frequently contain characters which would normally be expected to undergo much change in the course of transmission" (119). As expected, Bartlett's experiments revealed that changes are introduced into the stories either through omission, rationalization, and transformation of detail, or transposition of words and phrases. For him, some of these changes, especially the last one, "are very common indeed in the growth of popular rumour and story, and they may very often provide the conditions of important consequential alterations" (138). What Bartlett is suggesting in this passage is consistent with how Arigaigai Gatherer's reproduction of his story involving the Wizard of the Crow becomes a rumor so widespread that the stories of him wrestling with devils the night of the Global Bank's meeting with the country's elite have reached the Ruler's ears. But as interesting as they are, Arigaigai Gatherer's stories raise serious questions of character credibility and authorial intention.

Through this kind of grotesque hyperbole, Ngugi accurately captures a key feature of most African dictatorships: excessiveness in their use of force, immoderation in their spending of their country's resources, and oversized in their self-image; in a word, exaggeration. Therefore, by using exaggeration as a narrative technique, Ngugi is only speaking a language that African dictators know too well. That is why the main narrator, for example, will not be judged as severely as Arigaigai Gatherer, whose distortions greatly impact meaning, as I shall demonstrate in the next few lines. The narrator is an observer and

acknowledges the facts of distortion we know from Bartlett, whereas Gatherer actively enjoys hyperbole and making up details. The joke, of course, is that Ngugi's allegorical story can then pose as level-headed and rational in comparison, although it does of course also exaggerate.

Thus, it appears that unintentional distortion naturally is part of storytelling. Even when the storytellers are instructed to be accurate in their accounts, we notice that some elements are distorted albeit the participants' conscious effort to tell the story right. This failing is considered normal, essentially because humans are not just endowed with the function of remembering, but also with that of forgetting. However, when the proportion of these lies and their lifespan exceed a certain level, storytelling can become a symptom of psychological disruption. Motivation is the key difference between normal distortion and pathological lying, which William Healy and Mary Tenney Healy define as a "falsification entirely disproportionate to any discernible end in view, engaged in by a person who, at the time of observation, cannot definitely be declared insane, feebleminded, or epileptic" (1). In the previous section, I have concerned myself with what I vaguely termed "conscious distortion;" with the only criterion for discrimination being that people who indulge in those primarily have their own interests in mind. Here seems the appropriate space for further precision and proper terminology. The conscious versus unconscious distinction does not enlighten us much, for there is a certain kind of lie that seems to defy human logic in society as well as the field of research on lying as the result of a psychological disorder. If we look at Gatherer's behavior through a psychological lens, there is enough evidence to suggest that he is a pathological liar. Here, I do not intend to go into the detail of this character's behavior, but a definition of pathological lying will not only confirm this diagnosis but show how this makes the pathological liar extremely uncontrollable by the regime.

Arigaigai Gathere, the uncontrollable rumormonger

Arigaigai Gathere is a central figure in *Wizard of the Crow*. Many of the legends and rumors that circulate in Aburiria come from his distorted accounts of real events. He is a typical case of pathological lying. Understanding the basic operating principle of this behavior is instrumental in capturing Ngugi's use of rumors as a tool against the distorted narratives of the authoritarian government. In *Pathological Lying, Accusation, and Swindling*, Healy and Healy propose a definition of pathological lying as "falsification entirely disproportionate to any discernible end in view, engaged in by a person who, at the time of observation, cannot definitely be declared insane, feeble-minded, or epileptic" (1).⁸⁵ As in this definition, Gathere is not insane, and he exaggerates facts with no apparent motive. What is more interesting to his repetitive lying is that he does not lie of material benefits. Charles Dike et al. have noted that for the pathological liar, "material reward or social advantage does not appear to be the primary motivating force but the lying is an end in itself; an inner dynamic rather than an external reason drives the lies, but when an external reason is suspected, the lies are far in excess of the suspected external reason" (343). This description from psychology is important in the case of Gathere because it confirms the fact that even after he has been promoted to the Ruler's office, he continues to spread rumors that tarnish the dictator's image.

After his promotion, Arigaigai Gathere has become a daily witness of the intricacies of Aburirian politics. He has first-hand knowledge of what happens at the Ruler's office, but his pathology makes him distort what he sees. Once, while on a plane back to Aburiria, Arigaigai

⁸⁵ In this and other notable definitions of pathological lying, the absence of an apparent motive is systematically given as a distinguishing factor. Dike et al. argue that, while there is no consensus definition of pathological lying, there are nevertheless a certain number of functional elements on which most scholars agree. For instance, they observe

the repeated utterance of untruths; the lies are often repeated over a period of years, with the lies eventually becoming a lifestyle; material reward or social advantage does not appear to be the primary motivating force but the lying is an end in itself; an inner dynamic rather than an external reason drives the lies, but when an external reason is suspected, the lies are far in excess of the suspected external reason; the lies are often woven into complex narratives. (343)

Gathere overhears the Ruler and one of his ministers talking about an enigmatic note from the Wizard of Crow: “The country is pregnant. What it will give birth to, nobody knows” (510).

From the mouth of Arigaigai Gathere, the pregnant country gives way to a pregnant Ruler:

In his tongue the real and the marvelous flowed out of each other. He would even talk about the Ruler. He would hint about plants that bore money. They listened to his stories and later improvised on them in the retelling. Soon the stream of stories became common lore. The ceaseless transformation of the stories soon resulted in rumors throughout Aburiria that the Ruler was pregnant and had a secret garden with dollar-producing plants. (570)

Of course, people have not invented the stories about the Ruler’s pregnancy out of thin air. The Ruler happens to be suffering from a mysterious disease that causes his body to expand in gravity-defying proportions. Besides, the Ruler has always insisted that he is the country, and has even interpreted the Wizard’s note (“The country is pregnant. What it will give birth to, nobody knows”) by replacing the word “country” by “ruler.” After reading the note, the Ruler ensures that the story does not reach the outside world by putting the piece of paper in his mouth, chewing and swallowing it. But Gathere’s ears have already caught the message, and his hints have contributed to the elaboration of the rumors about the Ruler’s pregnancy. Luckily for Arigaigai, the Ruler and his ministers do not know that he is the source of the rumors about the Ruler’s pregnancy. Maybe they will imprison him or offer him money to shut his mouth. But we already know that Gathere is not motivated by material benefits. As I indicated earlier, what is even more ironic is that “A.G. did not know that he himself had somehow been the source” (571). So, we can say that Arigaigai Gathere’s pathological exaggerations pose an existential threat to the Ruler’s power because neither Arigaigai Gathere himself nor the Ruler can control the rumors generated by this puzzling behavior.

A dictator's power crumbling under the weight of rumors

Unintentional distortion of reality happens in individuals to varying degrees. One such form, which runs across all of our selected novels, is a natural result of storytelling. Every individual can experience distortion due to memory failure during the retelling of events. What first happens as a purely unintentional and relatively innocent distortion of reality can quickly spiral into a rumor as the distorted information is passed on from one member of society to another. As Bartlett argues: "The passage of popular stories and rumour from mouth to mouth commonly shows much more elaboration, especially in the direction of exaggeration" (165). In African societies, where the primary medium of transmission of knowledge is oral storytelling, rumors are part of everyday life. In Farah's *Variations*, for example, even Margaritta had to concede that in "this country [Somalia], rumors rule" (126). But it is in Ngugi's novels that the reader witnesses how devastating this social phenomenon can be to the powers in place. Ngugi uses rumor in order to manipulate information and deconstruct power. Rumors challenge the Ruler's main narrative so much so that his collaborator advise him to address them.

In *Wizard of the Crow*, the place of rumors in the Aburirian society is made clear from the beginning of the novel. Indeed, the book's very first sentence is the following: "There were many theories about the strange illness of the second ruler of the Free Republic of Aburiria, but the most frequent on people's lips were five" (3). Rumors surrounding the Ruler's illness and the incident at his birthday party have taken a heavy toll on his reputation, so much so that he feels the need to address the situation in front of the nation, and he does this by way of propaganda. The result of his efforts, far from ending the rumors, degenerates however into unexplainable and mystic incidents that merely add more fuel to the fire of rumormongering. As Raphael Dalleo observes, the conflict between the Ruler and those who oppose his dictatorship is also discursive in nature, as truths, rumors, gossip, and propaganda

proliferate and compete amid the ruler's bid to "position himself as the 'sole voice of the people,' and his attempts to wipe out those he labels 'terrorists' who call themselves 'the Movement for the Voice of the People'" (10, original quotation marks). There is much to say about Dalleo's observation. The political arm wrestling between the Ruler and his opponents is first and foremost a communication war in which rumors pose a vital threat to both truth and lie.

The destructive potential Ngugi attaches to rumors gains all its meaning after the Ruler fails to curb them multiple times. No matter what methods he uses, the Ruler remains powerless before the force of rumors. After a dissident group has ruined the Ruler's birthday party by dispersing plastic snakes in the crowd, the media have not mentioned a single word of the dramatic incident. They are all focused on the joyous parts of the celebration, notably, "the special birthday gift and the impending arrival of the Global Bank mission [...] So if it had been left to the media, the story about snakes would have remained only a rumor. Ironically what subsequently gave life to the rumor was the strangeness emanating from the State House" (22-23). The Ruler decides to address the nation on live television to put an end to the rumors. The discourse has been unfolding well until the moment when the Ruler

raised the club higher in the air as if ready to throw it at any and all self-styled Moseses. The cameramen ducked behind their cameras, and all at once, as if hit by the same object simultaneously, every television screen in the country split into seven pieces. The viewers did not know whether the Ruler had actually thrown the club or simply had the power of mind to disintegrate their screens; disagreements remain to this day. (23)

Obviously, the Ruler's attempt to suppress the rumors about snakes has created another incident that gives more credence to stories. So, for a second time, the Ruler decides to counter the rumors by organizing a visit to a church, a "well-publicized spontaneous Sunday visit to a church to draw attention to his religiosity would surely counter the basis of the

malice toward him” (26). When the day comes, the Ruler, accompanied by his cohort, starts his walk of fame toward the All Saints Cathedral. Everything is done to make the Ruler’s image as a “common man” credible, and the Ruler even decides to ride a donkey in imitation of Christ while some of his secret servicemen dressed in plain cloth pave his way with palm leaves.

In the first instants, the “the performance was almost flawless, and the inner circle even started imagining a social celebration of the victory of guile over rumor” (27). But this was without counting on the misfortunes of destiny or Ngugi’s plot-twisting mastery. For as soon as the Ruler has “set his foot at the doors of the cathedral they lost the pictures, reminding them of that other time when their TV screens broke into seven pieces.” This time, the television screens do not break into pieces but suffer a glitch that denies spectators “a view of what happened next, and they had to glean bits and pieces from those who were there and saw the Ruler enter the building.” Subsequent stories of the event go so far as to suggest that after the church incident, the Ruler has visited other churches with similar results. The storytellers even claim that after touring churches, the Ruler announces that he will tour other places of worship: “Islamic mosques, Sunni, Shiite, or Wahabi; then at Indian temples, Hindu, Buddhist, or Jain; and Sikh gurdwaras; and end up in Jewish synagogues, with the hope that these spontaneous appearances would wipe out images of what had happened at All Saints and other churches” (28). The rumors have it that at the Ruler’s entry into his first mosque, strange things started happening, culminating in an even bigger drama and giving birth to stories of Satan and devils having escaped churches and mosques to terrorize the population. As these examples show, Ngugi conceives of rumors as alternatives to state propaganda, which seeks to impose one narrative on the masses. Each time the Ruler and his handlers try to counter these rumors, they only fuel them with more food for speculation.

Although there are multiple rumors developing simultaneously in *Wizard of the Crow*, I will almost exclusively focus on the rumors relating to the Wizard of the Crow and the main originator of these rumors, namely, Arigaigai Gatherer. Consistent with what has been said about storytelling and pathological lying, the latter character definitely presents the symptoms of pathological lying since his stories contain most of the main features of pathological lying identified by Dike and his scholarly colleagues (see above, p. 225). When compared with the narrative of the main narrator, Arigaigai Gatherer's accounts of events are disproportionately exaggerated. I will, therefore, first offer a succinct summary of what actually happened according to the main narrator. Then, I will present Gatherer's version of the events to show how his exaggeration of certain details gives way to rumors about the supernatural powers of the Wizard of the Crow.

The birth of the Wizard's legend

Everything starts at the Ruler's birthday party when cabinet members present him with a very unusual gift. After unveiling the birthday present, the Minister of Foreign Affairs tells the Ruler that the Aburirian people

had decided unanimously to erect a building such as had never been attempted in history except once by the children of Israel, and even they had failed miserably to complete the House of Babel, Aburiria would now do what the Israelites could not do: raise a building to the very gates of Heaven so that the Ruler could call on God daily to say good morning or good evening or simply how was your day today, God? The Ruler would be the daily recipient of God's advice, resulting in a rapid growth of Aburiria to heights never before dreamt by humans. (16)

The project is presented as well thought out, and the Global Bank is even already expected to visit Aburiria to discuss loaning money for Marching to Heaven. According to Asadu and

Egbe, the Ruler's much anticipated building is on a "Tower of Babble. The Marching to Heaven could not be erected because of lack of funds, but they have conjured up enough stories and lies which when piled up are as tall as the Tower of Babel. Just as the Tower of Babel collapsed, the Tower of Babble which they erected also collapses since it is not founded on truth" (553). Indeed, Asadu and Egbe have drawn a cleverly subtle contrast through a play on the words "Tower" and "Babel/Babble" game because on the one hand, the Tower of Babel refers to the "real" Biblical construction. On the other hand, the Tower of Babble implies that the government's project only exists as stories held together by strings of lies, which the Ruler's distorted eyes, ears, and mouth have fabricated.

Ngugi's portrayal of the Aburirian government prostituting themselves before the Global Bank to collect for a fictitious project is symbolic of Africa's relationship with the West's global financial institutions, which, for more than sixty years, have loaned money to corrupt governments who have no viable projects. In *Wizard of the Crow*, soon after unveiling the absurd Marching to Heaven project, the Global Bank mission announces their arrival in Aburiria. As the news spreads, the city's beggars decide to hang around the meeting place in the hope of collecting money. At one point, the group of beggars, which political activists have infiltrated, break the calmness of the evening and begin chanting their disapproving slogans. The order is thus given to the police officers to chase the beggars away. Three policemen now run after two beggars. Two of them eventually give up the chase as the third grows more indefatigable. Gatherer, the third policeman, follows the two beggars through the prairie, to the bushes, and the outskirts of the city, before they disappear among the houses. Suspecting that the beggars may have entered one of the houses, Gatherer, with his gun in hand, starts knocking on doors, asking their occupants to come out.

To deter the officer from his project, Kamiti (the later Wizard of the Crow) ties together bones, rags, a dead lizard, and a frog and hangs the bundle above his door along with

the following inscription: “WARNING! THIS PROPERTY BELONGS TO THE WIZARD WHOSE POWER BRINGS DOWN HAWKS AND CROWS FROM THE SKY. TOUCH THIS HOUSE AT YOUR PERIL. SGD. WIZARD OF THE CROW” (77, original capitals). Kamiti’s strategy proves efficient, for upon seeing the makeshift charm and the inscription, officer Gatherer takes to his heels. He is now convinced that the beggars he was running after were not thieves, but devils sent by the Wizard of the Crow to trick him to death. The legend of the Wizard of the Crow is born. And when Gatherer recounts his story that night, the multiple versions of the same story look nothing like the original. In one version, he claims that the Wizard of the Crow can take any form, which, he stresses, he has seen with his own eyes. At the point in the story where the two beggars just dashed into a bush, A.G. (as he calls himself) claims that they vanished (96). The fact that he is a superstitious person of course plays a great part in his distortions. For example, he is now certain that he has been pursuing only one person, although he could have sworn there were two. Below is a side-by-side comparison between the main narrator’s version of the incidents and Arigaigai Gatherer’s.

Table 1

The main narrator's version	Arigaigai Gatherer's version
<p>1. "Two unfortunate beggars found themselves being chased by three police officers. Covered in rags from head to toe, both carried bags clutched tightly, which was their undoing, for the police had convinced themselves that the bags were full of Buri notes the two had been collecting all day and night." (75)</p>	<p>1. "What was even more amazing was that he was not running. True, <i>Haki ya Mungu</i>. The man just strolled swinging a big bag he was carrying; yet no matter how hard I ran after him, the distance between us remained the same." (97)</p>
<p>2. "They came to a bush and, though it was darker inside, the leading beggar, followed by the second, dashed in." (76)</p>	<p>2. "No sooner had I blinked than the man was gone. As there was no gap in the hedge, I could not tell how he got through." (97)</p>
<p>3. "The police officer did not hesitate and ran after them, only to fall down, trapped by something hard, like a stone" (76)</p>	<p>3. I tripped over something and fell. It was a rock cleft in two. (97)</p>
<p>4. "But when the officer saw the bundle of rags and bones, he took a step back. He gathered courage and approached the bundle. He was about to touch it when he saw the leg of a frog and the tail of a lizard, and he was petrified. On reading what was written on the cardboard, he found his voice and let out an anguished cry: Oh, the Wizard of the Crow! He took to his heels ..." (77)</p>	<p>4. "One glance at the thing hanging from the roof and I knew I was facing powerful magic. Approaching it, I saw some letters jumping from the wall toward me... I was about to touch the thing when I felt hands I could not see lifting me up. They swung me in the air and dropped me to the ground, again and again. Seven times. When I was released, I fled and did not once look back." (98)</p>

As we can see from this table, there are numerous differences between the incident as it happened in the original narrative and the account of the incident as told by Arigaigai Gatherer. His versions get farther and farther away from the truth in the course of his numerous retellings of the story. This is, as we have seen earlier, how popular legends and rumors are born when a story is recounted multiple times, each time by a different person. However, the case at hand is different in that the same person, Arigaigai Gatherer, tells numerous versions of the Wizard of the Crow story. When this behavior manifests itself in an individual, it can be taken as another feature of pathological lying, which presupposes that to be called a pathological liar, the individual must lie consistently.⁸⁶ Thus, we find Arigaigai Gatherer telling the same story countless times, so much so that some of his listeners start translating his initials, A. G., as “attorney general of storytelling” (96). Indeed, Arigaigai Gatherer deserves this title, for as Aurélie Journo suggests, he sometimes assumes preeminence over the narrator to become

the novel’s main storyteller, reporting on rumours, and even creating and spreading them. His narration is characterized by exaggeration. This figure, that gives life and depth to the story, is a good representation of the way the voice of the people, even if it is not recognised as a legitimate one and repressed by the power, pervades society and is able to overturn, or at least weaken the body of power. It is also the voice that closes the book, as if to remind us that history is also made of storytelling. (3)

Journo is right in her assessment of the role that Arigaigai Gatherer and his rumors plays in Ngugi’s criticism of authoritarian falsehood. On the one hand, this character’s stories give supernatural powers to the Wizard of the Crow and make him a serious threat to the Ruler’s regime. On the other hand, the rumors that he spreads make the Ruler a laughing stock and

⁸⁶ The term compulsive is also, often, used to refer to pathological lying, although certain professionals insist that pathological lying and compulsive lying are not the same.

severely threaten the Ruler's hold on power. His storytelling takes place wherever he finds a crowd, be it a bar, a village, a marketplace, or the crossroads; with the bar being his favorite location since there, his imagination is fueled to new heights by an endless supply of liquor. It would be inaccurate, however, to say that obtaining free beer is the main purpose behind his storytelling. Even a promotion to as Superintendent in the Ruler's office cannot make him stop making up stories about the person whom he works for.⁸⁷ This is precisely what gives power to Ngugi's conception of rumors as a counter force against the Ruler's lies. Just like Gatherer cannot control his behavior, the Ruler's material incentives cannot stop Gatherer from spreading rumors that damage the reputation of the state, i.e., the Ruler.

Conclusion

Through their novels, Farah and Ngugi raise some insightful questions about the moral and pathological implications of lying in politics. Distortion of objective reality is an important weapon in the dictator's arsenal of totalitarian control. My discussion of the phenomenon of distortion in the selected novels followed the distinctive axis of intentionality. In Farah's *Variations*, where I focused on the material motives that cause people to lie for the General, lying can be defined as a conscious and evil act destined to mask reality. In *Sweet and Sour Milk*, Farah has concocted an evocative allegory of the *big lie*, an outrageous and outright distortion of fact used for propaganda purposes. The protagonist's twin brother, a known political dissident against the regime, is assassinated and transformed into a national hero, who "died serving the revolution" (105). Although the regime's narrative is recognized as

⁸⁷ As far as motives are concerned, lying is considered normal insofar as it appears to be elicited by some obvious personal gain, such as financial compensation, relational stability, or avoiding punishment (Dike et al 345). In plainer words, people normally lie out of necessity. The pathological liar, on the other hand, does not seem to pursue any observable goal. And even when there appears to be such a goal, "the lies are often so grossly out of proportion to the perceived gain that they appear ridiculous" (Dike et al. 345).

mere fabrications by the private circle of the deceased, it is accepted as the truth by the masses. What makes the regime's lie believable is the fact that the late Soyaan worked with the General. How can the protagonist convince the public that his late brother "opposed this regime's dictatorship until the last second of his life" (96)? How can he explain this discrepancy between the man's public discourse and his private beliefs?

His task is rendered even more difficult by their father's use of his authoritative weight to support the regime's fabrication of lies. Did he lie to have his job back, or is it just pure coincidence that the General reinstated him after he accepted to repeat the big lie? Whereas Keynaan responds no to the first question, Loyaan maintains that it is "dishonest of [him] to say that Soyaan died serving the General's régime" (96). We can see that what is in question here is Keynaan's moral integrity. It is the same question that underlies the narrator's critique of the elite, whom he sees as parvenus, upstarts, and cowards "with no sense of dignity nor integrity" (36). But at the same time, this stark condemnation is eroded by presenting the reader with the specific reasons that have caused characters like Samater and Loyaan to collaborate with the regime against their will. The regime interrupts Loyaan's search for the truth about his brother's death by appointing him ambassador abroad and giving him no other choice than to accepting leaving Somalia. Samater's case follows the same pattern. But his fate is particularly revealing of the General's instrumentalization of ethnic sentiments. He offers Samater a ministerial position as a way to earn the support of his tribe. When Samater refuses, the General threatens to imprison his clan elders. Samater complies and accepts his nomination, thereby joining the lot of the humiliated. What these cases demonstrate is that some intellectuals collaborate with the regime not necessarily for material benefits. As Loyaan's inner voice suggests, some of these intellectuals are mere saboteurs working to undermine the regime from within (114). Therefore, their collaboration with the regime is mitigated by the reasons underlying their attitude.

But as suggested earlier, distortion of reality is not always deliberate and externally and materially motivated. Vaillant's definition also falls in line with the first definition of the *APA Dictionary* which views distortion as an inaccuracy of perception, cognition, or memory (326). Distortion, thus, can be regarded as something that happens unconsciously as the result of failing memory or other cognitive deficiencies. Sometimes, this kind of distortion can be innocent when we report distorted facts while believing them to be true. For Sartre, this form of distortion cannot be called *a lie* because it is not intentional and there is no malicious intent behind it. This is also true for the storyteller, who embellishes his story to captivate his audience. In *Wizard of the Crow*, Ngugi achieves this end by exaggerating the physical traits of the dictator's collaborators. The character of Machokali becomes the Ruler's Minister of Foreign Affairs after enlarging his eyes to the size of a light bulb. His gesture then leads two other characters to enlarge other parts of their bodies: one, his ears, and the other, his mouth. Ngugi's hyperbolization of these traits is not only an expression of his literary mastery but also a case against lying in politics. These characters do not stop at distorting the truth in support of the dictator. They even go further to distort their own bodies to have a seat beside the Ruler.

While it seems understandable to see the narrator's exaggeration as a conscious narrative device, Ngugi complicates his characterization of distortion by creating a character named Arigaigai Gatherere, who acts not as a storyteller, but as a witness to some events in the novel. Yet in his quality as a witness, Gatherere's accounts are exaggerated to extreme proportions, so much so that another character named Kaniuru sees him as "just a storyteller" (145). The term *storyteller* as used by Kaniuru legitimately undermines Gatherere's authority as a witness since his accounts of the events are not accurate. Through Gatherere's stories that evolve at every retelling, Ngugi performs a real coup de maître, inscribing the dynamism that characterizes oral stories onto a written text. But Gatherere's attitude is interesting in other

respects and begs many questions. Why does he always blow things out of proportion? Is he conscious of his own lies? Or is he simply sick or mad?

The character of Arigaigai Gatherer plays a determining role in Ngugi's portrayal of dictatorship. *Wizard of the Crow* is richly diverse for its smorgasbord of grotesque characters. While characters such as the Ruler's ministers intrigue readers by their physical traits, others such as Tajirika and Gatherer, are remarkable for their puzzling behavior. The character of Tajirika, whom I will investigate in Chapter Fourteen, is a singular specimen who displays a morbid devotion to the Ruler and an inferiority complex that causes him to want to become white. Arigaigai Gatherer remains unique in his compulsive habit of telling disproportionately exaggerated stories. He marks a shift from the Ruler's ministers, whose moral corruption and search for profit have driven them to distort their own bodies. These ministers also differ from Arigaigai Gatherer because purposeful lies help the Ruler. On the other hand, Arigaigai Gatherer's rumors threaten to undermine the foundations of the Ruler's "Tower of Babble," as Asadu and Egbe suggested. Even more interesting is that the pathological nature of Arigaigai Gatherer's lies and his lack of apparent motive make him uncontrollable by the regime. But why is it important to distinguish between someone who lies for lack of moral integrity and someone who does pathologically? How does this distinction help us understand Farah and Ngugi's critique of the unsound methods of rule used by African dictators?

First and foremost, in a normal world, which the dictatorships described in our novels are not, an effective diagnosis determines who is evil and should be punished for their lies and who is ill and deserves medical attention. The implications of this distinction are far-reaching and go beyond medical, legal, and judiciary concerns. As my chapter on the psychology of dictators will demonstrate, the issue is also political. Is Farah's General in the *Variations* trilogy a strategic and cynical liar or is he mad, i.e., a medical case? What about the Ruler of Aburiria in *Wizard of the Crow*? In other words, are these dictators ill or evil? The events and

the characters I have analyzed in my selection of novels suggest that lying should be read in the continuity of my definition of silence as madness in Part Two. At the beginning of this Part Three, I provided a definition of silence as a form of denial. Then, I argued that denial and distortion are defense mechanisms, i.e., patterns of behavior “that distort reality” (Paulhus et al. 552). The logical deduction that naturally follows these propositions is a redefinition of lying as madness because publicly speaking, the deluded who repeats the lies of the dictator and the liar who repeats those lies for material benefits both look mad. From a standpoint of public perception, it does not really matter whether characters lie intentionally or not as long as their lying perpetuates mass madness. As such, lying is a step deeper into the mass madness of totalitarianism. In Part Four, I shall discuss the notion of madness from a postcolonial perspective, notably, the postcolonial subject’s mental alienation inherited from colonization and the *folie du pouvoir* of the dictator in Ngugi’s *Wizard of the Crow*. In Farah’s *Variations*, I shall turn my focus on the phenomena of propaganda and indoctrination to explain how the personal delusions of a tyrant are transformed into a mass delusion.

PART FOUR

MENTAL ILLNESS: ALIENATED POSTCOLONIAL SUBJECTS AND THEIR INSANE RULERS

That imperialism which today is fighting against a true liberation of mankind leaves in its wake here and there tinctures of decay which we must search out and mercilessly expel from our land and our spirits.

Frantz Fanon—*The Wretched of the Earth*

Introduction

One of the first difficulties one encounters when researching the concept of madness is the plethora of terms that express different mental troubles: lunacy, dementia, delusion, delirium, hallucination, paranoia, melancholy, psychosis, alienation—and the list continues. In his *Medico-Philosophical Treatise on Mental Alienation*, the French physician Philippe Pinel expresses how a physician's task could be further complicated by linguistic barriers, notably the deficiencies in the French language to express varying degrees and forms of alienation (69). In this part, the generic term “madness,” as used in the title of this study, should be taken in the broad sense to encompass in a rather loose sense that not only encompasses all biological and psychological imbalances that result in odd behavioral or intentional perceptual intellectual disturbances but also the state of nations or communities that seem to function abnormally.

The effect of colonization on the mental health of the postcolonial subject is a significant concern in postcolonial criticism. In their introduction to a collection of essays on madness in postcolonial fiction, Susanna Zinato and Annalisa Pes argue, that the “theme of alienation cannot but be ‘topical’ in the literatures of the countries that have experienced the cultural shock and bereavement, and the physical and psychic trauma of colonial invasion” (3). Zinato and Pes rightly point to the pervasiveness of the theme of madness in postcolonial literature in many other respects, especially when we consider the damages done by dictatorial regimes in the equation. As Jules Michelet Mambi Magnack notes in his doctoral thesis, in the aftermath of independences,

African writers produced a large quantity of literary works developing the motif of madness, not to legitimize and adhere to the thesis that the black man is a being devoid of reason, but to stage the wanderings of the new states set up on the

continent. In a word, the motif of madness appeared in African literature at a time of historical uncertainty, when the black continent was going through deep crises born of the dictatorial systems put in place after the departure of the colonists.

(Magnack 2, my translation)

In this passage, Magnack justifiably opposes two kinds of madness. In the first interpretation, we can notice Magnack's cursory reference to the Enlightenment era's praise of reason thesis, which has partly legitimized the colonial conquest and later aroused a controversy between Leopold Sédar Senghor and some postcolonial intellectuals who vehemently opposed any proposition that praised the black man's emotion over his reason.⁸⁸

The second position, to which postcolonial critics subscribe, sees madness in the light of the chaos and contradictions that took over the continent because of the proliferation of dictatorial regimes. Thus, in his assessment of the postcolonial situation as represented by Nuruddin Farah, D. R. Ewen invokes the notion of insanity by describing living under the General's "crazed and bogus" revolution as "a situation that bears much the same relation to any reasonably sane society as Milton's Hell does to Heaven: a post-colonial Pandaemonium" (200). As suggested in these words, the fictional Somalia is the opposite of a sane society. Ewen reiterates his conviction by asserting that the more demented a society becomes, "the more dependent it becomes on rhetoric and on fear" (201). I believe that Ewen is fair in his judgment as he points to the elements of fear and rhetoric as ingredients in the making of the mad world of dictatorship. To sum up, one interpretation of madness proposed by the postcolonial critics mentioned above sees madness as the consequence of colonization. It focuses on notions of alienation and trauma to denounce the black man's estrangement from his culture and identity. The other uses the term madness to denote both the state of chaos and nonsense generated by dictatorship and the consequences of this mad world on the

⁸⁸ I discussed this issue in the subchapter "Negritude and the emotive Negro." See above, pp. 20-23.

postcolonial subject. The fundamental meaning that I ascribe to the term madness in this study is closer to the second interpretation.

Before I lay down the plan for my discussion, let me take a minute to recapitulate what I have discussed so far in the previous parts by means of for George Orwell's BLACKWHITE paradox. Here, I see Orwell's BLACKWHITE paradox⁸⁹. First, because it is a nod to the state of confusion induced by colonization, which causes the black man to want to become white. The second reason I appeal to this paradox is that it accurately describes the contradictions generated by political chaos in the postcolonial era. For instance, in my chapters on silence, the primary assumption was that when postcolonial regimes seek obedience using force, some characters, such as the teacher and the student in *Matigari*, refuse to speak for or against such regimes. Saying anything other than "black is white" would provoke the regime's anger. Saying that "black is white" is a lie many are not willing to profess. So, silence becomes a safe ground for the fearful lot, who are neither willing to support the regime's narrative nor courageous enough to challenge it. In my chapters on distortion, I have shown how postcolonial regimes seek to obtain consent by dangling material benefits in front of the elite. One consequence of this tactic is that the elite will now repeat the lies of the regime to earn a living. Consequently, they will affirm that "black is white" even though they do not believe so. But there is a third category of characters who genuinely believe that black is white. Having focused my attention on the silent person and the liar in my previous chapters, I shall now, in the present part of this dissertation, focus my

⁸⁹ I borrow the analogy from the following passage: "The keyword here is BLACKWHITE. Like so many. Newspeak words, this word has two mutually contradictory meanings. Applied to an opponent, it means the habit of impudently claiming that black is white, in contradiction of the plain facts. Applied to a Party member, it means a loyal willingness to say that black is white when Party discipline demands this. But it means also the ability to BELIEVE that black is white, and more, to KNOW that black is white, and to forget that one has ever believed the contrary" (276-77).

attention on the “mad” character, and by this, I primarily mean the people who “believe” that black is white.

However, as said above, there are multiple interpretations of madness in the postcolonial context. Madness has meant different things to different people at different points in history. But since my disciplinary focus is postcolonial, my theoretical chapter does not discuss the implications of the notion of insanity during other historical periods. Thus, in the first chapter of Part Four, I will briefly step back in time to discuss the effects of colonization on the mental health of the colonized. In my discussion of the psychological effects of colonization in Africa, I will use Freud’s psychoanalytical approach to mental distress and other concepts from social and cultural studies, and argue that the colonial encounter must have caused some psychological conflicts not only in the colonial subject but also in the postcolonial individual. After the theoretical grounds of the notion of madness have been laid out, I will focus on two psychological problems encountered in our novels.

First, in *Wizard of the Crow*, many characters appear to be suffering from an inferiority complex—an enduring pattern that Fanon deconstructs in his *Black Skin, White Masks*. Through his uniquely grotesque and ironic approach to the subject of the Black man’s alienation, Ngugi not only questions the superiority of Western values and practices but also takes a new look at African traditional healing practices that are often assigned condescending names such as divination, witchcraft, or sorcery. As will be discussed in due time, the role the Wizard of the Crow plays in the novel questions the superiority of imported Western traditions and their ability to solve postcolonial problems. The second psychological issue that we witness in our novels—and *Wizard of the Crow* in particular—is the deranged and, sometimes, mad behavior of dictators. As my discussion will demonstrate using Ronald Aronson’s concept of derangement, people often call dictators mad because of their abnormal behavior, which they believe must necessarily come from a diseased mind. However,

systematically calling dictators mad may be an error of appreciation that prevents appropriate action against them.

But madness is not an illness that only affects postcolonial dictators in their individualities. It can also be a characteristic marker of the whole nation when the delusions of the autocrat are imposed on all classes of society. I have previously demonstrated how a dictator can use violence and material persuasion to impose his will on certain characters. The last two chapters of Part Four will then discuss the dictator's attempt to obtain consent at the intellectual level by using tools of propaganda and indoctrination in *Matigari* and the *Variations* trilogy. In Chapter Sixteen, I shall discuss some generalities of the notion of propaganda, notably, its definition and its operative principles as opposed to those of persuasion. After that, I shall analyze how Ngugi uses irony in *Matigari* to expose the regime's reliance on multiple propaganda techniques to impose its distorted narrative on the masses by using a radio broadcast whose very name, The Voice of Truth, is propaganda. Lastly, Chapter Seventeen will focus on how indoctrination and propaganda in Somalia are presented in Farah's *Variations* trilogy. The goal of this Part Four is to demonstrate that the way Farah and Ngugi allegorize and satirize African politics suggests that apart from the usual use of propaganda and indoctrination to share information, dictatorial regimes often use these tools to share their "madness" with their populations.

Chapter Thirteen

From Colonial to Postcolonial Madness

As stated in my general introduction, postcolonialism, when taken from an ideological and discursive point of view, draws its insight from various disciplines because the consequences of colonization affect the postcolonial subject and his society at equally varied levels. While the economic and political impacts of colonialism are evident to the naked eyes of postcolonial scholars, the psychological scars of the colonial enterprise are pretty ambiguous and prove more difficult to grapple with. Understandably, the investigation of the subjective, psychological dimension of colonization is primarily the domain of the field of psychology and postcolonial specialists of the mind. It produced critical works like Frantz Fanon's *Black Skin White Masks* and Ashis Nandy's *The Intimate Enemy*. But as the present study is a literary analysis, we can show how other postcolonial critics use fiction as another means to investigate the traumatic effects of colonization. From Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*, which recounts the traumatic consequences of the colonial encounter in the village of Umuofia, to Tsitsi Dangarembga's *Nervous Conditions*, which examines the loss of identity under colonial and other types of oppression, to Ngugi's *Wizard of the Crow*, which satirizes the enduring patterns of colonial mentality years after colonization ended, alienating and traumatic

experiences have always characterized African literature. Alienation and trauma are useful terms in my discussion of madness in the postcolonial context because they sometimes manifest through behavior that can seem abnormal, as evidenced in the character of Tajirika in *Wizard of the Crow*.

Robert Eaglestone suggests that it “could easily be argued that nearly the whole range of African literature in the second half of the twentieth century is traumatic” (76). Roger Kurtz, who would later appeal to Eaglestone’s comment in his article “Literature, Trauma and the African Moral Imagination,” is even more acerbic in his assessment and contends that “all aspects of contemporary African writing—who creates it, the language of its expression, its favoured forms, its predominant themes, its audience, how it is published, indeed all the conditions of its production and consumption—originate in the context of a massive, continent-wide experience of deep social trauma” (425). As both Kurtz and Eaglestone maintain, postcolonial literature originates in the traumatic experience of colonization. But if the colonial encounter left psychological imprints on the colonized subject’s mind, it was not by accident. It was also by design because, after the military conquest of the colonized land and bodies, there was a second phase that expressly acted on the psyches of the colonized people. The present theoretical review aims to understand the historical precedents and some of the mental processes that contributed to the state of madness and alienation of the postcolonial subject as depicted in our novels.

The second conquest and the mental reformation of the colonized

The colonial enterprise in Africa unfolded at multiple levels, the most palpable of which were economic and political. Direct military occupation, for instance, was intended to take possession of the indigenous people’s lands and control their bodies. However, colonization

did more than control the indigenous people's natural resources and bodies. In the colonizer's effort to shape the conquered people's attitudes and morals according to European standards, controlling their ways of thinking was primordial. Their minds had to be colonized, too. Formal colonial education, then, was the tool *par excellence* to reform the indigenous person in a new fashion. Georges Hardy, the director of the educational system in French colonial West Africa, was aware that military conquest and occupation must be followed by a moral conquest for the civilizing mission to be effectively implemented. The indigenous populations would have to undergo French intellectual and moral training from childhood to mold their minds. Writing in 1917, Hardy believed that the very future of France's colonial work depended on "the intellectual and moral training" of its natives.⁹⁰ Thus, not only were the military conquest and the economic exploitation of natural resources strategically prepared but plans were also devised to affect the psychology of the indigenous populations. For Shaden Tageldin, "the literatures and cultures of modern European empires claimed the psyches of the peoples they colonized" (7). Ashis Nandy confirms this claim as well, as the following quote shows:

This colonialism colonizes minds in addition to bodies and it releases forces within the colonized societies to alter their cultural priorities once for all. In the process, it helps generalize the concept of the modern West from a geographical and temporal entity to a psychological category. The West is now everywhere, within the West and outside; in structures and in minds.

This is primarily the story of the second colonization and resistances to it.

(11)

As Nandy argues, there was a second stage of colonization primarily aimed at inculcating a particular conception of the West in the minds of the colonized. This means that besides the

⁹⁰ I paraphrased Hardy's word from the following quote: "Sujet cependant si important, puisque de la formation intellectuelle et morale de nos indigènes dépend en majeure partie l'avenir de notre œuvre coloniale" (iii).

economic or the military dimensions, which could cause trauma even if they were not primarily intended to, the colonial endeavor expressly devised psychological mechanisms to alter the colonized individual's culture, which necessarily entailed altering their mental environment. But this was not without consequences for the colonized since the imported culture, which was alien, was enforced upon a native culture that took generations to consolidate and painstaking complex mental processes for the individual to internalize. The incompatibility between the local and the imported cultures and, sometimes, the colonized subject's failure to mediate the conflict between both cultures created these forms of alienation.

Psychoanalysis and the clash of cultures in the native's mind

If we look at things from a psychoanalytical perspective, colonization necessarily must have produced conflict within the conquered societies. The colonial situation seems to entail at least two levels of psychological conflict. The first level of conflict arises when a given society seeks to inculcate moral values upon an individual's instinctual drives. The structural theory of psychoanalysis uses concepts such as the *id*, *ego*, and *superego* to explain how the individual mediates between his internal drives and external social norms. The theory posits that when the individual's *ego* fails to establish a balance between his *id*, the site of instinctual drives, and the *superego*, the site of societal morals, anxiety ensues as a consequence. Assuming that before the colonial era, individuals in African societies must have obeyed the same principles, we can argue that there must have also been some individuals with various mental disorders who failed to reconcile their impulses and cultural expectations.

For those who have successfully mediated between the *id* and *ego*, we can say that those internalized social norms have, to some extent, become their second nature—what Carl

Jung calls the *collective unconscious*. With the advent of colonization, this acquired nature was suddenly confronted with new sets of norms imposed in a way that made the colonized individual struggle to find a balance between their inner drives, their social norms, and the newly imported European norms. In that sense, the colonial encounter was also a cultural one. Although the conflicts resulting from the colonial encounter and its consequences on the individual can be analyzed from a psychoanalytic perspective, it seems noteworthy to point out that the psychoanalytical approach was at one time a legitimizing tool for colonial discourse, i.e., Freud's concept of the primitive mind provided a solid ground for the colonial project.⁹¹ The indigenous African individual, whose mind Freud likened to a child's, was considered inferior and needed to be civilized (Frosh 143). Interestingly, the psychoanalytic theory would be used by postcolonial critics to deconstruct the colonial discourse and liberate the postcolonial subject from his alienation. This is, for instance, Fanon's approach in *Black Skin White Masks*, where the black man's inferiority complex is explained not only through psychological but also through sociological and political analyses. Fanon's text helps us understand a kind of mental disorder called "white-ache" in Ngugi's *Wizard of the Crow*. But before I arrive at that point, it is necessary to investigate the sociocultural side of colonization and the adverse effects of cultural imperialism on the colonial and postcolonial subjects.

Often, conflicts that arise from the interaction between two cultures, as well as the resulting consequences, are considered sociological phenomena. But they are not without psychological implications and can also be studied from such a viewpoint. In cultural psychology, cultural alienation and psychological acculturation are generally defined in reference to individuals adopting the dominant cultural norms of the country where they settle. However, it is also generally admitted that members of the indigenous population can

⁹¹ The field of psychoanalysis itself is fraught with many controversies regarding its contribution to stereotyping the native other as a primitive. See Anderson et al., *Unconscious Dominions: Psychoanalysis, Colonial Trauma, and Global Sovereignties*.

be affected by the culture of the immigrant population in turn. This observation is also acknowledged by John Berry, whose acculturation model is most widely used to assess the impact of cultural encounters.⁹² For Berry, acculturation is a dual process of cultural and psychological exchange that occurs when two or more culturally diverse people or groups of people interact and affect individuals of both the alien and the receiving dominant cultures (“Living Successfully” 698-99). Berry further argues that although acculturation happens in a variety of contexts, such as colonization, military invasion, migration, and sojourning, contemporary acculturation research has increasingly focused its interest on immigrants as it “grew out of a concern for the effects of European domination of indigenous peoples” (700). Berry’s acculturation model seems more inclusive, as people on both sides of the encounter are considered. He proposes four acculturation processes: integration, assimilation, separation, and marginalization, and two variations in adaptation, namely, psychological well-being and sociocultural competence (“When Individuals” 472). Here, the effect of acculturation on the psychological well-being of immigrants seems a valid lead to pursue.

Numerous studies based on Berry’s acculturation model have shown that psychological well-being is determined by the coping strategy adopted. Integrating individuals were found to experience less psychological stress than individuals using other coping strategies. Individuals who reject both the dominant and their own cultures were found to experience negative psychological consequences. Assimilating and separating individuals occupied an intermediate level. For instance, Choy and his colleagues reviewed twenty-one studies. They conclude that most of those studies suggest that “that marginalisation was associated with worse depression symptoms, compared to integration, assimilation, and

⁹² As Berry contends, the interests of acculturation researchers have evolved throughout the centuries, first concentrating on the effect of colonization on the indigenous people, then moving its attention to “how immigrants changed following their entry and settlement into receiving societies,” and more recently to “how ethnocultural groups relate to each other and change as a result of their attempts to live together in culturally plural societies” (“Living Successfully” 700).

separation, while integration was associated with the least depressive symptoms” (1). However, the colonial context significantly differed from the immigrant cultural and psychological acculturation model in many ways.⁹³ First, the colonial populations were not ordinary immigrants who were generally the least powerful economically and politically upon their arrival in their new environment. European settlers and colonizers were rich and powerful. Secondly, the native populations were not immigrants, and the alien culture they had to adapt to came to them and into their natural habitat. Thirdly, the alien culture was imposed on the majority by a minority of individuals, the colonizers and settlers.

This imposition, generally referred to as cultural imperialism, entailed psychological consequences for both the colonizer and the colonized. But, here, I am only interested in the latter category.⁹⁴ The indigenous populations were also psychologically impacted by colonization, even more so than the settlers and colonizers. In the case of indigenous populations, however, acculturation cannot be seen as a normal or voluntary process. The research community has used different terms, such as *forced acculturation*, *forced assimilation*, or *deculturation*, to denote the forceful imposition of Western cultural values on indigenous people. *Forced acculturation*, for instance, has seen widespread use among researchers, including several delegates to the *8th International Congress of Anthropological and Ethnological Sciences* (Tokyo and Kyoto, September 1968). They submitted a resolution

⁹³ Judging from Europe’s general patronizing attitude towards Africa in the nineteenth century, I would further argue that the colonizers and settlers had no intention to integrate into what they considered an inferior culture. Rather, they tended to maintain their cultural norms while maintaining a minimum of interaction with the local populations. Separating themselves culturally from the indigenous populations should no longer be seen as an acculturation style but rather as segregation. Though Apartheid segregation in South Africa can be seen as the culminating point of colonial segregation, the practice unfolded on a lesser scale in other African colonies as well; see the case of Algeria in Fanon’s *The Wretched of the Earth*.

⁹⁴ The settlers and colonizers, too, must have found it difficult to adapt to their new environment and to witness cultural practices they could not understand. Thus, the establishment of psychiatry and asylums in the colonies was primarily geared towards the mental healing of those who suffered mental breakdown among the colonizer population. According to Mrinalini Greedharry, the natives were not considered “civilized enough to require actual mental health care” unless in extreme cases (12). Here, we can see that the same stereotypes of racial inferiority that motivated the colonial *mission civilisatrice* also affected the practices of the psychiatrist institutions.

condemning the use of force and other questionable methods to acculturate indigenous populations across the globe, arguing that such methods and programs of “acculturation and assimilation of indigenous societies are often harmful, immediately or ultimately, to their physical and mental health, and their social and economic well-being” (qtd. in Wilmer 141). These psychological effects of colonization have received considerable scholarly attention. Different concepts such as colonial mentality, postcolonial trauma, and historical trauma have been advanced to explain those psychological effects. They all approach the psychological effects of colonization from different vantage points. For instance, the concept of *colonial mentality* is more concerned with the forced inculcation of Western values through education and its psychological effects, such as low self-esteem or loss of identity. At the same time, traumatic approaches tend to stress the role of violence in provoking psychological distress.

But all these theoretical approaches to the psychological health of colonized communities and people suggest that what happened in the colonial era continues to affect the psychological well-being of indigenous populations today. Studies relating to this topic do not target only people and communities that have been directly colonized but also the postcolonial societies that have come after the end of formal colonization. For example, Yellow Horse Brave Heart used the term *historical trauma* in the 1980s to denote “cumulative emotional and psychological wounding over the lifespan and across generations, emanating from massive group trauma experiences; the historical trauma response (HTR) is the constellation of features in reaction to this trauma” (7). By linking colonization to seemingly unrelated behaviors such as substance abuse, domestic violence, and suicide in Native American societies, this approach opens new possibilities for research into the perpetuation of trauma and related behaviors that manifest several decades after colonization.

We can draw many conclusions from various psychological, cultural, and social theories reviewed above. First, relying on Sigmund Freud’s psychoanalytical approach, I

contend that insanity cases must have existed in Africa before the advent of European imperialism. Secondly, it seems normal to suggest that insanity cases must have increased in number afterward because of colonization and the new stresses it put on the African mind. Also, from a social-psychological standpoint, it has been determined that conflicts arising from encounters between two cultures can cause mental disorders. To sum up the situation, in the case of colonization, the African individual was forced to adopt an alien culture. This forced acculturation had devastating consequences for the colonized and the postcolonial individual, whose mentality was and still is often affected by a complex of inferiority inherited from the colonial period.

Chapter Fourteen

Postcolonial Alienation in *Wizard of the Crow*

It follows from what has been observed regarding the moral conquest of the African mind that the postcolonial individual, who inherited a collective psychology from the colonial era mentality, is alienated. Thus, in *Postcolonial Theory and Psychoanalysis*, Mrinalini Greedharry argues that “although violent resistance might oust the colonizer from the physical space of the colony, only psychological resistance can oust the colonizer from our minds and hearts” (12). Greedharry’s position reflects what many other postcolonial critics have observed, i.e., that colonization has not yet ended at the cultural and psychological levels. For example, in his discussion of the effects of cultural imperialism in *Decolonising the Mind*, Ngũgĩ observes that the effect of cultural imperialism “is to annihilate a people’s belief in their names, in their languages, in their environment, in their heritage of struggle, in their unity, in their capacities and ultimately in themselves” (3). For Ngũgĩ, language played an important role in colonial alienation and caused “a deliberate disassociation of the language of conceptualisation, of thinking, of formal education; of mental development, from the language of daily interaction in the home and in the community” (28). Here, we can see that to Ngũgĩ, the fact that European languages are still the languages of education and literature

long after decolonization meant that the postcolonial individual is suffering from the same alienation. But language is not the only element from which the postcolonial individual is annihilated. The postcolonial individual continues to speak the former colonizer's language and calls himself by his name.

In *Decolonising the Mind*, Ngugi mentions the question of African names only in passing. But we can see parallels between his position regarding Christian European names and his views on language. For example, Ngugi's first three novels were written in English under the name of James Ngugi. We can see that the writing language and his first name were European then. But as Ngugi became increasingly critical of imported cultural markers, he abandoned his Christian name in the 1970s, first on his publications and then changing it legally in 1977. His novel *Petals of Blood*, which appeared the same year, was his first novel published under the name Ngugi wa Thiong'o (Lovesey 14). And for his next novel, which he wrote in prison, Ngugi would abandon English as a writing language in favor of Gikuyu, his mother tongue. His attitude toward the English language in the context of neocolonialism is evident. What I would like to focus on now is Ngugi's concern with names as an identity and cultural marker in *Wizard of the Crow*, which shows not only a stark condemnation of postcolonial dictatorships but also makes a strong statement against continuing colonial influence at the political, economic, cultural, and psychological levels.

Ashamed of their identity and names

Ngugi's criticism of colonial mentality starts relatively early in the *Wizard of the Crow* during the first conversation between the hero and heroine. When they present themselves to one another, they make it clear that they have African and European names. Their exchange

suggests that, in the postcolonial context, a name is valued differently depending on whether it is African or European. Below is a snippet of their interchange, starting with the hero:

‘You are a university graduate? I would never have guessed ...’

‘Why? I don’t have a mark on my forehead?’ the woman said rather sharply before laughing and extending her hand. ‘My name is Nyawira. Grace Nyawira, but I prefer Nyawira by itself.’

‘I am Kamiti wa Karimiri. But there was a time I used to be called Comet Kamiti.’

‘Comet? That is a new one.’

‘When I was a kid I read somewhere about stars and something about comets streaking across the sky, and I said: That is my Christian name.’

‘Comet? A Christian name?’

‘Why not? It is as European as your Grace.’

‘When I was in Brilliant Girls High School I was in charge of saying grace before meals. We thank you Jesus for the food we are about to eat, etcetera. The other students started calling me Grace, and soon after I adopted it as my own, replacing Engenethi.’

‘Engenethi? A version of Ingrid?’

‘I believe it’s derived from Agnes.’

‘Engenethi? Ingrid or Agnes? A Christian name?’

‘Well, it sounded European. All European names are Christian, African ones are satanic.’

‘Is that what you got from that novel you were reading, *Shetani Msalabani*, *Satan on the Cross*—or is it *Devil on the Cross*?’ (63)

In this fascinating dialogue, in which Ngugi refers to his own novel, the protagonists touch upon a widespread phenomenon on the African continent, the beginning of which can be traced back to the work of early Christian missionaries. At first, assuming new names can be

seen as a religious phenomenon per the Christian rite of baptism. If considered through this religious interpretation only, it cannot be called a colonial method per se. Changing one's name after conversion to Christianity is as old as the religion itself. Yet, in the African context, this does come with serious interrogations. As Kamiti tells Nyawira during their conversation, European names are Christian while African ones are considered satanic. Kamiti's sarcastic comment reflects the prevailing Western colonial attitude of demeaning African customs, practices, and even languages. The interiorization of this paradigm entails numerous consequences, notably regarding identity formation. The protagonists indicate that they are now at ease with their African names, although it appears that at one time in their lives, they had gone by Christian, i.e., European, names. To understand why these names seem so crucial for Nyawira, one can rely on the narrator's explanation:

At Brilliant Girls High School, Nyawira went through a period when she really struggled with her names. There was a time when she called herself Engenethi Nyawira Charles Matthew Mugwanja Wangahu, often writing it as E.N.C.M.M. Wangahu. She was not very keen on Engenethi and became Grace Mugwanja. Grace Mugwanja stuck, mostly in the village community, and she held on to it for a while. Her father liked Grace more than Engenethi, and Roithi, her mother, liked Engenethi more than Grace, and both hated Mugwanja with equal intensity, and so to her parents she would always be either Engenethi or Grace. She herself continued struggling with these markers of identity, and after going to college she eventually settled for Nyawira wa Wangahu, though there were some who could not bring themselves to call her anything but Grace Mugwanja. (73)

This long quote astonishingly well captures a complex many postcolonial Africans inherited from their colonized parents. It is usual for parents to give their children a combination of African and European names. Nyawira's example shows that although each parent has a preferred name, both preferred names are European, and they hate her African name "with

equal intensity.” It has taken Nyawira many years to come to terms with her fractured identity. But in the end, she manages to overcome her complex by settling for an exclusively African name. through this example, Ngugi brilliantly and grotesquely allegorizes many Africans’ preferences for European names and their rejection of African names through Nyawira’s long-winded names.

Let us now come back to the conversation between the protagonists. What Kamiti and Nyawira condemn is not just the demeaning attitude towards African names. What is more at issue is the attitude of many Africans who have come to appreciate European names while feeling ashamed of their African names.⁹⁵ This translates the desire of many colonized and postcolonial Africans, not only to look, sound, and behave like the white man, but also to become white. The black man’s inferiority complex manifesting in his unconscious desire to be white is central to Ngugi’s critique of colonial mentality in *Wizard of the Crow*. Frantz Fanon readers may feel familiar with Ngugi’s approach to a problem that is the main theme in *Black Skin, White Masks*. The title is quite evocative of the importance of the subject. For Fanon, there are a few important facts regarding the relationship between the white and black races. One is that “white men consider themselves superior to black men,” and another one is that “black men want to prove to white men, at all costs, the richness of their thought, the equal value of their intellect” (12). It is from this need for recognition that springs the black man’s inferiority complex, his unconscious desire to be white altogether. In Fanon’s words, the black man sees himself facing a dilemma: either “*to turn white or disappear*” (100, original italics). Given the daunting problem that plagues the black race, Fanon clearly states his goal as a psychiatrist: “I believe that the fact of the juxtaposition of the white and black

⁹⁵ People want to change their name for many reasons. In the United States, Chinese students often use European names as a motivation to learn English and to make things easier for their European teachers, who cannot pronounce the original Chinese names. But this situation differs from what we have in the African countries in our novels.

racism has created a massive psychoexistential complex. I hope by analyzing it to destroy it” (14). Kamiti’s role as the Wizard of the Crow is in many ways comparable to Fanon’s as a psychoanalyst in his *Black Skin, White Masks*. The point I am going to demonstrate in the next few paragraphs is that, although Kamiti does not refer to himself as a psychiatrist, most of the problems he solves in *Wizard of the Crow* are more psychological than physical.

In *Wizard of the Crow*, the black man’s longing to be white is given physical manifestation through the sickness of the character named Tajirika. The predicament begins after Tajirika is appointed Chairman of Marching to Heaven, the dictator’s megalomaniac project. Businessmen start flooding his construction office in the hope to secure contracts. At the end of his first day as the project’s chairman, he had already collected three sacks of bribe money. He goes home, shows his wife what his first day as Chairman of Marching to Heaven earned him, and goes into a monologue about their prosperous future, telling Vinjina that that was only the beginning:

The morrow would bring even more money, for there were many more people coming to see me. If in just one day I have harvested this much and marching to heaven has not even begun, when the Global Bank releases its loans and the construction actually begins, my money will go through the roof. By the time all is said and done, I will probably be the richest man in Aburiria, the richest man in Africa, probably the richest man in the whole world, and I will be in a position to have anything I want, except ... except ... and it was then that he started coughing uncontrollably, not finishing his thought. (173)

Tajirika rushes to the bathroom, only to be found by his wife staring at himself in the mirror and repeating the word *if*. What is happening to Tajirika? Has he gone mad? Or is he just so overwhelmed by the prospect of his future glory that he cannot speak? At first, Vinjina thinks that the mirror is the source of his illness, so she takes it out of the bathroom. But the next morning, Tajirika starts shouting when he finds no mirror on the wall. After accusing his

children, and threatening to beat them, Vinjina is forced to put the mirror back. But as soon as he sets his eyes on the mirror, Tajirika resumes his *ifs*. To make matters worse, he starts scratching his face between his “ifs” and “if onlys” before stripping himself and jumping into the bathtub while continuing to scratch himself all over.

In a sense, one can argue that Tajirika is mad since his behavior is abnormal and unexplainable at this point. Were he to see a doctor in this condition, he would probably be straight-jacketed to prevent him from scratching himself. Later, when he is interrogated, Tajirika seems reluctant to reveal the exact nature of his illness and tells his interrogator that he had a heart problem and that he went to a witch doctor instead of a physician. Questioned further on the implications of his choice, he is now forced to concede:

‘Mine was not an illness of the organ itself,’ Tajirika tried to explain. ‘I meant the heart as mind. Something like that.’

‘You mean you were mad? Crazy?’

‘Nooo! Hapana! No, no!’ Tajirika denied the suggestion in three languages for emphasis. ‘I meant heart as when we say so-and-so is heartless or so-and-so is full of heart.’

‘A psychiatric disorder, something like that, is that correct?’

‘I don’t know much about the names of illnesses. But I think that a diviner could be called a psychiatrist of sorts.’ (320)

The vehemence with which Tajirika objects to his interrogator’s suggestion is revealing of the stigma associated with madness in the Aburirian society. This probably explains why Tajirika’s wife chooses to keep her husband’s illness secret. In any case, the description of his symptoms seems so unbelievable that the ruler’s minister Sikiokuu refers to him as “the madman” while ordering his underlings to make the Wizard of the Crow share a room with Tajirika (374). Lastly, the conversation between Tajirika and his interrogator also

foreshadows my discussion of the role of the Wizard of the Crow and Ngugi's criticism of the pejorative connotations that often come with names given to some African practices.

Seeing this, Vinjina now thinks that her husband may be bewitched because some people are envious of his appointment as Chairman of Marching to Heaven. It is then that Nyawira, the heroine of the novel and Tajirika's secretary, proposes the idea to bring Tajirika to the Wizard of the Crow, something Tajirika's wife accepts without thinking twice—which shocks Nyawira who knows that Vinjina is a Christian. But let us note that before thinking of her husband's malady as a divine or supernatural instance, Vinjina first turned to practitioners of Western psychiatry for a drug. Far from being anodyne, her gesture, calling doctors first and going to a sorcerer as a last resort, reveals another facet of the black man's alienation. This pattern is recurrent in recurrent in *Wizard of the Crow*, where Ngugi consciously attracts the reader's attention to what is happening. Even in Farah's *Close Sesame*, an interesting case of madness requires the intervention of different healing traditions. Although Farah may not have intended to use it as a criticism of the preeminence given to Western medicine, the order of intervention of health practitioners suggests such preeminence.

Competing healing practices

There are numerous cases of insanity and other bodily and psychological afflictions in the novels under scrutiny. These include Khaliif's madness in *Close Sesame*, and Tajirika's and the Ruler's white ache in *Wizard of the Crow*. In general, the afflicted characters attribute the causes of their illnesses to either of two different etiological categories: the spiritual and the psycho-medical. In Ngugi's *Wizard of the Crow*, some characters from the lower class turn to Christianity, an imported religion, or African ancestral traditions. In Farah's *Sweet and Sour Milk* and *Close Sesame*, some characters remain within the Islamic tradition, while others turn

to witchcraft. In Christianity, madness and other bodily illnesses are seen as a punishment from God, like in the story of Nebuchadnezzar,⁹⁶ or the work of evil spirits, as when Jesus cast seven demons out of Mary Magdalene, and when a man possessed by demons that caused him to live among the tombs and to cry out and cut himself with stones (Mark 5:5).⁹⁷

As in Christianity, beliefs in the spiritual origin of diseases were common in the early Islamic world.⁹⁸ According to Historian Michael Dols, in the ancient and medieval Middle East, there was a deep-rooted religious interpretation of bodily and mental illnesses “which easily and cruelly defied the logic of naturalistic medicine” (9). For early Muslims, illnesses, especially insanity, were seen as the work of evil spirits known as *jinn*.⁹⁹ In the Islamic tradition, the term *majnun*, which designates a person possessed by a *jinn*, is also the word used for a madman.¹⁰⁰ Additionally, as Doll suggests, “from the inception of Islam, *majnun*

⁹⁶ In one of the stories found in the Book of Samuel, King Saul is driven mad by Yahweh for disobeying his command. Another story concerns Nebuchadnezzar, whom God punished for boasting of his own mightiness. The King went insane, started eating grass, and lived like a wild beast. After seven years passed, the malediction was lifted and Nebuchadnezzar recovered his sanity, whereupon he glorified God and confessed his pride.

⁹⁷ Although no explicit reference is made as to the term madness or insanity, the account of the aftermath of his exorcism gives us good reason—in the use of the word mind, for instance—to believe that the demons had caused the man Jesus has cured to be mad. For, as people come out to see what they heard about they are surprised to see the demon-possessed man “clothed and in his right mind” (Luke 8:35). As these examples show, the ancient Palestinians attributed the causes as well as the treatment of all illnesses, whether physical or psychological, to divine agency.

⁹⁸ In *Madness in Civilization*, Andrew Scull argues that the supernatural interpretation of insanity was a shared feature across many cultures, religions, and periods. Thus, it was widely accepted in ancient Greece that mental illnesses were caused by godly intervention in human affairs. For Scull, this belief profoundly permeated Greek poetry and drama “so much so that millennia later, Sigmund Freud would call upon Greek myth when he named the psychological trauma he claimed indelibly marked the whole human race, the Oedipus complex. Panic, too, is a word that derives from Greek: *panikon*, of or pertaining to *Pan*, a god notorious for spreading terror” (22). Notable examples of divine madness in Greek mythology and literature include the goddess of wisdom, Athena, who provoked Penelope’s suitors to act uncontrollably while they were feasting.

⁹⁹ According to Alfred Welch, there are multiple references to the *jinn* in Meccan portions of the Qur’an, and in some of the passages where they are mentioned, the *jinn* have free will because they can choose to do good or evil and assume multiple capabilities, including making people mad (774).

¹⁰⁰ The correlation between the *jinn* and madness can also be investigated at the linguistic level where madness and possession by the *jinn* are designated with the same root words. For example, as Welch contends, “the concept ‘jinn-possession,’ involving the term *majnun* or the synonymous expression *bihi jinnatun*, occurs sixteen times” (744). In one of these occurrences, the prophet of Islam is accused by his detractors of being a false messenger because they assume he is possessed by a *jinn*. The term that is used for *jinn*-possession, *lamajnun* or *majnun*, has been translated in many versions of the holy book as *insane*, *madman*, *mad*, or *crazed*.

was a familiar but ambiguous term,” and the extraordinary character of Prophet Muhammad suggests that for early Muslims, he could be either a poet, diviner, sorcerer, or a madman (10). The ambiguous nature of the word *majnun* shows that madness was believed to possess many faces. I will give proper attention to this issue later in my discussion of the character of Khaliif the madman in *Close Sesame*.

But alongside these conceptions of madness and illnesses that we characterize as religious, there always existed other interpretations that were considered pagan, animist, or traditional. In the African context, healing practices that rely on a traditional approach assume many forms. According to Karen Flint, who focuses on South African healing traditions from 1920 to 1948,

‘Traditional’ healers, of which there were many types, specialized according to their talents and calling. Historically they performed a variety of functions for African communities; these included bringing rain, detecting witches and criminals, ‘doctoring’ armies, negotiating with ancestors, and using herbs and surgical procedures to cure and mend the body. (2)

As this quote shows, some African healing practices appeal to spiritual forces while others, such as using herbs and surgery, adopt a more rational and advanced approach to illnesses. Those practitioners had many African names that varied from one community to another, but in European colonial discourse, they went by names such as diviner, witch doctor, and herbalist. But what should attract our attention in this quote is Flint’s insertion of the word traditional in quotation marks. Although this can be interpreted in many ways, I would like to restrict my view to what this may imply with regard to colonial categories. Here, I suggest that we read the use of quotation marks to question the category “traditional” as applied to African practices.

During colonization, and beginning from the early 1600s, the African healing traditions cited above competed with other imported traditions from Christianity, Islam, and

Western medicine. For many postcolonial critics, including Ngugi, both the Christian missionaries and the colonial authorities used some of the negative denominations that designated local healers in a dismissive way (Havik 189). This condescending attitude was mostly based on stereotypes of the primitive and superstitious African healers who prayed to their dead ancestors and worshiped Satan instead of God. As Ngugi rightly notes in *Decolonising the Mind*, “Capitalism introduced a new medical science to conquer diseases: capitalism through its selective prescription of medical care, at least in the colonies, ensured a disease-ridden population who now lacked help from the herbalists and psychiatrists whose practices had been condemned as devilry” (66). That Africans were superstitious cannot be disputed, but to dismiss the whole body of African healing practices in such derogatory terms must be seen in the same light as other binary oppositions of colonial discourse that used to distinguish between the “traditional” African and the “modern” European. It is in this kind of distinction and the competition for dominance between various healing traditions that I am interested in the novels under discussion, especially how Ngugi uses the character of the Wizard of the Crow to demonstrate that some of those practices are even in many ways scientific.

Reading our novels in light of the spiritual explanation of insanity in Christianity and Islam helps us understand the behavior of many characters regarding illnesses and healing in general. Thus, in Farah’s *Sweet and Sour Milk*, Soyaan’s mother holds the belief that her son has been bewitched (13). Rumor also has it that she has consulted a witch doctor to harm her husband’s new wife, on whom she blames Soyaan’s poisoning and death (171-72). In *Close Sesame*, where Farah tackles the theme of madness explicitly, the services of Sheiks have been requested after Khaliif the madman starts undressing and uttering profanities:

The doctors that were consulted did not know what to suggest; one daredevil of a psychoanalyst spoke of the dangers of the haloperidol treatments and left it at that. Had Khaliif been given the treatment? No one could tell. His wife, children and the

relations did what tradition prescribed: he was tied to a bed, several sheikhs were summoned and were handsomely paid to read the blessed word over him. (16)

In this passage, the order in which different practitioners are called upon to cure Khaliif implicitly establishes a preeminence of Western medicine over traditional or religious healing practices.¹⁰¹ We see that doctors were consulted first. The sheikhs were summoned only after they had failed to cure Khaliif. But this passage also raises an important question regarding the efficacy of both Western medical practice and religious healing, as neither one nor the other was able to rid Khaliif of his madness.

The coexistence of different medical traditions is also a central motif in *Wizard of the Crow*. The novel's title—in which the term “wizard” refers to a traditional practitioner who offers divining services and healing solutions—is rather suggestive of the spiritual dimension in the fictional universe. In the novel, Ngugi shows how three medical traditions—Christianity, African wizardry, and Western medicine—compete for preeminence in Aburiria. He also questions the order of importance that different social classes give to these medical traditions. Ngugi's critical look at Western medicine and Christianity transpires through the fact that almost every affliction that imported traditions fail to cure ultimately finds a solution at the Wizard of the Crow's shrine. And yet, only in rare circumstances do the afflicted characters go to the Wizard of the Crow first—especially when they are from the upper classes of society. In the case of Tajirika's whit-ache, which I will discuss in more detail later, his wife turns to Western doctors first and to the Wizard only as a last resort:

¹⁰¹ Since madness and other illnesses have always been attributed to supernatural origins, it was, and still is, common to look for cure in the divine. The Bible has multiple accounts of miraculous healing, some of which have been mentioned earlier, and Christianity still has rites of exorcism in our days. In Islam, too, “the first recourse of disturbed individuals or, more likely, their families was probably to supernatural healing, if healing were thought to be necessary at all” (Dols 9). The first recourse of the afflicted in ancient times may not be the same as nowadays but religious healing remains a pervasive practice throughout the world. And this is also the case in our fictional universes.

Vinjinia started phoning up doctors she knew to be discreet, telling them only that her husband was low in spirit and occasionally scratched his face, omitting even the slightest reference to the mirror and Tajirika's loss of speech. When some suggested that she bring him to their clinics she would quickly downplay the seriousness of his malady. Others said flat out that they could not prescribe a cure over the phone; a few suggested over-the-counter drugs to relieve the itching and depression. The drugs did not work. (164)

As we can see from this quote, Vinjinia's first thought after her husband is struck by his mysterious illness is to call Western-trained "doctors" to have a prescription. As the drugs the doctors have suggested do not resolve the problem, she now turns to the Wizard of the Crow, whom many, including her, call a "witch doctor." Not only does the Wizard put a name on Tajirika's sickness but he also understands that Tajirika's "malady of words" is the mere symptom of a bigger problem, which I shall address in the subchapter below. But before pursuing this, it might be interesting to discuss how Ngugi has preemptively responded to a possible objection that Tajirika's sole case does not prove that most characters resort to African medical practice only after Western medicine and Christian exorcism have failed.

Indeed, Tajirika has not been examined by a doctor and does not have the appropriate prescription. Thus, one can easily object to Ngugi's implicit suggestion that Western medicine has failed to cure Tajirika because he has not had any. That is why Ngugi provides three other physical and psychological distress cases presenting similar endings. For example, when the Ruler of Aburiria catches the same "malady of words," he has access to renowned practitioners of Western medicine, who all fail to cure him. Ultimately, the Ruler, like Tajirika before him, finds relief with the Wizard of the Crow.¹⁰² Ironically, after curing the Ruler, the Wizard of the Crow himself catches the malady of words, which turns out to be

¹⁰² See below, p. 275.

a depressive episode caused by his separation from the Nyawira, the heroine. Another example is the couple Maritha and Mariko, who do not lust for one another anymore and consider this to be Satan's doing. Because they are a poor couple, they first turn to the Church for a solution, but in vain. Finally, they consult the Wizard of the Crow and find out that Satan has nothing to do with their problem. As these cases suggest, the African witch doctor can cure diseases that renowned doctors have failed to even diagnose. Ngugi establishes a pattern whereby the superiority of imported Western values is questioned.

African medical practices in a new light: wizardry or psychiatry?

At the Wizard's shrine, Vinjina explains Tajirika's symptoms to the diviner, leaving out the most embarrassing details such as his scratching himself. But as soon as the diviner places a mirror in front of the patient, he starts scratching himself again, repeating *if* and *if only* as his wife pulls him away from the mirror. At the end of the consultation, the Wizard of the Crow diagnoses Tajirika with the malady of words: Tajirika's words are stuck in his throat because "his thoughts are stuck in his head so that his wishes cannot be denied or fulfilled. His wishes are shards of words stuck in his throat. His enemies lie within him, and they want him to choke over his unvoiced wishes ..." (175). The Wizard of the Crow then advises Vinjina to come back with the three bags of money for the next curing session.

During the second curing session, Kamiti, in his role as the Wizard of the Crow, sees to it that Tajirika begs for the mirror, and he makes him promise to try to force out the words stuck within him. The Wizard then puts the mirror back and addresses Tajirika: "Vomit the words, the good and the bad!" The patient responds with his usual *if*. Kamiti pursues his diagnosis, forcing out of Tajirika, one word at a time, the thoughts stuck in his head. Then he asks his patient to piece his punctuated thought into one sentence:

Kamiti: 'There! You have voiced the treacherous thought! Now I want you to voice your thoughts without the aid of the mirror.'

Tajirika: 'If ... my ... skin ... were ... not ... black! Oh, if only my skin were white!' (179)

After many pages of misdirection, suspense, and mystery, Ngugi finally allows his readers to discover what was afflicting Tajirika: an aching desire to become white—hence his scratching himself as if to peel off his black skin to reveal the white underneath it.

Before breaking down Tajirika's "white-ache," it is important to take a moment to discuss Kamiti's role. First, it is possible to interpret Ngugi's portrayal of a sorcerer using only words to cure his patient as a continuation of his criticism of the West's condescending attitude towards African cultures and practices. As Kamiti himself has commented earlier, European names are Christian, and African names are satanic. In physical and mental health matters, we can observe the same attitude at play, whereby European practitioners are called by good names: physician, doctor, psychiatrist, and psychoanalyst. On the other hand, African practitioners are called diviners, sorcerers, witch doctors, traditional healers, etc. Ngugi's other merit regarding this double standard lies in his attempt to redeem African medicine by showing that both the European doctor and the African witch doctor treat the same mental condition. Ngugi further demonstrates his attempt to restore the dignity of African medical practice by having the Ruler of Aburiria issue "a special decree that traditional African healers would no longer be called sorcerers, diviners, or witch doctors. Henceforth they would be called specialists in African psychiatry, in short, afrochiatrists, and they would be allowed to call themselves *Doctor*. The Ruler was making plans to set up the Ruler's Academy of Authentic Afrochiatrists" (622, original italics). At least for once, it seems the Ruler makes a reasonable decision motivated by his belief that "the real threat to Aburiria's future lay in peoples abandoning their traditions in pursuit of a stressful modernity" (621). Here, we can

only give credit to the Ruler's acknowledgment of the positive correlation between colonization/modernity and mental distress.¹⁰³

Ngugi's decision to make the Ruler do something salutary and reasonable is not inconsistent. Sometimes, even real African dictators make good decisions, so why not a fictional one? But as has been discussed in my chapters on propaganda and indoctrination, dictators always have an ominous agenda hidden behind their good actions. Like Farah, who has always been critical of his General's exploitation of traditional structures, Ngugi suggests that the Ruler's appeal to traditions only intends to strengthen his power. As we look closely, it becomes evident that the traditional values that the Ruler encourages his citizens to follow only reinforce the oppressive patriarchal system. For example, the

Women must get circumcised and show submission by always walking a few steps behind their men. Polygamous households should not form queues. Instead of screaming when they are beaten, women should sing songs of praise to those who beat them and even organize festivals to celebrate wife beating in honor of manhood. Most important, all Aburirians should remember at all times that the Ruler was husband number one, and so he was duty bound to set an example by doing in the country what individual men were to do in their households. [...] Teachers would be strongly encouraged to impart to schoolchildren the virtues of the past, of unquestioning obedience. (621-22)

As this surrealist quotation suggests, Ngugi shows that the traditional values in the Ruler's philosophy are old-fashioned because they only call for submission and oppression. Nevertheless, the Ruler's call for a positive reevaluation of African medical practices seems a positive point, and his proposition that African healers should be called afrochiatrists is consistent with Kamiti's role as the Wizard of the Crow who can cure psychological illnesses

¹⁰³ Colonization came with modernization, which many consider a source of anxiety and stress. In *The Age of Insanity: Modernity and Mental Health*, John Schumaker, for example, suggests a correlation between the number of insanity cases and increasing urbanization in modern Europe (72)

Western medicine cannot even diagnose. As Fanon states, the work of a psychoanalyst is to “help my patient to become conscious of his unconscious and abandon his attempts at a hallucinatory whitening but also to act in the direction of a change in the social structure” (100). Considering this observation and Ngugi’s stance in *Wizard of the Crow*, we can thus call Kamiti an African psychiatrist or psychoanalyst. But one question remains to be answered: if Kamiti has succeeded in bringing Tajirika’s “white-ache” to the surface, will he also succeed in curing his patient?

As for Tajirika’s illness, there are two separate elements to consider: his *white-ache* and the malady of words, which is the symptom of the former. In *Wizard of the Crow*, Ngugi uses the term “malady of words” to allegorize the outward manifestation of deep-seated psychological problems. It is synonymous with depression. Ngugi provides three case scenarios to demonstrate this. Tajirika is the first to catch the malady of words which, makes him unable to say anything intelligible but “ifs” repetitively. The second character who suffers from the “malady of words” is the Ruler, whose case is further complicated by a bloating of his body.¹⁰⁴ But let us focus on his loss of speech here. Ironically, after curing the Ruler, the Wizard of the Crow himself catches the malady of words, which turns out to be a depressive episode caused by his separation from the Nyawira, the heroine. The juxtaposition of these three cases shows that different characters catch the malady of words for different reasons: For Tajirika and the Ruler, it is the consequence of the humiliation and low status associated with their black skins; for Kamiti, it is a burning desire to reunite with his half. But now that Tajirika knows the root cause of his loss of speech, what will he do? Will he learn to accept his skin, or will he really try to become white?

¹⁰⁴ The Ruler has access to renowned practitioners of Western medicine and his first reflex is to call his personal doctor Wilfried Kaboca. Dr Kaboca has no solution for the Ruler’s illness and contacts Clement C. Clarkwell, who is also overstrained by the case. He calls his former professor, Din Furyk, whom he usually appeals to “whenever he came across difficult cases” (470-71). All fail to cure the Ruler. Ultimately, the Ruler, like Tajirika before him, finds relief with the Wizard of the Crow.

After being diagnosed with white-ache, Tajirika naturally asks the Wizard of the Crow how it can be cured. And for Tajirika, this essentially means how to become white. The Wizard of the Crow responds that becoming white “is actually quite simple, but it calls for work, hard work” (181). First, Tajirika will have to choose a new name that best reflects his whiteness. This is how he becomes Clement Clarence Whitehead Tajirika. Next, Mr. Clement Clarence Whitehead will have to marry a white woman to take on the whiteness of his new wife. However, the problem is that Tajirika already has a wife who happens to be at the shrine. At the thought that her husband will divorce her, she begins trembling, and then as a surprise, she starts saying *if* and *if only*. It turns out that she, too, wants to be white. Like her husband, she changes her name to Virgin Beatrice Whitehead. Here again, the phenomenon of name change resurfaces as a necessary step towards becoming white.

Kamiti also takes the opportunity to explain the importance of names as a primary identity marker. He reminds Tajirika that slaves were given new names in the image of their masters. His reference to slavery, however, serves another, more subtle, purpose. By telling Tajirika that he is free to choose a name—unlike slaves who were forcibly given new names—Kamiti is implying that there is no real difference between slavery in the sense of physical subjugation, and mental slavery which is the result of many years of indoctrination—a subtlety that Tajirika is too uncultured to understand. In accordance with what I have suggested in Chapter Three regarding the neocolonial theory of decolonization, the chains of mental slavery are stronger to break than those of physical subjugation. Indeed, Tajirika’s aching to be white is so strong that he goes to New York to have himself transplanted with a right white arm and a white left leg. His wife, for her part, decides to remain black but settles for a more youthful face and firmer breasts. Although painted grotesquely, Tajirika’s process of physical transformation to become white is a powerful allegory of a real-world behavior generally observed in African women, of using cosmetics to whiten their skin. In a sense, the

postcolonial alienated individual, typified in Tajirika, can be considered mad because of his strange behavior. Indeed, there was a time when the term “alienation” and its derivatives (alien, alienism, and alienist) readily denoted mental health issues. An alien was a psychiatric patient. The word “alienist,” was formerly used for a psychiatrist and is still used in the U.S. to refer to a psychiatrist who determines the legal responsibility of a defendant.

In *Wizard of the Crow*, white skin is synonymous with respect, attraction, and power. And so is everything associated with the whiteness of the Europeans. Whether it is European languages, European medicine, or European names, people exhibit a somewhat pathological preference. As mentioned above, even the Ruler of Aburiria is not immune to “white-ache.” His also manifests first as the “malady of words” after the Global Bank denied him a loan to finance his project of Marching to Heaven. He felt so humiliated that he became unable to utter words other than the usual *if*, and the swelling of his body. The words the Wizard of the Crow forces out of the Ruler are similar to Tajirika’s. Once cured, the Ruler summons his ministers to his chamber and exposes to them how frustrated he is with the Global Bank’s refusal: ““Yes, if my skin was white, would the directors of the Global Bank have insulted me as they have in this letter?’ he asked the ministers, who roared back a resounding NOOO!” (495). This not only proves that white skin commands more respect than black skin, but it also shows how deeply rooted and pervasive the evil of “white-ache” is. For if an all-powerful dictator can feel that his skin is a malediction, how much more desperate must the common individual be to become white? Still, the dictator’s psychological problems are far deeper than an inferiority complex. Like other Africans, the typical African dictator is also an alienated individual, but he is so in his own way.

Chapter Fifteen

The Disordered Minds of Postcolonial Dictators

Through the actions of their dictators, Farah's *Sweet and Sour Milk* and Ngugi's *Wizard of the Crow* raise interesting questions about the mental sanity of political leaders. The portrayals of these dictators reflect many real-life situations in which terms such as "crazy" and "mad" have been associated with the personality of political leaders whose behavior presents an abnormal or deranged character. For example, the way Ngugi depicts the Ruler of Aburiria in *Wizard of the Crow* readily suggests that the dictator has some mental imbalances. In Farah's *Variations* trilogy, on the other hand, the General does not appear as deranged as his Aburirian counterpart but the question of his mental sanity is nevertheless the subject of a divisive debate among the members of the clandestine group working to undermine the General's regime. But why do we call murderous and eccentric dictators mad? In what measure can the dictators in our novels be called mad? To answer this question, a brief theoretical foundation seems in order.

Political leaders and personality disorders: a theoretical foundation

In “Social Madness,” a chapter in the book *Genocide and the Modern Age: Etiology and Case Studies of Mass Death*, Ronald Aronson offers an interesting outlook on what people mean when they call an act “mad.” Aronson’s first proposition situates the madness of an act in an abnormality of human behavior. It may simply “mean that it is severely and systematically abnormal” (127). As regards the issue of madness, Aronson rightly observes that “in addition to considering a ‘mad’ act as extremely abnormal, we imply that its source is in a mind that is somehow deranged. A mad action, we may suggest, proceeds from a disordered psyche. Indeed, if we call an act ‘insane’ we complete this shift and our emphasis falls more heavily on the mental state of the actor” (127-28). Aronson’s second premise turns towards the individual identified as deranged or mad, implying three possible areas of derangement: “systematic derangement of perception, systematic derangement of intention, or systematic derangement of affect” (128). I will use the second area later in my discussion of the Ruler’s psychology in *Wizard of the Crow* to demonstrate that he is mad, basing my judgment on the premise that his intention to build a modern Tower of Babel is deranged.¹⁰⁵

Aronson’s first hypothesis, establishing a correlation between mad behavior and a deranged mind, has been, sometimes rightly but often wrongly, applied to the actions of historical dictators with whom history has blessed us. Since many dictators exhibit specific patterns of behavior that fall into the domain of abnormality, people generally assume that something must be wrong with their minds. Whereas most would agree with this observation and thus consider such individuals mad, a more informed critic like Gerrold Post advises caution in the psychological assessment of dictators. In *The Psychological Assessment of*

¹⁰⁵ Derangement of perception can be described as seeing things that are not there or the inverse. Derangement of intention is, for example, when someone intends to do things that are not possible. Finally, we can talk of derangement of affect when someone shows emotional responses that “are seriously and systematically inappropriate” (Aronson 128).

Political Leaders: With Profiles of Saddam Hussein and Bill Clinton, to which I shall return later, Post warns about the “not only inaccurate but also dangerous” pejorative diagnosis of madness (335). The kind of misjudgment exposed here generally proceeds from a combination of factors. The first one lies in the lack of separation between an act of madness and its perpetrator. The theory of reintegrative shaming has amply demonstrated the dangers of emphasizing the evil character of a person instead of focusing on the crime committed. In reintegrative shaming, John Braithwaite writes, “the offender is treated as a good person who has done a bad deed” (1). Unfortunately, failing to do so leads many to characterize dictators as mad when they may not be. The second reason that leads many to misjudge dictators’ psychological fitness has to do with the failure to properly situate the dictators on a continuum of madness that “stretches from the impossible extreme of seeing and acknowledging reality completely to the other impossible extreme of breaking with it totally” (Aronson 130). While there is a consensus that dictators do not tend to lean towards the former extreme, it is also a common misconception to call them mad, which would place them farther down the latter extreme than they should be.

As Aronson suggests, the term madness should be considered in its milder sense, implying not insanity as an extreme but a derangement which “is always selective and limited, leaving intact most of the vast web of one’s other ties to reality as well as abilities to function within it” (130). In *Tyrannical Minds: Psychological Profiling, Narcissism, and Dictatorship*, Dean Haycock argues that psychological profiling concerning the diagnosis of mental disorders is more complicated than and “very different from assessing readily apparent personality traits and impressions” (Chapter 2). When it comes to the psychological assessment of Adolf Hitler, Haycock notes there is a controversy among historians and psychologists over Hitler’s mental sanity: “[S]ome dismiss him as a ‘madman.’ Others offer specific, limited diagnoses. More recent attempts to explain Hitler’s state of mind suggest he

had multiple psychopathological features” (Chapter 1). The controversy over the mental soundness of dictators is also a matter of responsibility, even more delicate not only because they exercise power over entire nations but also because their actions can affect even world history.

Is Farah’s General a fool?

In *Sweet and Sour Milk*, Farah shows how delicate it can be to pose a proper diagnosis regarding the mental state of dictators, especially if one wants to counter their actions. Instead of being constructive, the controversy surrounding the psychology of the dictator in Farah’s book turns out to be rather devastating and divisive for the group of intellectuals working underground to overthrow the General. Some belittle the General’s mental capacities within the group and deny him any logic. Medina, for one,

held the belief that the General was the Master of Grand Irrelevances and Irreverences (in capitals) and that no intellectual in his senses should take him seriously. She believed, and so did those who had joined her group, that whatever publishable research we gathered on the workings of his régime wouldn’t help anybody have a clearer picture. *A priori*, Medina considered the General a Grand Fool, and that science hadn’t the capacity to analyse the workings of the minds of idiots. (152-53)

That the General lacks respect for the people and institutions of his country has been demonstrated in many ways already. On this point, Medina is primarily suitable to say he is the Master of Grand Irreverences. However, the remaining part of Medina’s diagnosis is reasonably debatable in many respects. First, there is reason to suspect that her problem is more profound than honest underestimation. It looks more like a willful understatement coming from her desire to deny the general power and agency.

Second, her diagnosis seems to follow what Haycock views as a simplistic ‘all-or-none’ “approach to describing the mental state of a human being” (Chapter 3). It would even be a dangerous mistake to consider him as mad. For, as Gerold Post argues in the case of Saddam Hussein, consigning the dictator “to the realm of madness can mislead decision makers into believing he is unpredictable when in fact he is not” (335). Post also suggests that although Saddam Hussein was labeled the “madman of the Middle East” by some and megalomaniac by others, there is no evidence that he suffered from a psychotic disorder. On the contrary, Post argues that Saddam’s psychological profile revealed that he was psychologically in touch with reality but was nevertheless often out of touch with reality politically (342). Returning to our book, the third inconsistency in Medina’s argument is that she believes that no one should take the General seriously and that no serious action should be taken against him. Since she considers the General a grand fool, she is convinced he will not last long in power. Here again, Medina is partly right when she insinuates that no one takes fools seriously—in Chapter Twenty, I will discuss how some members of the clandestine group take advantage of this fact to carry out assassination attempts against the General. However, for the above reasons, I believe Medina is wrong to take the General for a fool. And her friends, of course, have their objections, too.

Other members of the group, including Soyaan, reject Medina’s point of view on the General’s mental state and hold the belief that “there is a pattern studyable, that there is a logic behind almost all that the General has done, that the minds of fools and idiots have already been studied anyway” (*Sweet* 153). Hence, for them, the General is neither a fool nor the Master of Grand Irrelevances and Irreverences. Ibrahim maintains that if dictators such as their General, Idi Amin, and Bokassa act with so much impunity for so long, this is precisely because they are not taken seriously. This directly responds to Medina’s claim that no one should take the General seriously because he is a fool. Nevertheless, Medina’s reflection

holds some truth because, as I shall discuss in the next chapter, no one ever takes idiots and madmen seriously. Where she is wrong, however, is when she considers the General an idiot when he clearly is not.

After listening to both sides of the argument, Loyaan also disagrees with Medina's diagnosis, reasoning that someone who can kill his adversaries and devise a plan to change their history is certainly not a fool. For Loyaan, "Medina is wrong. The man kills. The man has designs on our lives. The man can eliminate a person and then take possession of his soul and have him discredited in the eyes of his friends and those with whom he worked, those he protested with" (154). As Loyaan learns from Ibrahim, the controversy over the General's psychological assessment had a decisive impact on the cohesion and longevity of the underground group. This disagreement alone was enough to split the group "down the middle. Five of us against five of them," Ibrahim elaborates (153). Divided as they are on the General's mental fitness, they cannot fully coordinate their plans and decide on which front to attack the General. Unfortunately, as said in the previous chapter, regimes like the General's thrive on division. And the brevity of the group's existence ensures the General's regime's longevity. The underground movement's internal disagreement over the General's intellectual capacities has the merit of showing that there is generally no consensual agreement on the psychological assessment of political leaders—in particular, dictators.¹⁰⁶ For my part, I do not think that the term *fool* is the most adequate to describe the General. But that does not mean that he is not *mad* or *deranged* either. But when do people like dictators stop being normal, and at what point do they become mad or deranged?

As suggested by Aronson, no one can see and acknowledge reality completely (130). This is because we are endowed with psychological defense mechanisms that enable us to

¹⁰⁶ See Haycock's *Tyrannical Minds: Psychological Profiling, Narcissism, and Dictatorship*, especially how amateur and professional profilers contradict one another in the psychological assessment of Donald Trump (Chapter Ten, n. pag.).

cope with stressful situations. For Post, the types of defense mechanisms and their pattern of occurrence can ultimately determine and predict an individual's character (72). That is why, as Post further suggests, identifying a "characteristic pattern of ego defenses is especially helpful in predicting behavior under stress, for it is under stress that these coping mechanisms not only come into play but can become exaggerated" (79). While it appears from the hierarchy of defenses that some of them are inherently pathological, the more mature and adaptive ones can also give way to mental disorders when used compulsively and excessively. The Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-5), for instance, argues that personality traits "are enduring patterns of perceiving, relating to, and thinking about the environment and oneself that are exhibited in a wide range of social and personal contexts. Only when personality traits are inflexible and maladaptive and cause significant functional impairment or subjective distress do they constitute personality disorders" (647). Relying on the preceding consideration, I consider madness to represent (on a spectrum of mental disorders) behavior patterns that exhibit systematic derangement in the three areas proposed by Aronson or patterns of thinking which deny or distort reality. It is important to keep this definition in mind because even though Ngugi's Ruler is not depicted wearing tattered rags or wandering the streets of Aburiria naked, his abnormal behavior amply justifies the use of the notion of madness. Ngugi's *Wizard of the Crow* is remarkable for its out-of-the-ordinary characters, but the Ruler remains a most eccentric figure that deserves our full attention.

The Ruler's folie des grandeurs in *Wizard of the Crow*

Without using the technical terminology of psychology, Ngugi's satirical characterization of the Ruler in *Wizard of the Crow* poignantly captures the grandiose narcissistic personality of many African dictators. In psychology, narcissistic personality disorder refers to "a pervasive

pattern of grandiosity, a need for admiration, and a lack of empathy present in a variety of context” (APA 669). According to the American Psychological Association, an individual with this disorder has a set of characteristic attitudes, including a sense of grandiose self-importance, fantasies of unlimited power and intelligence, a belief in his special and unique capacities, and a need for excessive admiration (APA 669-70).¹⁰⁷ These characteristics also seem to match the behavior pattern of Ngugi’s dictator in *Wizard of the Crow*. But Ngugi’s critique of dictatorship does not rely on sophisticated technical descriptions. He uses satire and Biblical parody to expose the incongruousness of tyranny.

First, multiple instances show that the Ruler is preoccupied with fantasies of unlimited power and intelligence. He considers himself the best at everything in his country. He is the number one husband, who has a “*droit de cuissage*” to every bride-to-be (6). He is also the number one educator and teacher, who seizes on every opportunity to devise a philosophy, and every Aburirian “knew that the Ruler was the supreme educator. Teacher number one. So all institutions of learning, from primary schools to university colleges, would be required to teach only those ideas that came from the supreme educator. They would be required to offer the Rulers mathematics, the Rulers science (biology, physics, and chemistry), the Ruler’s philosophy, and the Rulers history” (565). As these examples show, the Ruler believes he is the most intelligent person in his country.

The Ruler’s fantasies of grandiosity are supported by his belief that he is special and unique. He assigns extraordinary abilities and powers to himself and becomes angry whenever he believes someone belittles his abilities. After the fiasco of his birthday

¹⁰⁷ In the DSM-5, the American Psychological Association suggests that a person with narcissistic personality disorder “is someone who a) has a grandiose sense of self-importance; b) is preoccupied with fantasies of unlimited success, power, brilliance, beauty, or ideal love; c) believes that he or she is “special” and unique; d) requires excessive admiration; e) has a sense of entitlement; f) is interpersonally exploitative; g) lacks empathy; h) is often envious of others or believes that others are envious of him or her; i) shows arrogant, haughty behaviors or attitudes” (APA 669-70).

celebration, which the “Movement for the Voice of the People” has sabotaged and their fake snakes, the Ruler’s head of M5 tries to soften the dictator by explaining that the Intelligence community knew that the movement existed. But they have kept the information to themselves because they did not want to give the movement unnecessary publicity before they know everything about it. The head of M5 then inadvertently concludes his explanation with a proverb that “one does not rush to hit a snake before it has fully come out of its hole” (24).

But instead of calming the dictator’s nerves, the proverb only makes him angrier:

How dare anybody say that I cannot strike a snake before it has fully revealed itself? Who says that I don’t have the power to strike at that which is most hidden from view? Sikiokuu’s attempt to diffuse the Ruler’s wrath by explaining that his statement was only a proverb made matters even worse. Was Sikiokuu suggesting that there were proverbs that superseded the Ruler’s mighty sayings? The Ruler had power over all proverbs, all riddles in Aburiria, and no proverb could bar him from hitting the hidden, even in the most inaccessible of holes. (24)

After reading this passage, anyone with a fair knowledge of postcolonial African dictators will recognize in Ngugi’s fictional dictator the likes of Zaire’s Mobutu and Uganda’s Idi Amin. And when it comes to assigning themselves extraordinary abilities, the Ruler of Aburiria has nothing to envy of his real-world mentors.

For example, following his politics of authenticity in the 1970s, Mobutu changed his name in the seventies from Joseph Désiré Mobutu to *Mobutu Sese Seko Kuku wa za Banga*, which stands for “the all-powerful warrior who, because of his endurance and inflexible will to win, shall go from conquest to conquest, leaving fire in his wake” (Capps 103).¹⁰⁸ However extraordinary this may seem, no title comes closer to the Aburirian Ruler’s self-proclaimed

¹⁰⁸ Authenticity was a political and cultural ideology initiated by Zaire’s Mobutu in his desire to celebrate African values.

powers than Idi Amin's. For his part, Amin assumed the unique title of "His Excellency President for Life, Field Marshal Al Hadji Doctor Idi Amin, VC, DSO, MC, CBE, Lord of all the Beasts of the Earth and Fishes of the Sea, and Conqueror of the British Empire in Africa in General and Uganda in Particular" (qtd. in Appiah and Gates 97). Ngugi's portrayal of an African dictator assuming long titles and extraordinary powers merely reflects earlier historical role models.

The third symptom that the Ruler exhibits is an excessive craving for admiration and love, a subject that needs careful consideration here. For the sake of this demonstration, let us suppose that in a democracy where the president satisfies the needs of his people, the expectation that people admire and love him would not be contradictory. People naturally love people who care for them, not those who oppress them. In the case of a dictatorship, the dynamics are different. The dictator in Aburiria has complete disregard for the people's needs. Those who protest to demand better living conditions are repressed cruelly. Therefore, it cannot be suggested that people love him. Yet, the Ruler's need for love and admiration is so pathological that he will not acknowledge the contradiction between the pain he inflicts on the people and the love he expects from them. And despite all evidence to the contrary, he maintains his belief that the people love him.¹⁰⁹

To satisfy his craving for love and support his delusional belief in being loved, the Ruler of Aburiria organizes a grandiose celebration of his birthday each year. From how the narrator describes the event, it is possible to suggest that the Ruler's birthday celebration occurs more than once a year:

The birthday celebrations would always start at the seventh hour of the seventh day of the seventh month, seven being the Ruler's sacred number, and precisely because in Aburiria the Ruler controlled how the months followed each other—

¹⁰⁹ This behavior corresponds to the definition of a delusion, described as a fixed, hard held belief against contradictory reality (Butler and Braff 633).

January for instance trading places with July—he therefore had the power to declare any month in the year the seventh month, and any day within that seventh month the seventh day and therefore the Ruler’s Birthday. The same applied to time, and any hour, depending on the wishes of the Ruler, could be the seventh hour. (12)

Ngugi’s allusion to the Biblical number seven is glaring in this quotation. His allusion serves an ironic purpose in this quotation and already gives us a glimpse into the Ruler’s God complex, which I discuss in the upcoming subchapter. Seven is a sacred number in the Bible. It represents God’s number and symbolizes completeness and perfection. It is not surprising, therefore, to see the Ruler who considers himself God on earth appropriate this number and its sacredness to give credence to his love-seeking and delusion-reinforcing celebration held on the seventh day of the seventh month. He wants the celebration to be perfect. But contrary to God’s seven-day creation, the Ruler’s birthday party is flawed at its inception because it is motivated by greed and selfishness.

Of course, Ngugi’s Biblical allusions in this quotation can also be linked to his rejection and criticism of Christianity and imperialism. But here, my focus is on how he uses the scriptures to expose reveal the vanity and absurdity of African dictators. Furthermore, Ngugi’s portrayal of the dictator not only reminds his readers of some Roman emperors, such as Julius Caesar and Augustus Caesar, who renamed months after themselves. He also accurately allegorizes some famous flamboyant dictatorships of the sixties and seventies, of which Zaire’s Mobutu is a prime example. During these giant celebrations, chants and dances were performed to honor the dictator who would see his ego boosted and his delusions of grandeur entertained. Here is not the place to discuss this topic commonly referred to as the cult of personality. But I shall return to it later.

The Ruler of Aburiria’s love-craving is accompanied by a fourth symptom: a sense of entitlement that knows no limits. As the “Eternal Ruler of the Free Republic of Aburiria,” he

has unlimited access to his country's media. He is always on television, with "his every moment—eating, shitting, sneezing, or blowing his nose—captured on camera. Even his yawns were news because, whether triggered by boredom, fatigue, hunger, or thirst, they were often followed by some national drama" (3-4). He, therefore, expects the same treatment whenever he goes to a foreign country. The first theory about the Ruler's illness posits that his ailment is "born of anger that once welled up inside him; and he was so conscious of the danger it posed to his well-being that he tried all he could to rid himself of it by belching after every meal, sometimes counting from one to ten, and other times chanting *ka ke ki ko ku* aloud" (3). The theory goes on to suggest that his anger might have started because he was denied the attention he demanded when he traveled to the United States: he "failed to land an interview with Global Network News on its famous program Meet the Global Mighty [...]. It is said that when he was told that he could not be granted even a minute on the air, he could hardly believe his ears or even understand what they were talking about, knowing that in his country he was always on TV" (3). His reaction to this rejection would have probably been different had he been denied access in his own country, where media outlets would be closed while their owners and employees would be jailed.

Since the Ruler cannot direct his anger at the Western media, he has to brood over it and becomes ill. Ngugi uses the Ruler's "malady of words" and his body expansion to show that the Ruler cannot manage anger unless acted out violently. What happens to him after the Global Bank refuses to fund his megalomaniac project fairly illustrates this point. After receiving the bad news from the Global Bank, the Ruler stands to make a speech but is so angry that no word comes out of his mouth. Then, suddenly, "his cheeks and stomach began to expand. No, not just the cheeks and the tummy but the whole body (486). As this incident suggests, the theory about anger causing the Ruler to become sick is not so absurd. Regarding the Ruler's inability to speak, I have already discussed how this is caused more by the fact

that it is white men who have refused to fund him, a black man. His body expansion, as Journo rightly suggest, is symbolic of the “decaying nature” of the Ruler’s power (2).

The fifth and last symptom of the Ruler derangement concerns how he takes advantage of others to achieve his goals. Not only does he exploit his relationship with others, but he also instrumentalizes enmity and competition between his ministers. The dictator has a well-established reputation for “making minister plot against minister, region rise against region, and community fight against community” (731). Legend has it that the Ruler would instigate a feud between competing factions, only to play the mediator and finally have all parties hail him “as a Solomonic prince of peace.” And if his tactic proves efficient, it is mainly because his ministers, even though they know that the Ruler is willingly making them fight one another, engage in the vilest bootlicking competition “to sit on the right side of the father.” The parody of biblical Scriptures, which portrays the dictator as God himself, remains a recurrent motif in Ngugi’s criticism of colonial and postcolonial exploitation.

The Ruler’s God complex

In *Wizard of the Crow*, Ngugi’s references to the Scriptures are even more justified as a deconstruction of the Ruler’s God complex. As for the Ruler of Aburiria, his God complex manifests primarily in how his ministers address him. His ministers entertain his feeling of omnipotence by addressing him as their lord and savior and directly comparing him to God. Sometimes, they even go so far as to suggest that he is above God, as evidenced in the following interaction:

The Ruler: ‘Mr. Sikiokuu,’ he called out, ‘you know, don’t you, that a good shepherd knows a hyena when he sees one, even if it is in sheep’s clothing?’

‘Yes, Your Mighty Excellency,’ Sikiokuu answered quickly, even as he assumed that the Ruler was about to expose Kaniuru. ‘May the Ruler be praised for his great inborn wisdom,’ added Sikiokuu.

‘It comes directly from God,’ Kaniuru opined.

‘But it also springs from his own efforts,’ Sikiokuu said, resenting Kaniuru’s attempt to join his song of praise. ‘He has mastered all the book learning.’

‘He is the true dispenser of knowledge,’ said Kaniuru, ‘the teacher of teachers, the number one teacher. The Ruler is the source of all the knowledge in the world.’

‘That’s enough,’ the Ruler said, pretending to be angry with their excess. ‘It is not good to praise a person in his presence; it might embarrass him.’

‘I, too, share that sentiment, Your Mighty Excellency,’ said Sikiokuu. ‘Oh, you should hear me when I am not in your presence, for that’s when I feel most free to sing your gifts.’

‘I, too, praise you all the time, wherever I am,’ Machokali said, not to be outdone.

‘Deep in my heart,’ Kaniuru said, ‘I know no calling higher than that of singing your praises at all times because of what you have done and continue to do for us. One day I overheard my own heart saying, *If God and the Ruler were standing together side by side and their hats were blown off their heads at the same time, I would pick up the one that belongs to the Ruler first, and without realizing it I had said loudly: Alleluia, may my Lord and Master be praised for ever and ever, Amen.*’

‘I am going to ban this business of people putting me on a pedestal with God,’ said the Ruler, with disingenuous firmness.

‘You would turn every person into a lawbreaker, because that is one law that people cannot possibly obey’ said Sikiokuu. (541, original italics)

This exchange between the Ruler and his servants is noteworthy because it pretty much sums up what has been discussed above. Here, we can only speculate why the Ruler hates being compared to God. One theory I propose here is that God is the only thing that reminds him of the limits of his earthly omnipotence. For him, being compared to God is like being told that there is someone as great as, if not greater than himself. And since he cannot kill God, his competitor, he rages whenever such a comparison occurs. In a sense, Ngugi's satiric depiction of the Ruler conveys the image of a Ruler who sees himself as God because, through his powerful words, he decides who lives and who dies:

No sooner was he fully in charge after the mysterious death of the First Ruler than he asked for the list of all condemned prisoners awaiting clemency and signed the warrant for their immediate execution. When he saw that his signature on paper or a word from his mouth could bring about the immediate cessation of a life, he there and then truly believed in his omnipotence. He was now sovereign. (233)

Here, we can see Ngugi's caricature of the Ruler as God in analogy to God's word on *creation* day. God's mighty "word" that brought everything into existence contrasts with the Ruler's earthly omnipotence that relies on his power of *destruction*. He is powerful, not because his word creates life, but because a "word from his mouth" can destroy thousands of lives simultaneously. While this quote and the previous exchange show that the Ruler is an irrational dictator obsessed with his own omnipotence, Ngugi also supplies his readers with other private conversations between the Ruler and his ministers, which suggest there can be a rational explanation for the Ruler's reaction to being compared to God that we can find in the scholarship on personality cults.

In his model of personality cult, Xavier Marquez uses the concept of flattery inflation to explain how, in their bid to secure advantages, collaborators of authoritarian leaders engage in excessive flattery. The problem, however, is that when flattery becomes excessive, it "disrupts the leader's ability to distinguish between genuinely loyal followers and pure opportunists,

and leaders themselves are often aware of this” (8). This explains, for example, why the Ruler in *Wizard of the Crow* not only commands his servants to stop comparing him to God as portrayed in the scene above but also intervenes to end their inflationary bid when it becomes too excessive.¹¹⁰ This also shows that the Ruler of Aburiria knows that his ministers and collaborators are opportunists who flatter him only to have higher status. The question now is: knowing fully how insincere their humility is, why does he let them humiliate themselves?

In “Cults of Personality, Preference Falsification, and the Dictator’s Dilemma,” Crabtree et al. propose a model of personality cult that explains some private aspects of personality cults. As the researchers suggest, cults of personality can seem irrational: “[T]he most striking and seemingly irrational aspect of cults of personality is the use of excessive flattery and adulation involving grandiose claims about the infallibility, omniscience, omnipresence, omnipotence, and even divinity of the leader” (3-4). These words accurately describe most of the interaction between the Ruler and his collaborators in *Wizard of the Crow*. But I would like to draw attention to the researchers’ use of the word “seemingly” here, which suggests that the irrational behavior we observe from afar may not be that irrational when analyzed from within the private interactions between a dictator and his collaborators.

In the privacy of a personality cult

The personality cult model proposed by Crabtree et al. is useful for understanding the phenomenon of personality cult in *Wizard of the Crow* because we, as readers, are allowed into the privacy of the dictator’s interactions with his collaborators. Ngugi’s internal

¹¹⁰ In the following quote, for example, the Ruler has to intervene to stop his servants’ bid to show gratitude and loyalty that has been going on for seven days. As the narrator comments:

These people may have been tired after seven days and nights of writing the pledge over and over again, but now their rivalry gave them a new lease of energy as they, now on their feet, tried to outdo one another in barking out their hatred of the Ruler’s enemies. They would have gone on, out of the fear of losing the right of the last word to the others, but the Ruler himself shouted at them, Down with all of you, in response to which they now suddenly shut up and retreated to their seats. (561)

focalization not only shows why some characters praise the Ruler even though they secretly hate him, but it also shows there is more to personality cults than a dictator's mere satisfaction with the adoration he receives from his servants. To understand how this observation translates into Ngugi's portrayal, let us look at the case of Kaniuru, the highest bidder in the flattery inflation we witnessed above. At the time of the interaction between the Ruler and his ministers analyzed above, Kaniuru is the Ruler's Minister of Defense. Before that, he has been the chairman of the Ruler's project of Marching to Heaven. During that term, Kaniuru collected money from entrepreneurs who were eager to secure contracts for the project. Not only did he not tell the Ruler about the money, but he even went further and forged many signatures, including the Ruler's, to secure the bribe money in private accounts. One day, Tajirika, who had been chairman of Marching to Heaven before Kaniuru, discovers the swindle and immediately reports to the Ruler:

'What a crook!'

'Yes, a first-rate crook,' quickly agreed Tajirika.

'And what is such a crook doing as my Minister of Defense?'

'Very dangerous, Your Excellency,' Tajirika agreed.

The Ruler sent for Kaniuru. (716, original italics)

Once before the Ruler, Kaniuru decides to save his skin by sacrificing his wife's. He blames everything on his wife, telling the Ruler how he has been tricked by her the same way Samson fell for Delilah. When the Ruler asks why he married her knowing this, Kaniuru is forced to admit that his wife blackmailed him into marrying her lest she expose everything and blames it on him, as shown in the conversation below:

'And why did you marry her knowing all this about her?' asked Tajirika, fearing that the Ruler was being taken in.

'Do you want to know the truth?'" asked Kaniuru rhetorically. "She threatened to expose the whole thing and blame it on me. Pure *whitemail*.'

'You mean, she is a bigger crook than you?' asked the Ruler, smiling a little.

(716, original italics)

As seen from this passage, not only does Kaniuru's strategy appear to work, but the Ruler also seems to be amused that an even bigger crook has duped a crook like Kaniuru. But it is what the Ruler says next that is even more surprising:

Kaniuru, you are in the wrong ministry. The Defense Ministry needs somebody trustworthy, not a crook, at least not a crook that would lead his commander in chief astray. It needs somebody I can trust completely, somebody who can make enemy forces surrender with scare tactics but who is scared enough not to try anything against his Lord and Master, somebody who can lie for me but not to me, somebody who has shown that he would rather dig his own grave in the prairie than cross me, somebody like Tajirika, and in the era of the Baby D, I need such a man at the head of my armed forces. Tajirika, you are my new Defense Minister. (717)

The Ruler's response to Kaniuru's betrayal is logical. The first thing he does is to remove the crooked minister from his position. The Ruler understands that Kaniuru, who has no scruples faking this signature to embezzle money collected from the Marching to Heaven project, would not hesitate to stage a coup using the army if given the opportunity. Therefore, for the Ruler, Kaniuru is in the wrong ministry, not because he is a crook, but because he is not loyal to his master. This is consistent with what Charles Crabtree and his colleagues suggest in their model: "Active participation in the cult may signal either loyalty or unscrupulousness, which are useful to the dictator but not in the same manner" because "different roles within the dictator's regime may be optimally served by subordinates possessing different characteristics" (416). The theory here is that dictators generally allow instances of flattery inflation to better judge the character of their collaborators. The dictator can, then, compare a collaborator's degree of self-abasement before him to other actions and decide who is

trustworthy and who is unscrupulous. This knowledge will allow the dictator to give each collaborator the position that best fits their personality. As the fictional example above suggests, the dictator reasons that his defense ministry needs somebody loyal like Tajirika, who would rather die than betray his master.

Now that the Ruler knows that Kaniuru is untrustworthy, he gives the ministry of defense to Tajirika, who appears more loyal. But what will happen to Kaniuru now? Will the Ruler fire him? Would he imprison Kaniuru or, worse, kill him? As surprising as it may seem, the Ruler does neither. After addressing the reasons why Tajirika is best suited as his defense minister, the Ruler now turns to Kaniuru and says:

I want fifty percent of all the money you stole from Marching to Heaven, and the interest, to go to the Ruler's Smog Disaster Fund. But I will give you another chance. Your kind of cunning is best for youth and money matters. You are my new Minister of Finance and Youth. As for your wife, Jane Kanyori, I want her transferred immediately from the National Bank of Commerce and Industry and placed in a strategic position in the Central Bank. I want her as the new comptroller of the Central Bank. (717)

Here, it seems that Kaniuru and his wife, Kanyori, are rewarded for their crookedness instead of being punished. The Ruler places them in positions where they are useful but not dangerous. Now we understand that the Ruler allows his collaborators to engage in the kind of inflationary bid we have witnessed above for specific reasons. He knows that their show of love and admiration is insincere. However, he is pleased with it because he knows that servants who engage in this self-abasement will be unscrupulous enough to perform other tasks, such as repressing mass protests or torturing dissidents. The ease with which Kaniuru usually prostrates himself, coupled with his capacity to lie cold-bloodedly, are hints that tell the Ruler that he is crooked enough to manage money matters but too dangerous for the

Ministry of Defense. Tajirika, on the other hand, is a true believer in the Ruler and crooked enough to repress the Ruler's enemies but too afraid to turn his back on his master.¹¹¹

In sum, through these scenes of flattery inflation and flattery management, Ngugi shows, as research suggests, some aspects of personality cults that look irrational to public observers but are pretty grounded in rationality when viewed in private. The way the Ruler manages his ministers according to their loyalty and crookedness shows that he is a pragmatist realist when it comes to practical personnel questions that could cost him his throne. But it should also be recalled that nobody is ever entirely in or out of touch with reality. Being rational in some circumstances does not mean that the Ruler's mind is not disordered in other ways.¹¹² The subject of narcissistic personality disorder is delicate, especially when exhibited by dictators, in which case, it is not only severe but also merges with other mental disorders. Through the validation of the five symptoms discussed above, it can be confidently assumed that the assessment of the dictator in *Wizard of the Crow* is consistent with the diagnosis of a narcissistic personality disorder. To borrow the formulation from Haycock's previously cited book, the Ruler can be seen as "a remarkable example of psychopathology because he has such a complex array of negative psychological attributes as we have seen" (Chapter 1).¹¹³ These include paranoia, lack of empathy, severe narcissism, God complex, and delusional grandeur.

¹¹¹ Tajirika truly loves the Ruler. At the beginning of the novel, it was Tajirika's dream to shake hands with the Ruler. When this happens at the Ruler's birthday party, he feels so happy that he decides to never again touch anything with his hand. He puts a white glove on it and never takes it off.

¹¹² For example, being rational is in no way inconsistent with narcissism and can even be seen as a trait that most narcissists possess. According to the Ruler's own philosophy in *Wizard of the Crow*, "crooks are often more realistic in their assessment of a situation than moral idealists" (717).

¹¹³ Haycock writes the following about Hitler: "Hitler's messiah complex fueled his drive to power. Understanding it helps us understand the man a bit more. Still, Hitler is a remarkable example of psychopathology because he has such a complex array of negative psychological attributes as we have seen: paranoia, lack of empathy, posttraumatic stress, psychotic thinking, grandiose delusions, malignant narcissism, hypochondria, and anxiety, in addition to his messiah complex" (Chapter Three, n. pag.).

Although delusions are not a symptom of narcissistic personality disorder, it has been shown in the case of narcissistic dictators that some of their thinking patterns can be delusional. For example, as said earlier, when a dictator asks to be loved by the people he starves and kills, this is a contradiction. Most of the time, such dictators have to satisfy their ego by relying on mere delusions of popular support, as William Rempel argues in the case of Ferdinand Marcos of the Philippines (195). In *Wizard of the Crow*, the Ruler also entertains comparable delusions, for even after “the people abandoned him in the park for fear of snakes, he had tried to hatch a scheme that would prove how much they still loved him, how much they desired nothing more than to follow in his footsteps” (162). The Aburirian dictator’s grandest delusion is, however, to build a Modern House of Babel, to “raise a building to the very gates of Heaven so that the Ruler could call on God daily to say good morning or good evening or simply how was your day today, God? The Ruler would be the daily recipient of God’s advice, resulting in a rapid growth of Aburiria to heights never before dreamt by humans” (16). The project, named Marching to Heaven, becomes the battleground of political confrontation in the novel. For Simon Gikandi, “the ruler had embarked on the construction of a monstrous project, a building intended to function as the eighth wonder of the world. Rapidly approaching the terminus of his life, but obsessed with dreams of immortality, the leader seeks to imprint his vision in concrete and steel” (“Postcolonial Wizard” 158). As Gikandi’s words indicate, Marching to Heaven is of vital importance to the Ruler, his ultimate attempt to live after his death. But his is a mere delusion of immortality. *Wizard of the Crow*, thus, can be summed up in one sentence: a political movement’s attempt to expose the grotesque delusions of a dictator whom a group of sycophants supports. But if we were to describe *Wizard of the Crow* in one word, it would undoubtedly be “madness.” Madness, not because the dictator is mad in the literal sense of the term, as someone wandering the streets

half naked, but because distortions and delusions irrecoverably dominate his overall thinking pattern.

The problem with distortions and delusions in politics, as Aronson suggests, is not only that sometimes they can be so severe as to lose touch with reality but also that most dictators would try to “impose a more or less distorted vision of reality on all other social groups and classes” (135). Then, personal and private delusions of the dictator subsequently become a public phenomenon as more and more people are enrolled in his delusions. According to Aronson, when a ruler believes in things that do not exist or that are not possible to accomplish and then propagates his distortions and delusions, “then we may speak of madness as surely as when an individual does the same. For systematic misperception is involved” (134). This systematic recourse to propaganda and indoctrination to make people believe in that which does not exist or that which is not possible is what I consider to be a dictator’s attempt to share his madness with the people—which is also a pervasive phenomenon in African politics as represented our novels.

PART FIVE

SHARING MADNESS THROUGH PROPAGANDA AND INDOCTRINATION

Mass propaganda discovered that its audience was ready at all times to believe the worst, no matter how absurd, and did not particularly object to being deceived because it held every statement to be a lie anyhow.

Hannah Arendt—*The Origins of Totalitarianism*

Introduction

In this part, I will explore how “mad” dictators and their governments attempt to propagate their delusions and false ideologies in our novels. My assumption in this chapter proceeds from a simple analogy using illnesses and transmissibility. First, let us consider a scenario in which an individual infected with a contagious disease, like the flu, attends a well-attended meeting. During the meeting, he talks to many people, shaking hands here and giving hugs there. By doing so, he contaminates dozens of people. In the second scenario, the individual in question is having a delusion. He also goes to a meeting and talks to people about his false beliefs. Let us also suppose that by the end of the gathering, he makes a dozen attendees believe in his delusion. Would it be reasonable to say that this delusional individual “infected” the people he talked to with his delusions in the same way we would say that the individual with the flu infected his interlocutors? Is it possible for someone to share his madness? And how? These are the questions I wish to explore in Farah’s *Variations* trilogy and Ngugi’s *Wizard of the Crow* with the working hypothesis that the authors do not paint propaganda and indoctrination as mere attempts to share false information but also as means that some dictators often use to impose their distorted and delusional vision—their “madness” if we may say so—on the masses. This psychological phenomenon of a shared psychotic disorder can also be seen as an extension what is called a *folie à deux* in French. But to understand how dictators publicly share their madness with others, we must first explore the basics of propaganda and indoctrination.

Chapter Sixteen

Propaganda in *Matigari*

Propaganda: A Theoretical Foundation

In his seminal *Propaganda*, Edward Bernays writes that the “conscious and intelligent manipulation of the organized habits and opinions of the masses is an important element in democratic societies” (9). This affirmation, we might add, is also, if not even more, applicable to authoritarian regimes.¹¹⁴ From its religious beginnings to modern-day propaganda as we know it, the word has “propaganda” been variously defined across disciplines such as psychology, sociology, and education. But politics probably remains the field with which propaganda is most closely associated nowadays. The word has also, and quite from the beginning, acquired a negative connotation because the Roman Catholic church did not merely stop at propagating its faith but also devised aggressive means to counter Protestantism as well. For Garth Jowett and Victoria O’Donnell, propaganda nowadays mostly suggests something negative and dishonest and is frequently used with synonyms such

¹¹⁴ Many will acknowledge that defining propaganda is a difficult task. According to French political scientist Jacques Ellul, some modern American social scientists have even proposed to discard the term as it “cannot be defined with any degree of precision” (xi). This difficulty in defining propaganda owes not only to its pervasive nature but also to its evolution throughout time.

as “*lies, distortion, deceit, manipulation, mind control, psychological warfare, brainwashing, and palaver*” (2, original italics). In the same way, most attempts at defining propaganda will, at best, present it in a neutral if not a negative light.¹¹⁵ In *Channels of Propaganda*, Michael Sproule describes propaganda as “the work of large organizations or groups to win over the public for special interests through a massive orchestration of attractive conclusions packaged to conceal both their persuasive purpose and lack of sound supporting reasons” (8). Here, the term propaganda is markedly defined in pejorative words. For Sproule, four conditions usually work together to give propaganda its manipulative force in most of its uses. These are: first, *manipulation through covertness*; second, the overpowering of people with a *massive and self-serving outpouring of symbols*; third, *distortion through tricky language*; and fourth, *the pursuit of special interest as opposed to pursuing objectives of wider public good* (3). I will go into the details of these four conditions in the exploration of propagandistic discourses and devices in our fictional worlds.

However, I would like to pause for a moment to discuss the meaning of the term propaganda by comparing it to the notion of persuasion. This seems to be an important distinction because it adds something to the theoretical premises that I use to explore the characterization of dictatorial methods in our novels. In his description of the ways in which consent is obtained, Carroll Quigley suggested that governments can use persuasion to obtain consent and acquiescence at the intellectual level. While acknowledging the validity of this claim, I would like to add that it fits more how democratic regimes rule than dictatorial ones. According to Jowett and O'Donnell, both persuasion and propaganda can represent two forms of informative communication, similar in that “propaganda employs persuasive strategies, but

¹¹⁵ Also, each definition may focus on one aspect of propaganda, thus yielding many kinds. For example, Jowett and O'Donnell propose seven of these elements: “context, sender, intent, message, channel, audience, and response” (6). Focusing on the intent of the process from a communication studies stance, they define propaganda as “*the deliberate, systematic attempt to shape perceptions, manipulate cognitions, and direct behavior to achieve a response that furthers the desired intent of the propagandist*” (7, original italics).

it differs from persuasion in purpose” (2). From a communication standpoint, both persuasion and propaganda aim to influence and make the individual think or act in a certain way. Persuasion does this openly through an exchange of ideas so that if the persuaded person eventually decides to change their opinion on the subject at hand, it is done voluntarily.¹¹⁶ For example, in a democracy, this would be how politicians convince their electors by presenting facts clearly and letting them choose their candidates in an informed manner. Because information flows freely when persuasion is involved, the persuaded person is aware of the persuader’s intent. Besides, there is always some benefit to both parties. For Jowett and O’Donnell, persuasion is transactional, as all parties involved seek to fulfill their needs. In practice, however, things are more complicated and in countries that are considered democracies, politicians regularly resort to lying to get elected or to legitimate their authority.¹¹⁷ Contrary to persuasion, propaganda operates through manipulation and presenting biased or fabricated information. This is precisely how the dictatorial governments portrayed in our novels operate. With this distinction between propaganda and persuasion and how various types of regimes use them in mind, we are now well equipped to understand why lying and other deceptive techniques seem to be the norm in the novels under discussion. Therefore, in the next chapter, I will discuss how Ngugi exposes the regime’s propaganda by showing the contradictions between their words and actions.

¹¹⁶ In Sproule’s *Channels of Propaganda*, for example, the term persuasion is recurrent and almost systematically employed when other words are used to refer to propaganda. Oftentimes, Sproule uses the words “mass persuasion” not only to describe propaganda, but also to distinguish it from persuasion. According to Sproule, one of the major differences between the two notions lies precisely in the massiveness of propaganda, which he characterized as a “large-scale symbolic orchestration” (4-5). The present distinction, we must specify, corresponds to the second of the four conditions listed above. The two notions can be distinguished following the remaining conditions as well. As regards the first condition, covert manipulation, Sproule contends that propaganda is “an attempt to persuade people without seeming to do so,” while persuasion alerts the individual that someone is trying to sway them (3). Lastly, Sproule’s fourth condition expresses the same idea of mutual benefit, which we find in persuasion but not in propaganda.

¹¹⁷ See above, Chapter Ten on lying in politics.

Propagandistic contradiction in *Matigari*

Propaganda and indoctrination are part of the dictators' arsenal of consent-seeking instruments in the novels under scrutiny. Propaganda techniques are innumerable in the novel, but here, I will use some of the four conditions of propaganda discourse proposed by Sproule to show how the government uses propaganda in Ngugi's *Matigari* to sway the masses in their favor. I believe that the fourth condition does not need further discussion that deals with the intent of the propagandist because dictators only seek to remain in power. The element of covert manipulation can be broken down into two or more aspects. First, there is the use of mass communication, which facilitates the dissemination of propaganda under the guise of routine communication. This stands in opposition to direct persuasion, where the individual is aware of the attempt at persuasion. In *Matigari*, mass communication remains the government's primary means of disseminating propaganda through the Voice of Truth, the only radio outlet mentioned in the novel. What is amusing about this radio station is that even its name is propaganda. In "The Rhetoric of Irony in Ngugi wa Thiong'o's *Devil on Cross* (1987) and *Matigari* (1980)," Mamadou Diop Saliou Dione notes how even the name of the radio station is a clever fallacious tactic aiming to lull the masses "into not being dubious of their trustworthiness" (225). The government uses the radio station's name to exploit the pathos element of persuasion and make the listeners believe that the speaker has unquestionable moral integrity and authority.

Ngugi's use of semantic inversion to expose the contradictions of the pseudodemocratic pretences of the government is remarkable in *Matigari*. It is funny to see a radio station that relays government propaganda call itself "The Voice of Truth." But the semantic inversion we see here also operates at other levels. The government has a Minister for Truth and Justice, whose stated aim is to serve justice based on the truth. In my chapter on

fearful silence, I have discussed one of this minister's decisions in which he has completely ignored the exploited workers' demand for better working conditions. Without even listening to the worker, the minister settles in the favor of the company owners. When the worker's representative exposes the unfairness of his decision, the minister has him arrested in the name of democracy: "Here, in this country, we are guided by democracy and the rule of law. The only thing we never condone is the breaking of the law. So, the government has the democratic right to remove such a person from amidst the people. No government can allow 0.0001 per cent of the people to disrupt the rights of the other 99.9999 per cent" (111). As we see here, the word "democracy" becomes a magic word brandished at every turn by the regime to mask its lack of democracy. This should remind us of a comment I previously quoted made by the character of Zeinab in *Close Sesame*: "Democracy is the instrument with which the elites whip the masses anywhere; it enables the ruling elite to detain some, impoverish others, and makes them the sole proprietors of power" (100). This dialogue between two novels written by different authors is fascinating but not unusual because both Farah and Ngugi describe the same African reality. Zeinab's observation quite majestically sums up what the Minister for Truth and Justice has declared in *Matigari*. The minister also says that no government should let a minority disrupt the right of the majority. This is a valid claim, but it is applied to the wrong situation. Ngaruro is not disrupting other workers' rights—because they do not have any. On the contrary, he is fighting so that the workers can have their rights to work in good conditions and for decent pay. Ngugi's use of irony is notable because what we see is a regime that calls itself a democracy but which is dictatorial in its methods of ruling. In that country, there is a Minister for Truth and Justice who lies and condones social exploitation, and lastly, a media that claims to be the voice of truth but only propagates government lies.

In the novel's first pages, the Voice of Truth mostly serves to relay government policy and decisions. Propaganda is mild because it only uses some persuasive techniques—not much deception is involved. For example, the very first radio announcement in the novel states that a decree of His Excellency Ole Excellence bans all gatherings of more than five people. The radio announcer comments that no explanation has been offered for the decree. But that it is known that “the university students were going to demonstrate outside the British and American Embassies in protest against the continued Western military and economic aid to the South African apartheid regime” (7). The president's decision to ban gatherings shows how dictatorial regimes curb and punish the exercise of fundamental rights under the guise of legality. In the second part of the announcement, the radio transmits, in a reported-voice format, a message from the president himself:

His Excellency Ole Excellence argues that a friend in need is a friend in deed. He says this as he bids farewell to the British soldiers who only last month disarmed a group of soldiers who had attempted a mutiny. His Excellency Ole Excellence heartily thanks the British government for allowing some of the soldiers to remain and assist with training. Addressing the nation, His Excellency Ole Excellence repeats what he already said during the mutiny: it was a great shame for the soldiers of the national army to go on strike for higher pay so soon after Independence. They had never gone on strike against the colonial regime. Why now?

A lot can be said about this passage. But what is particularly relevant to my discussion is the president's attempt at shaming not only the soldiers who went on strike for higher pay but also those who might attempt such an action in the future. Here, I propose to see his message as pure propaganda because no logical explanation is given to demonstrate why the mutineers' salaries cannot be raised after independence. Instead, the president appeals to people's patriotic sentiment by insinuating that the mutineers are unpatriotic since they

revolted against a national government. The terms national army and independence are glittering generalities used as vague feel-good words to appeal to people's desire to maintain national unity and to make them dissociate themselves from any action that might be perceived as unpatriotic. Finally, His Excellency's question ("Why now?") does more than question the strikers' motives and timing. By this question, the dictator implies that something is wrong with the striking soldiers. By claiming that he does not understand why they strike, he is also telling the masses indirectly that the strikers are mad. However, it is in dealing with Matigari that the government will explicitly use madness as a weapon.¹¹⁸

As Matigari's actions start to create a buzz, the government's propaganda machine gets into full swing with unprecedented distortions of facts. I have talked about some of these distortions in the previous chapter, but at present, I will focus on distortions in light of the notion of propaganda. Radio announcements released by the government following Matigari's first escape from prison allow the following conclusions. First, it is worth noting how multiple messages are released in short time intervals. If we add to this the fact that those messages completely disregard the truth, we can pinpoint a first technique known as the "firehose of falsehood." This propaganda technique consists of many consecutive messages repeated continuously without any commitment to truth. According to Christopher Paul and Miriam Matthews, the firehose approach to propaganda derives from Soviet Cold War era techniques, which Russia has modernized by taking advantage of contemporary technological capabilities (1). For Paul and Matthews, the technique got its name because of its distinctive features: a) it is high-volume and multichannel, b) it is rapid, continuous, and repetitive, c) it lacks commitment to objective reality, and d) it lacks commitment to consistency (2). This propaganda is also consistent with what we see in the latter pages of *Matigari*.

¹¹⁸ To further understand the instrumentalization of madness, see Chapter Nineteen

In *Matigari*, the public is overwhelmed with repetitive and conflicting messages about who the supposed prisoners are. The following are announcements issued after the captives have escaped the psychiatric facility. First: “This is the Voice of Truth, ... A special announcement, the police are continuing their search for a group of madmen who escaped from a mental hospital” (133). This announcement is immediately followed by another message inviting the public to report to the police any person who looks or acts like a madman. On the following page, we have another message: “This is the Voice of Truth ... This is an urgent announcement ... The Minister for Truth and Justice has authorised the police to shoot down all madmen ... Shoot on sight” (134). The consecutiveness of the announcements and the rapidity with which they are released are also noticeable in how Ngugi juxtaposes them in the novel. Indeed, an overwhelming proportion of the radio announcements mentioning the escaped madmen—about ten announcements—are concentrated on only twenty pages of the book. In contrast, the hundred and thirty pages that precede the last chapter only contain five announcements. The third and fourth features of the firehose propaganda approach—lack of objective reality and consistency—also appear as the messages multiply. First, Matigari and the other fugitives are labeled prisoners by the police in the first announcement following their escape from prison. Then, they become criminals, finally becoming madmen in later announcements. As this example shows, the government’s narrative contradicts reality because Matigari and the other detainees are not clinically mad but simply citizens who refuse to acquiesce to political injustice and capitalist exploitation.

Chapter Seventeen

Propaganda and indoctrination in Farah's *Variations*

Propaganda and indoctrination are also recurrent themes in Farah's *Variations*. Unlike in *Matigari*, where characters or the narrator do not explicitly discuss propaganda techniques, Farah's novels, especially *Sweet and Sour Milk*, openly examine how the General's regime uses propaganda and indoctrination to make the masses believe inconsistencies. The overall aim of this section is, therefore, to explore the notions of indoctrination and propaganda on the premise that they not only serve to fashion the public image of the General but also help him induce a particular form of madness in the population.

Disinformation and Demoralization

With the notion of propaganda in mind, we can now shed some additional light on the General's fabrication of lies about Soyaan's political commitment to the revolution. What I previously discussed in terms of distortion in Chapter Nine can now be interpreted as propaganda. As said earlier, the two parameters that determine the type of propaganda at play, namely its originator and its content regarding the aspect of falsity, all point to information as

a pivotal element. For clarity's sake, I shall begin by stating the two key points I will develop regarding the General's propaganda around Soyaan's death. Firstly, the General has decided to knight the dead as a "Hero of the Revolution" and to name a street after him, although he knows very well that Soyaan was plotting a coup against his regime. Secondly, the regime attributes to the dead last words he has never uttered, using the authoritative father figure to make the lies all the more believable. There is no doubt for the reader, however, that the supposed last words came from the General's office and not from the father of the late Soyaan himself. This indicates that we are in the presence of black propaganda because not only is the information being propagated false, but it also comes from a concealed source. Within the realm of black propaganda, we can distinguish many forms to be distinguished that the General uses in the *Variations* trilogy. These include disinformation, demoralization, lying, and deception, among others. Below, I will discuss how the General uses disinformation to discord and divide the intellectuals plotting to overthrow him.

The primary domain of disinformation, most would acknowledge, is international politics.¹¹⁹ In a typical example of two countries engaged in some adversarial relation, disinformation from one country will be primarily directed against both the other country's leadership and its population, and accessorially at the originator country's home populations. The propagandist's goals will be different from one target to the other. What is true in the international context can also be transposed into the domestic one whenever two opposing camps engage in disinformation. In *Variations*, the context is domestic, and we have the General and his government on one side and Soyaan's underground group on the other. By

¹¹⁹ To see this, it may suffice to consider the U.S. Department of State's publications on the subject, which pays particular attention to Russian disinformation. Moreover, there is a considerable amount of documents concentrating on countering disinformation. It has also become common practice to refute accusations, even though they may be true, by simply characterizing them as pure disinformation.

focusing on disinformation coming from the regime, we can determine at least two targets: ordinary people and Soyaan's group, the enemies of the regime.

On his death bed, Soyaan, in *Sweet and Sour Milk*, has expressed concerns about the General's disinformation, probably without suspecting that his own death was going to be the object of distortion of a most odious kind. In his long-winded monologue, he denounces the government propaganda, claiming that the General "was serving a cocktail of poisonous contradictions to the masses" (14). Soyaan's wish, then, is to reinform the masses, to tell them the reality of what "s happening, information being essential in a country where everything is censored" (15). Soyaan's reflection on the regime's management of information is consistent with the definition of propaganda as the misuse of persuasion, which relies on rationality instead of contradiction. For Soyaan, the demystification of information will consist of telling the masses what is happening and emptying their "heads filled with tons of rhetoric" (16). Here, the term "rhetoric" must be understood as the artful use of grandiloquent language that lacks meaningfulness and sincerity. Part of what Loyaan means by "tons" can be traced back to the General's words of wisdom, which he compiled in a book.

The General's reliance on beautiful words is fully captured by the author when he has the narrator remark sarcastically that "the roadsides are decorated with neon signs illuminating the sky of the city with the brilliance of his quotes of wisdom. Some of these sell to the masses, like any cheap commodity, a controversy of ideas which one is expected to buy uncritically—these being the General's wise sayings" (78). *Sweet and Sour Milk* does not actually give us the opportunity to set eyes on the content of these words, but we have every reason to believe that they are platitudes that present no sound argument—which is why Loyaan views them as a poisonous cocktail of contradiction. They can be categorized as glittering generalities. However, as I will discuss shortly, not all propaganda techniques seek to make people feel good. Sometimes, propaganda aims to antagonize and hurt. This is also

one of the General's goals in propagating lies about Soyaan's supposed loyalty to the revolution.

Presently, I would like to discuss how the General's lies about Soyaan's political convictions affect members of the clandestine movement to which Soyaan belonged. When propaganda targets an adversary, whether foreign or domestic, there is often more to the propagandist's aim than deception. Propaganda, in this case, must be seen as a war tactic whose primary goal is to harm, more precisely, to harm the morale of the enemy. Thus in *Variations*, the effects of the regime's distortion of Soyaan's life story are perceptible in many ways. For example, shortly after Soyaan's death in *Sweet and Sour Milk*, Loyaan notices on his way to retrieve his brother's death certificate that some of their friends are embarrassed by what they have read in the news. It does not take Loyaan long to realize why his friends avoid him, as we can see in the quote below:

The woman was gone. She waved goodbye before she formalized her hello with a handshake. Gone. Like the five before her. He was in front of Azan Café. He walked in and ordered a cappuccino. He stood by the counter; he leaned against it, his eyes fixed on the entrance. There he saw a number of friends who dispersed in all directions. The epidemic of the caste-shame which his presence had brought— was that why they were avoiding him? (109)

As we can see in this passage, his father's interview has brought shame to the Keynan family. His friends seem so embarrassed that they do not want to be seen in his company. Loyaan has given no interview, but his father's declarations affect him, his family, and his clan, whom people now perceive as traitors and collaborators of the regime. The aim of the General to demoralize and confuse seems to be working well if we also consider how the secretary of the death certificates office welcomes Loyaan. During their discussion, she tells Loyaan she knew his late brother Soyaan. Since they are twins and look alike, she must have known who he is. Yet, when Loyaan first arrives, she behaves as if she did not know who he is (110).

“Shame” is also the word the secretary pronounces after reading the newspaper. After she pronounces the word twice, Loyaan catches on and responds:

‘Shame. A young man of his education and intelligence ...’

‘Yes?’

‘Shame.

She wouldn’t commit herself any more for now. She was in her early twenties, nails neatly varnished, hair tinted and faultless. She sat behind a weather-beaten teak table on top of which lay, as though temporarily, heaps and heaps of files stacked to one side. In front of her, there were two cupboards which, once opened, appeared never to have been closed again.

‘He did not say that.’

‘He did not say what?’

Soyaan did not say, ‘Labour is honour and there is no general but Our General.’ He did not. I was there.

‘No?’

‘He did not.’ (111)

Later the conversation continues as follows:

‘Isn’t Soyaan the man the General’s régime has named a street after because he died serving the interests of the revolution? Isn’t he the one whose last words were, “Labour is honour and there is no general but our General?” I personally find the whole affair too embarrassing.’

‘But he did not say that. He did not, I am telling you. I was there.’

‘Ours is the only tribe which has resisted his fascist rule. No other. See how we’ve suffered. Mulki goes to prison. Our men, too. Ten distant and close cousins of mine. Every other tribe has succumbed. A great let-down.’

‘But Soyaan did not say that.’

‘Your tribe is known for that sort of thing. Your tribe easily succumbs to anything,’ she said accusingly.

With a wave of the hand, he dismissed it all as nonsense. (112-13)

One of the most interesting parts of this exchange is that the secretary need not say more than a few words to make Loyaan understand what the problem is. It seems like the last words that the regime attributes to Soyaan are so repugnant to her that she cannot even pronounce them before asking whether Soyaan really pronounced them. Loyaan also seems reluctant to say those words and says, “He did not say that.” This conversation, in which Loyaan repeats multiple times that his brother did not say the words the government claims he said, shows that the lies his father has corroborated are having devastating consequences on the reputation, not just of a single family but an entire tribe. Many of the friends whom Loyaan meets on that day were also friends of the late Soyaan and are probably aware of his detestation of the General’s regime. Hence, reading in the news that Soyaan supported the regime must have felt like a betrayal to them because, maybe, Soyaan changed sides. But in the end, it does not matter whether Soyaan really spoke those words or not. What everybody sees is that Loyaan, his family, and his tribe support the General. So, in fomenting lies about Soyaan and having his father approve them, the General pits friends against one another and ignites tribal divisions. In Chapter Ten, I have discussed how the General relies on tribal allegiances to rule his country. In the case of Samater, he has pressured an entire clan to accept his nomination of one of their co-ethnic as minister. But if the General relies on such divisive tactics, it is because his politics is unpopular. To remedy this lack of popularity, he uses political indoctrination to force civil servants to support him. I have previously mentioned how this method forces many to falsify their political preferences.¹²⁰ But in this chapter, I want to discuss Farah’s portrayal of the General’s relationship with his civil service

¹²⁰ See above, subchapter “To the dictator belong the spoils.”

through the notion of indoctrination and personality cult. However, before I begin my analysis of indoctrination and propaganda in the *Variations* trilogy, I shall devote a few lines to recall the context of postcolonial African nations and why the use of the term “indoctrination” is justified in the context of a revolution as depicted in the *Variations* trilogy.

Unpopular revolutions and the need for indoctrination

Postcolonial African states of the 1960s and 1970s were newly formed nations. While most of these nations maintained amicable relations with their former colonizing powers, a few states had conflictual relations with their former colonial masters. When this latter case applied, there usually was a marked determination to reject the values of the colonizing country and to inculcate in the populations a new set of values. This phenomenon is also observable in the case of regime change, especially as the result of military intervention. For such new regimes to establish their authority, the need to mark a sharp break from the preceding regime’s politics is sometimes necessary. This is even more so the case when the new holders of power invoke the term *revolution* to justify their power grab, as in the case of Somalia.

In political terms, *revolution* refers to a sudden, radical, and often violent change in a country’s political, economic, and social structures. For Samuel P. Huntington, in *Political Order in Changing Societies*, this change is fundamental and affects society’s dominant values and myths (264).¹²¹ The extent to which these changes can affect fundamental institutions and sometimes the daily life of people will be significantly determined by the ideological path on which the new power holders wish to engage the country. There are two possible hypotheses we would like to consider here. In the first case, the new establishment

¹²¹ That the notion of change is common to all revolutions is conceded by many. Indeed, a revolution is often distinguished from other socio-political changes such as rebellions and revolts on the basis that such phenomena do not constitute “a challenge of authority or the established order of things” (Arendt, *On Revolution* 40).

holds the same ideological view as the old regime. In this case, disruption of the established order will be less consequent than the second hypothesis, where the new regime takes a different, sometimes opposite, ideological turn.

Post-independence Kenya and post-revolutionary Somali, as Ngugi and Farah depict them, can be analyzed through the lenses of these two hypotheses. Kenya, for example, did not witness major changes due to decolonization. Though a new indigenous government replaced the old colonial British regime, there still was no radical reversal of economic ideology. In most aspects, decolonization was a perpetuation of the same economic system by a different set of men. This situation, which I have sufficiently demonstrated in the introduction, is also recurrent throughout Ngugi's *Devil on the Cross* and *Matigari*.¹²² As mentioned in the latter's summary, the protagonist's disenchantment is mainly provoked by the realization that the black ruling elite is as exploitative as their former masters were.¹²³ The relative sameness between colonial and postcolonial Kenya did not require a stark ideological turn.

Although Somalia is also a postcolonial nation, its colonial history is slightly more complicated than Kenya's colonial past. The postcolonial realities of both nations followed somewhat different paths. In 1969, a faction of the Somali military led by Siad Barre carried out an "apparently bloodless" coup against the government of the old president Abdirashid Ali Shermarke within twenty-four hours of his burial and amid discussions to find a successor for him. Siad Barre's coup d'état was followed by a significant change commonly called the Somali Revolution (1969-76). In this event, not only a newly established order of things was introduced, but the attitudes and values of men were also refashioned. The term "revolution" was used by the regime itself; it was not a people revolution, as described above, but the new

¹²² See above, pp. 31-33 on neocolonialism.

¹²³ See above, p. 100 for the summary of *Matigari*.

leadership decided to steer the country toward a new ideology. While establishing new institutions often happens relatively quickly after a revolution, changing men's attitudes and beliefs or the processes whereby they are made to adopt a new ideology may prove slower and harder to attain. This is where indoctrination becomes a handy tool for revolutionary regimes who want to make men adopt new attitudes and values after a revolutionary change, especially where education or persuasion have proved unsuccessful.

Unlike Kenya's regime change, which did not provoke considerable change on the ideological level, the Somali coup was accompanied by an ideological shift and an attempt to break away from the previous regime's policies. Though not having come to power as the consequence of mass mobilization, General Siad Barre later won popular approval by devising a revolutionary roadmap based on Scientific Socialism, his ideology that mixed Marxism and Islam. To tighten his grip on power, Siad Barre relied on multiple techniques of propaganda and indoctrination. Farah's *Variations* is set in the post-revolutionary Somalia described above, which, as far as historical events are concerned, bears a striking fidelity to historical reality. Of course, the goal here is not to demonstrate how faithful fictional Somalia is to the real one but merely to show Farah's condemnation of indoctrination concerns not only the regime but also parents who indoctrinate their own children while trying to save them from state indoctrination.

Political training in the *Variations* trilogy

In the trilogy, introducing a socialist ideology by the General requires a reeducation of the population and the working civil force. In the context of democracy, "reeducation" would mean teaching people to adopt new values, beliefs, and attitudes logically and voluntarily. But as we have witnessed a few times already, things take different turns under dictatorships, and

the thin line between education and indoctrination is often easily crossed.¹²⁴ The General has set up some mechanisms to facilitate the implementation of Scientific Socialism.

This was one of the most populous districts of Mogadiscio. 'There are thirteen cells. This city is broken into thirteen cells, of which all but one is of manageable size. The Security deems it necessary to break this sandy city into these, have each house numbered, the residents counted—and everybody screwed! The General has the master-key to all cells, whether numbered or unnumbered. He is the Grand Warder, remember. Every civil servant and his family must register with the Centre nearest him. Thrice weekly, civil servants should report themselves to the Centres at which they are registered. Thrice weekly in the mornings, civil servants must attend a programme of orientation organised by the Revolutionary Council for all Ministries. If any person is found missing on two counts out of six, he or she loses his or her job. What do they do out there in Baidoa, Loyaan, I wonder?' Soyaan had written in a letter to him. (*Sweet* 95)

The narrator's comments describe Mogadiscio as an open prison for civil servant and their families. Loyaan makes a similar remark about the country: "Somalia is a prison. We are the prisoner; the Security, the Green Guard, are the jailer; and the General, the Grand Warder of them all" (210). Secondly, the General has also established in each district so-called Orientation Centers, the declared intent of which is to give the individual a sense of national belonging instead of tribal affiliation. In theory, this proposition is commendable because the clan politics of the previous regime only served to sow division and breed extreme corruption.

¹²⁴ The meaning of the term indoctrination has evolved in a fashion similar to that of propaganda. Early uses of the word in English date back to the seventeenth century. It was then used in its original sense of "to teach." This neutral meaning has now become secondary in numerous dictionaries, sometimes referred to as archaic or rare, even as non-existent in others. The verb to indoctrinate and its derivatives are mostly used in a negative sense. Although notions of teaching and instruction are still apparent in their denotation, indoctrination is now regarded as antithetical to education (Tan 1). Education has many other purposes. First, it aims at imparting knowledge to the learner. On this point, indoctrination and education are may be difficult to distinguish from one another.

But in practice, political favoritism along tribal and clannish lines remains the same, as I have shown in my discussion of buying consent by wealth in the *Variations* trilogy.¹²⁵

In any case, the General's Orientation Centers, as portrayed in *Sweet and Sour Milk*, occupy center stage in everybody's life in some form or another. Civil servants are directly concerned with these centers and must register themselves and their families in the nearest center. A civil servant and his entire family's livelihood depend on his attendance and performance at the Orientation Center. First, as the narrator explains, a civil servant had to undergo, three times weekly, "a programme of orientation organized by the Revolutionary Council for all Ministries. If any person is found missing on two accounts out of six, he or she loses his or her job" (*Sweet* 95). Secondly, and this is where things start getting out of hand, civil servants not only have to be present at the Orientation Centers but also demonstrate some form of acquiescence regarding the new ideology.

One question that legitimately arises at this point is to know what the attending civil servants actually do in those centers, a question that Soyaan himself asks in a letter to Loyaan: "What do they do out there in Baidoa, Loyaan, I wonder? Soyaan had written to him. That was about three years ago when the centres had just started" (95). The beginning of an answer lies in the name "Orientation Center" itself. The name suggests that those centers were theoretically meant to introduce civil servants to a new ideology and to change their fundamental values and attitudes in favor of such an ideology. In and of itself, his initiative appears commendable. After all, it is the proper task of revolutions to introduce men to a new order of things, and by asking civil servants to train for his new ideology, the General only seeks to prepare the country's workforce to face new challenges. But as we delve deeper into

¹²⁵ As Fiona Moolla also notes, whatever the declared ideals of Barre's scientific socialism were, it "degenerated into a cruel and unpredictable personal leadership that ruled by fear, manipulated clan loyalties, and promoted his own clan and the clans of his immediate family members" (203).

the subject matter, we discover that the orientation classes that civil servants are forced to attend are more political than professional.

We can also attempt to answer the questions regarding the utility of the Orientation Centers by looking at how observers of the historical Somali Revolution have described them. Amongst the terms used by historians to characterize Siad Barre's initiative to reform the country's workforce along the lines of Scientific Socialism, education, reeducation, and indoctrination are the most recurrent.¹²⁶ For instance, Dominik Balthasar notes that many civilian administrators of the previous regime were "required to undergo military training and political education" as part of their ideological reorientation" (152). And a few pages further down, while describing the purpose of the framework of nation-building, Balthasar writes:

A central tool to boost the state's new rule framework while simultaneously repressing competing sources of institution making and identity formation lay in 'orientation centres,' which were established in every permanent settlement throughout the country. These 'indoctrination centers' were the loci where public lectures on 'scientific socialism' were held ... (154)

As it appears from the historical accounts of the Somali Revolution, Siad Barre's Orientation Centers were the place where the new ideology was taught. The fact that Balthasar and Rinehart call them "indoctrination centers," which, in my sense, characterizes them best, also suggests that something was wrong either with the ideology itself or with how it was taught. Since the Somali Revolution is also the historical period covered by Farah's *Variations* trilogy, the Orientation Centers, as they are portrayed, can also be described as the place where characters are indoctrinated. But fiction always teaches us things that history may

¹²⁶ It is also common to encounter many of these terms with one writer and in the same work. Thus, in *Somalia: A Country Study*, Robert Rinehart remarks that civilian officers who "were not susceptible to reeducation" in the new ideology were purged (46). Two pages later, Rinehart employs the word "indoctrination" to illustrate how they "were made to attend reorientation courses that combined professional training with political indoctrination, and those found to be incompetent or politically unreliable were fired" (48).

consider too subjective. And the *Variations* novels do not deviate from this assumption. If you ask Farah's narrator what the civil officers do in the Orientation Centers, the answer will be the following:

Now it was to them that people went, not to mosques any more. People immediately, when their number exceeded five, found it expedient to sing the General's praises. For it was against the law of the land to have an assembly of more than five persons unless they were at an Orientation Centre or unless they were there to chant the chorus of the General's ninety-nine good-names. (95)

In this quote, Farah does not use the word "indoctrination" or the objective technical language of historians to expose the purpose of the Orientation Centers. The narrator's sarcastic comments may seem exaggerated and unobjective, but the fact that even historians use the term "indoctrination" to refer to Siad Barre's Orientation Centers shows that Farah objectively captured the unstated goal for which Siad Barre instituted those centers. Through the narrator's analogy between the Orientation centers and mosques and his allusion to the names of Allah, we understand that the primary purpose of these Centers is to force civil servants to nourish the General's cult of personality. More interesting in this passage is that the narrator's words point to a fusing of indoctrination and propaganda. First, the fact that civil servants are obligated to attend the General's re-education classes without question constitutes indoctrination. Here, I can argue that Farah conceives of indoctrination primarily in terms of method, i.e., teaching something uncritically. Second, this indoctrination is mixed with propaganda because all those civil officers do in these indoctrination centers is sing the praises of the General—a typical example of a personality cult. This one issue seems to annoy the narrator and other characters if we consider the number of contemptuous remarks they make thereupon. However, civil servants are not the only target of the General's indoctrination and propaganda. Children also sing the litanies of the General in schools and Young Revolutionary Centres.

The General is not the only indoctrinator

Coming back to fictional Somalia, I believe that at least two reasons make it possible to use the terms *indoctrination* and *indoctrination center* to describe the enforcement of the General's Scientific Socialism in the novel. First, it appears that civil servants who undergo orientation courses are expected to assimilate the General's ideology uncritically for fear of losing their jobs. The regime requires the same compliance from aspiring civil officers who must all go through military training and exhibit political compliance before they can secure a post. The second reason that leads us to characterize the teaching of the General's ideology as indoctrination derives from the narrator's use of the term indoctrination in reference to the free education that children receive in the General's Young Revolutionary Centres, an important point that I will discuss later.

In *Sweet and Sour Milk*, schools also represent instruments of indoctrination.¹²⁷ In the following passage, without using the word indoctrination, the narrator partly supports this claim when he asserts that “[h]usbands went to these rendezvous to save wives and children

¹²⁷ To understand how this came to be, we need to step back in the historical past of Somalia once again. Although I have concerned myself with the negative aspects of the General's rule, I believe we must also give credit where it is due by acknowledging that his revolution also brought about positive changes. Regarding the subject of indoctrination, I shall focus my attention on projects that center around literacy and education. Thus, the revolutionary regime made substantial efforts to improve the country's literacy rate. The first step of this achievement was the imposition of Somali as a national language and the adoption of a standard Latin script for the Somali language. This has come to be perceived as a particularly bold decision, considering the long-standing debate over the choice of a national language, and the various failed attempts to do so. After the adoption of a national language, the revolutionary government embarked on national literacy campaigns, first urban, then rural. Both campaigns had a significant impact on Somali society. According to Warsame, the use of the Somali language for instruction has contributed to the liberation of Somali education from its colonial past, to the emancipation of its people, and to a revival of its culture, identity, and heritage, among other things (359). Other significant efforts towards increasing literacy along the masses include emphasizing the education of girls, and compulsory primary education. While the abovementioned advances undeniably benefited the Somali people, they also benefited Siad Barre in some form or another. What I want to suggest here is that the educational reforms certainly facilitated the spread of literacy, which was directly beneficial to the masses. But they were also designed to facilitate the dissemination of state propaganda and indoctrination, which could now be done in a language the majority of the population could understand. In an interview centered around the Somali Revolution, Ioan Lewis states that political indoctrination was “one objective of the rural development campaign in the first place” (“Nationalism” 17). It was, then, in pursuance of this objective that schools also became places of indoctrination.

from starving joblessness. Children sang the General's praises at school so that their parents weren't blamed for dissuading them from the right path" (206). The rendezvous of broomsticks referred to in these lines is a communal street sweeping activity commended by the regime as a duty of the Revolution and can be considered part of the indoctrination process.¹²⁸ But let us focus on what the narrator says about children. Hiss comment reveals that there are efforts to indoctrinate children in schools. But what is most noteworthy is that even the children seem to sing the General's praises, not because they have been successfully indoctrinated, but because they, too, understand what is at stake and sing the praise songs because they are aware of the financial consequences that their parents might endure if they disobey. This suggests that when parents send their children to school to receive a good education.

It also transpires in *Sardines* that some parents are well informed about their children being indoctrinated at school. That is why Medina has decided to homeschool her daughter, Ubax (14). But even Medina herself has to be reminded by her father not to indoctrinate her own daughter: "[L]eave enough breathing room for little Ubax to exercise her growing mind. You mustn't indoctrinate, mustn't brainwash her" (14-15). The Words Medina's father uses here validate the method-based approach to indoctrination in that they put more weight, not on what Medina teaches her child, but on the way she does it.¹²⁹ The case reveals another specificity of Farah's position in the trilogy regarding complex issues such as violence. Just as

¹²⁸ As Alyona Ayrapetova argues, indoctrination can be viewed as a form of manipulation that seeks to unify thinking and behavior (17).

¹²⁹ In *Teaching for Commitment*, Elmer Thiessen contends that four criteria are commonly used to circumscribe indoctrination. He also proposes a fifth one he deems often overlooked in the literature (175). These are the content, methods, and outcome of indoctrination, the intention of the indoctrinator, and the institutional criteria. For example, within the content-based theory, a general assumption is that indoctrination relates to a certain kind of content (Thiessen 23). On the question of knowing exactly what makes a specific content qualify as indoctrination, proponents of this approach often point to concepts of doctrine and ideology as necessary constituents (Lopez 16). The method-based approach to indoctrination focuses more on how a particular content is taught. More specifically, proponents of this approach will seek to determine whether people are allowed to think critically about what they are being taught. This seems to be the perspective that Farah offers in the example above.

the example of Medina's mother-in-law's controlling behavior shows that tyranny is not the exclusive prerogative of the General or men, Medina's father's warning must attract readers' attention to the fact that indoctrination, too, is not the exclusive domain of the state.¹³⁰ Parents also risk indoctrinating their children at home, even if they succeed in saving them from state indoctrination.

At first glance, it seems that children are not safe from indoctrination, whether at school or at home. But in the following passage, we can see that there is a particular category of children who are free to attend or skip the indoctrination sessions of the regime. Also, in this passage, Farah not only establishes a link between the regime's schooling and indoctrination more explicitly but also paints the General as an irresponsible father to these children:

Many of them were rebellious runaways from the Young Revolutionary Centre at which any unclaimed babies found in the city's garbage bins or unpatrolled streets were trained to consider the General their father, his revolution their mother, the regimes' generosities to them their breast-feed. Free to offer services, free to choose, free to move where they wanted, these young runaways preferred this to the indoctrination and free schooling with which the regime was ready to supply them. (235)

In this quote, the regime has a program to take care of abandoned children—which is a good thing. One thing to note on in this quotation is that the children in question are different from the ones spoken of in the first quote. Since they have no parents, they are free to attend or miss school, and can escape being indoctrinated. However, most children who live with their parents are not that fortunate and are probably forced by their parents to attend school.

¹³⁰ For example, Medina's Mother-in-law is depicted as a tyrannical matriarch who wants to circumcise her granddaughter against her parents' will. See above, pp. 41-42.

The General, who is the head of the state, becomes their father on a symbolic level. But this quote also echoes the paternalistic attitude of many political leaders, who are often called *fathers of the nation*. It is this fatherly image that Soyaaan also denounces in *Sweet and Sour Milk* when he hears a song in honor of the General on the radio: “Listen to these ludicrous eulogies of the General [...] The father of the nation. The carrier of wisdom. The provider of comforts. A demi-god. I see him as a Grand Warden of a Gulag” (10-11). Through his likening of the General to a prison warden, Soyaaan reveals one of the many contradictions we encounter in postcolonial dictatorships. Like the General, most dictators will readily accept the appellation of “father of the nation” but will not act like a father toward their citizens. They appropriate the country’s resources and let their children die, something an authentic father would not do. Still, these dictators often fashion and convey this fatherly image through distortion and falsification of information, in other words, through propaganda and indoctrination. Yet, political and ideological indoctrination into Scientific Socialism is not the only thing against which characters must protect themselves. State indoctrination is backed by multiple propaganda techniques, with the final goal to solidify the dictator’s grip on power and maintain his godly image. But why does the General make people praise him? Does he really believe he is God, or do his praise-songs serve other tangible purposes? To answer these questions, we can look at how Farah allegorizes the General’s reliance on propaganda techniques such as transference and personality cult, and their on affects the behavior of his citizens.

Transference and Cult of Personality

Transference is a powerful technique that associates the virtues of something or someone revered or admired with something or someone whose image or reputation is less appealing.

The technique functions also in the opposite direction. In the *Variations* trilogy, ordinary people's lives are guided by the religious principles of Islam. This observation is even more accurate within the older generations, for instance, who impute all unexpected twists and turns of life to God and turn to religion for happier tomorrows. In his discussion of the significance of religion in Farah's novels, John Hawley distinguishes three types of characters who call themselves Muslims: the cynical politicians, the self-enslaved fanatics, and the devout. In the first category, of which the General is the first representative, religion is merely a tool for achieving political and material ends. The second category, as Hawley points out, is made up of characters such as Medina's Mother-in-law, who use a strict interpretation of the Koran to justify their actions and impose their worldview on their relative. Finally, there is the group of true believers in which Hawley places characters like Fatima, Medina's mother, and Deeriye in *Close Sesame* (194). Without denying the validity of Hawley's categorization, I would, nevertheless, like to add another character (Qumman) to the category of true believer and a new category of believers, i.e., those who worship the General instead of God. These two additions seem important for our understanding of Farah's characterization of the irrational aspects of personality cult work in the novels.

First, regarding transference, I would like to add the character of Qumman in *Sweet and Sour Milk* to Hawley's category of devout Muslims because by comparing her to Deeriye in *Close Sesame*, we can see that, although both appear as typical examples of God-loving creatures, the General's attempt to transfer God's qualities onto himself did not have the same effect on both characters. Qumman, the mother of the twins, appears to have placed herself into God's hands. She is submissive to her husband, to God, and to the General. This submission, which is a mixture of love and fear, prevents her from even complaining about her fate at the hands of these three entities, let alone contemplating the idea of revolting

against them. This explains, for instance, her revulsive reaction at seeing the poster of a woman with a raised fist in defiance to God:

‘What is that?’ she cried angrily.

She pointed at the poster on the wall, the poster of a raised fist. She looked at it intently, fixedly. In profile, she seemed a woman much younger—but more fragile.

‘Remove it, please.’

Representational art, figurative art—and miscellanea! A fist raised upwards at the heavens, deviant as the devil himself. (26-27)

As Qumman’s reaction shows, the very idea of defiance against authority is repulsive to her. Thus, without question, she accepts all the misfortunes that befall her, be it abuse from her husband or the loss of her son. She suffers in silence and never seeks vengeance.

Deeriye in *Close Sesame*, however, who is the most pious character in the *Variations* trilogy, is submissive to God only. Throughout the novel, his daily routine always starts and ends with prayers. Most of his time is devoted to God, his old age and poor health suggesting that he may die anytime. For that reason, all his daily activities are punctuated by ablutions, rosaries, and prayers. His grandson is even instructed not to touch him lest he sullies his sanctity, in which case his grandfather would die and not enter the kingdom of God. Even though Deeriye and Qumman’s attitude appears virtuous from a religious point of view, it constitutes, at the same time, a vulnerability that can be exploited for political purposes. The process of transference, then, intervenes when a political leader uses religious symbols to arouse likeability and reverence or fear and terror. In Deeriye’s case, the process of transference fails to produce the desired effect because after his son Mursal dies in his assassination attempt against the General, Deeriye does not accept this as God’s will like Qumman and Keynan, Soyaan’s parents do in *Sweet and Sour Milk*. Deeriye’s response to his son’s death in *Close Sesame* radically differs from that of Keynan, who also lost his son but

who, instead of seeking revenge, helps the General distort the deceased's memory for political purposes. In *Close Sesame*, Deeriye also loses his son at the hands of the regime. But unlike Keynan, he is not affected by the godly image the General seeks to project and decides to avenge his son's death.

As these cases suggest, The General exploits believers' reverence for God to legitimize his tyranny. But he does not stop at presenting himself as a pious person. He is also the object of a personality cult. This is where the other type of believer I mentioned in passing enters the scene. I have explored some aspects of personality cult in *Wizard of the Crow*, but Ngugi's critique only focuses on the private part of the phenomenon. Here, I would like to look at personality cult from the outside—the perspective Farah offers his readers in the *Variations* trilogy. But before setting to explore the public and seemingly irrational side of the General's personality cult in our novels, we first need to understand what is generally meant by personality cult. Thomas Wright and Tyler Lauer state that a personality cult is “the idealized, even god-like, public image of an individual consciously shaped and molded through constant propaganda and media exposure” (29). A second definition provided by the *APA Dictionary of Psychology* tells us that the main purpose of a personality cult is an “exaggerated devotion to a charismatic political, religious, or other leader, often fomented by authoritarian figures or regimes as a means of maintaining their power” (273). As suggested in both definitions, personality cults are often the prerogative of authoritarian regimes seeking to retain power through propaganda. Jan Plamper focuses his attention on modern personality cults in *The Stalin Cult*. For him, five characteristics set modern personality cults apart from their predecessors. First, they target the entire population and not just a selected elite. The second characteristic relates to using mass media to propagate cult products. Thirdly, modern leader cults tend to emerge in closed societies, which, while they make it easy to curb criticism of the leader, render it extremely difficult to introduce another cult. Fourthly,

modern personality cults are secular in so far that the authority of the leader is not derived from God but from such notions as the nation and popular sovereignty. And fifthly, these cults are exclusively patricentric: their objects are men (vii-viii). It appears that the cult of General in *Variations* meets all five conditions.

First, looking retrospectively at Soyaan's comment on the General "serving a cocktail of poisonous contradictions to the masses," we see that propaganda targets the entire population and not just the elite in the *Variations* trilogy. Secondly, in our fictional Somalia, the General's cult of personality is disseminated through mass media—notably through the press and the radio, which are controlled by the regime. His personality cult targets the entire population. Civil servants must sing his praises in Orientation Centers. Children also do so at school, and the rest of the population is enrolled in the cult through the radio, the press, the General's book of wise sayings, and posters of him decorating public offices as well as city streets. Whenever possible, all these media are used in conjunction to meet everyone's literacy level.¹³¹ Thirdly, Somalia appears as a closed society, as totalitarian dictatorships generally are. In *Sardines*, for example, we find the General's regime confiscating passports, making it impossible for his enemies to travel abroad. It also transpires that the General's personality cult is secular since, officially his rule relies on a pseudo-democratic legitimacy and not on a God-given authority. In *Close Sesame*, for instance, the notions of nationalism and popular sovereignty are emphasized when the General renames the country *Democratic Republic of Somalia* to insinuate that his legitimacy is derived from the people. Lastly, the factor of patricentricity is also verified since the General is male.

But Farah does not merely show that the regime's authority relies on the cult of the General but also goes on to condemn it through the voice of his narrator, who certainly finds

¹³¹ For instance, according to Anita Pisch, the use of posters in Stalin's Soviet Union was given special treatment because the Soviet Regime had a preference for their simplicity and straightforwardness (4).

it absurd to venerate the General. In the quotation below, which I previously quoted in my discussion of the Orientation Centers, we can now see how the narrator uses the symbol of the mosque in *Sweet and Sour Milk* to condemn the General's personality cult:

Now it was to them that people went, not to mosques any more. People immediately, when their number exceeded five, found it expedient to sing the General's praises. For it was against the law of the land to have an assembly of more than five persons unless they were at an Orientation Centre or unless they were there to chant the chorus of the General's ninety-nine good-names. (95)

The religious connotation of this passage is not only conveyed through such obvious words as "mosques" and "praises." For anyone who has reasonable acquaintance with the religion of Islam, the absolute indication of the General's cult of personality is the narrator's reference to "ninety-nine good-names" of the General—the same as the number of names that *Allah* has in the Koran. The General exploits people's devotion by appropriating religious phrases that are normally used to qualify God's most unique qualities. With the slogan "there is no general but our General," he is appropriating the first testament of the Shahadah—the Islamic creed which professes the oneness of God. Besides, in his quality of father of the nation, the General also decides who lives and who dies in his country, as every father has the right of life and death upon their children and wives: "I am the father. It is my prerogative to give life and death as I find fit. I've chosen to breathe life into Soyaan. And remember one thing, Loyaan: if I decide this minute to cut you in two, I can. The law of this land invests in men of my age the power. I am the Grand Patriarch." (102). The General's parody of the holy Islamic words turns religion into a tool the regime uses to inculcate obeisance among the population.

Farah also illustrates the General's God-like aspirations in *Sardines* through an exchange between Nasser, Medina's brother, and Dulman, a famous actress-singer. During their conversation, Dulman tells Nasser that she cannot read. Nasser seizes on the opportunity to address a few similarities between Prophet Mohammed using humor: "Through the irony

of history,' said Nasser, 'an illiterate prophet' changed a people from being oralists and forced them to belong to the written tradition. That was Prophet Mohammed. And through another irony of history, an illiterate general who models himself on God has tried to do the same thing" (170). But Nasser does not stop there and later uses a touch of mockery to tease Dulman on the fact that she used to sing praise songs for the General. But now she is no longer useful for the General's propaganda:

'I became too famous, too important and the General thought it was time I was cut down to size, made irrelevant like last year's joke.'

'I thought they needed people like you. I thought they would buy you, pay any sum to have you rally for them. Isn't that what you did for them when you sang those grotesqueries praising him like a God? What was it? Let me try:'

'He is a prophet'

'His name is Mohammed'

'He is an *ummi*'

'But made his people read and write?' (173)

Farah's use of irony here is multilayered and allows the reader to complete the picture Nasser has begun to draw by comparing the illiterate Prophet and the General, who employs an illiterate actress-singer to sing his litanies.

From pretenders to believers

The combination of the two propaganda techniques discussed above, namely transference and personality cult, has certainly yielded a formidable result, for the likening of the General to God has produced compliance in the multitude, either because they love him or because they fear him, as they would God. But of course, many other reasons may justify compliance with

the General's rule, and we find many who sing his praises not because they love or fear him so much but because they simply need to feed their families:

My daughter is faceless like a windmill and spins fast. Her memory is bad, too. Yes, she's spoken to me of her plan to leave on a government ticket for Budapest and her desire to defect to Rome, London or somewhere else in western Europe. But before she is seeded, before she is allowed to compete, she'll have to seal her mouth, train harder for the contest, take part in the activities of the District Revolutionary Centre where one chants the numerous praise-names of the General and where one is as false as their revolutionary password. Possibly she will put in an appearance at the Centre, maybe for a day, maybe two; then she'll vanish, irritable as ever, angry with herself. She'll unchain her tongue and utter the most unpalatable truths. But she will not, I repeat, she will not paint the morning with anti-government writings. (28)

This quote translates more than a mother's fear that her daughter might lose her temper and utter obscenities against the General. It also shows that singing the songs of the General or participating in the activities organized by the Revolutionary Centers does not mean a blind acceptance of the Revolution's philosophies—earlier I have mentioned the case of Loyaan, who has been advised by his mother to undergo military training so that he could get a government job.

Therefore, we can say that not everyone who sings his praises is necessarily moved by those two emotions only. Some people plainly want to earn a living. A notable example of the phenomenon is the following: "Loyaan should, like Soyaan before him, add his name to the end of the long list of regimented men and women. He should do his military service. He should, like every humiliated civil servant, sing the praise songs of the General in return for a position, yes a guaranteed monthly stipend" (57). This piece of advice, which the protagonist's mother offers Loyaan, also validates the observation I made in the third chapter

regarding the practice of the spoils system in most African dictatorships. Most individuals will adopt, at least publicly, the political leaning of a dictatorial regime to find or keep their jobs. As suggested by his mother, Loyaan has done his military service and has sung the praises of the General during his training. But until his brother's death, Loyaan had never taken a side for or against the General. The praise songs he has sung during his military training have not transformed him into a worshiper of the General.

However, the problem remains that a multitude genuinely believes in those false narratives and ideologies. These characters constitute the fourth category of believers I suggested earlier. Such is, for instance, the case of Khadija in *Sardines*, where she is described not only as a puritanical pervert but also as the ideal revolutionary woman. In a discussion between Amina and Sagal, Khadija's character emerges as a walking contradiction. Her puritanical perversion comes from the fact that she does not want others to set their eyes on her body. She refuses to change into her swimsuit in the changing room with other girls. Instead, she would dive into the pool fully clothed and "stay at the bottom of the water out of everybody's view until she had changed" (244). As both characters discussing Khadija's case agree, her attitude is ridiculous and "as exhibitionistic as if she were naked," since everyone can see her under the water.

Concerning her revolutionary side, she "is said to have answered the revolutionary call with such devotion she spends her days and nights singing the panegyrics of the General and working day in day out for the Revolutionary Center of her area" (244-45). As this quote shows, Khadija sings the litanies of the General just like many others we have discussed earlier. However, something sets her apart from those who do so without conviction or for material benefits only. Her devotion seems sincere, and Sagal does not see any contradiction regarding Khadija's revolutionary commitment as in the case of her apparent puritanism. Sagal describes her as "the ideal 'revolutionary' woman, submissive as servitude, dumb and

dull as a ‘yes, *jaalle*, viva Generalissimo’” (245, original italics).¹³² What this second remark suggests is that Khadija believes in the General’s propaganda and is utterly devoted to his cause. She is indoctrinated by the General’s ideology and is described as someone who assimilates and then regurgitates what she has been taught at the Revolutionary Center without critical assessment—as if brainless. Having previously demonstrated that the General’s propaganda is a mere fabrication of lies—it seems reasonable to suggest that she has been infected with the General’s madness since she believes in a “god” that is not one.

But Khadija is only one in a multitude that give credence to this mass madness. The General’s religion has his most fervent believers in the youth, who call themselves *Guulwade*. In *Sweet and Sour Milk*, the narrator succinctly summarizes the extent of the General’s personality cult:

They beat the drum, these militiamen in the green uniform of the *Guulwade*—the bringer of victory. ‘The lumpen in hempen, the green roughness of the uncultivated,’ Soyaan’s definition of the *Guulwade*. Hundreds of jobless youths who would enrol as volunteers first, who would work round the clock doing what job they were asked to. Six months, nine months, perhaps. Then they would undergo a military training of no great worth, would take oaths of loyalty to the General’s revolution. ‘The lumpen in hempen, a creation of the General’s notion of the loyal citizen,’ another definition from Soyaan. They were beating the drum and singing the sycophancies of the revolution’s successes. (205, original italics)

In this quote, Farah exposes the General’s propaganda by juxtaposing of competing definitions. The official version of the term *Guulwade* paints the General as “bringer of victory.” When applied to the supporters of the General, the term can be translated as “victory pioneers.” But Soyaan sees the reality of things differently and confronts the General’s definition with his own. Through the late Soyaan’s sarcastic comments on the mindless

¹³² *Jaalle*: Somali word for comrade.

revolutionary fervor that elevates the General to a God-like figure, Farah gives the impression of an ideological madness that afflicts a significant portion of Somalia in the *Variations* novels. The General's propaganda and indoctrination seem to have produced a situation that justly captures the depth of Meerloo's conviction: "The tragic facts of political experiences in our age make it all too clear that applied psychological technique can brainwash entire nations and reduce their citizens to a kind of mindless robotism which becomes for them a normal way of living" (106). The "robotism" of the youth we observe in Farah's trilogy is the consequence of the unjustified methods that the regime uses to obtain consent from the population. In the present chapter, Farah uses religious symbolism to expose the dangers of ideological indoctrination.¹³³

Conclusion

In this Part on madness, two main hypotheses emerge from my efforts to uncover aspects of the psychological dispositions of the postcolonial subject as portrayed in our novels. First, taking a psychological interpretation of the notion of madness, I have shown that postcolonial political subjects and actors can suffer certain forms of madness. On the one hand, the black man's inferiority complex, best allegorized in the character of Tajirika in *Wizard of the Crow*, remains a pervasive phenomenon that we find across all social classes. On the other hand, the dictator's *folie du pouvoir*, which is characteristic of people in positions of leadership, manifests itself in various kinds of disorders and derangements—as evidenced in the Ruler of

¹³³ As we can read from someone who has worked in the Barre administration, singing the songs of Siad Barre appeared incomprehensible. The intriguing part is that even the people who sang it knew that it was absurd:

At the end of these weekly meetings we would pledge to follow the commandments of the Political Office, and we would stand and sing *Gul Wade Siad*, the song dedicated to the President. This behaviour was bizarre, and we appeared stupid, but we had no choice in the matter. None of us dared to question our actions. I would have liked to know, how serious the Ambassador was about this veneration, but could not ask. The local staff, sitting in adjacent rooms, could hear us singing. They too must have wondered what we were doing, but would not dare ask. For anyone to raise questions would have been criticism of the Revolution, and considered *kacaan diid* (Omar 137-38).

Aburiria's delusions of grandeur and his Marching to Heaven project—which even its chief architect, Kaniuru, describes as “that madness” (110). Madness is also the word the heroine, Nyawira, uses when she reveals the plans of her movement to Kamiti: “All of us men and women of Aburiria must join hands in opposing this madness of Marching to Heaven” (210). The use of the term “mad” by these two characters suggests not only that the project itself is senseless and insane but also that people who sincerely believe in it are equally mad. My second hypothesis builds on a broad definition of madness as any form of behavior that distorts or denies reality—which will also include silence and lying, and suggest that in their quest for total obedience, postcolonial dictators attempt to spread their madness to the entire population through propaganda and indoctrination.

So far, my focus has rested on two categories of people who repeat the lies of the dictator and sing his praises in *Variations*. The first category encompasses those who are aware that the General's narrative is a lie but repeat it because doing so allows them to access jobs and other material comforts. Secondly, other characters like Khadija sing the panegyrics of the General because they sincerely believe in his cause and are devoted to his cult of personality. Both categories of characters, however different their attitudes may be, participate in and give credence to the General's madness all the same. Publicly, there is no way to tell the difference between the pretender and the devotee since they all sing the General's praises. As other people see them do so, they will start emulating them, thereby swelling the ranks of the mad. However, there is yet another category of characters who belong neither with those who feign devotion nor with those whose devotion is sincere. Those who resist the dictator's call to be mad give its full relevance to the spiral of madness. Together with the silent ones, the liars, and the mad, those who choose the path of resistance create some remarkable contradictions and paradoxes as the result of the instrumentalization of madness by postcolonial dictatorial regimes and the activists who oppose them.

PART SIX

THE SPIRAL OF MADNESS: PARADOXES OF SUBMISSION, RESISTANCE, AND MADNESS

Perhaps a lunatic was simply a minority of one. At one time it had been a sign of madness to believe that the earth goes round the sun; today, to believe that the past is inalterable.

George Orwell—*1984*

Introduction

In the previous chapters of this study, I have discussed the fictional representation of certain aspects of dictatorship in selected works by Nuruddin Farah and Ngugi wa Thiong'o. More specifically, I have explored the themes of silence, distortion, and madness as part of a spiral of madness, a framework of behavior patterns set in motion when tyrannical regimes seek to obtain consent through force, bribery, propaganda, and indoctrination. My discussions of various scenes in the novels not only reveal that silence, distortion, and madness represent forms of behavior that express consent or acquiescence with dictatorial regimes, but they also show that all three categories of behavior form a circle in which individuals deny or reject the existence of uncomfortable truths in society. But silence, distortion, and madness are not the only types of reactions characters exhibit in the face of tyranny. There is another behavior pattern in the spiral of madness, which I have already discussed implicitly without focusing much on what it is called.

For instance, each of the first three elements of the spiral of madness has an opposite reaction that can be considered an act of resistance. For example, in *Matigari*, Ngugi opposes the teacher's fearful silence to Matigari's outspoken criticism of political injustice. As for distortion, it appears that some individuals, especially members of the elite and civil servants, would rather lie than remain silent. In a general sense, the government imposes a narrative in which all is fine and well in the country, which is a distortion of reality. In this case, telling the truth means going against the repressive regime's false narrative. Also, when a dictatorial regime seeks consent through propaganda and indoctrination, they are making their citizens believe in things that do not exist or that are impossible, like the Ruler of Aburiria's Marching to Heaven project in *Wizard of the Crow*. Succumbing to this sort of propaganda is to be "mad" in some way. In contrast, when individuals refuse to believe in false narratives, they

are resisting tyranny. We can see here that resistance is an integral part of the spiral of madness—in our novels, against the multitude who acquiesce to the perpetration of injustice, there is always a small group of characters who resist oppression, whatever the cost may be.

The major interrogation of this part proceeds from the realization that characters who denounce political injustices or tell the truth when others remain silent are considered mad by the government which they criticize and the members of their families and societies. For example, in Chapter Six of this study, I discussed how the murderer warns Matigari that he will end up in a mental hospital if he continues asking questions about truth and justice. And like a prediction, as Matigari persists in his quest, he is declared insane by the government and confined in an asylum. Also, as shall be discussed in Chapter Eighteen and Nineteen below, the government in *Matigari* calls political opponents “mad.” The same is true for the General’s regime in *Close Sesame*, which labels political dissidents mad. But why so? What is the link between resistance and madness? As said above, the notion of resistance has always been in the background of my discussion, but in this final part of my study, I would like to take a new look at the concept of resistance by opposing it to the notion of madness. In the present part, I will use various scenes from my selected novels to explore the social and political implications of madness in authoritarian contexts. I will argue for the existence of a paradoxical relationship between madness and sanity, which becomes more evident when analyzed through the perspective of resistance. But before setting out to explore the political significance of madness and resistance, let us first shed some light on one of the greatest mysteries in the *Variations* trilogy— “the mystery no one was ready to solve; and a wonderful mystery too,” as the narrator puts it: the case of Khaliif the madman (*Sesame* 15).

Chapter Eighteen

The Beginning of Paradoxes: Is Khaliif the Madman Mad?

Despite his omnipresence throughout *Close Sesame*, the last novel of Farah's *Variations* trilogy, Khaliif remains a mystery to the characters and even more so to the readers. This figure's mysterious nature is entertained by the enigma surrounding the source of his malady and by the contradictions that set him apart from the usual madmen who populate the streets of Mogadiscio. The first mystery surrounding the character of Khaliif the madman relates to the causes of his madness. From what we learn from the narrator, it appears that Khaliif was once

a highly placed government civil servant, respected by all, a family man with four daughters, a son and a job that could have got him a fat pension if...! If what? Here everything became shrouded in mystery. Nobody knew what happened to him between one evening and the following morning. His wife and children saw him leave as he always had done in his car, his mood more or less jovial, his destination unknown to them. The following morning, he was mad. The house and the whole neighbourhood awoke to his screams, his profanities. No one could make him keep his clothes on long; he would begin unbuttoning his shirt or unzipping his trousers or would undo his sarong's knots the instant the helper's hand relaxed. The doctors

that were consulted did not know what to suggest; one daredevil of a psychoanalyst spoke of the dangers of the haloperidol treatments and left it at that. Had Khaliif been given the treatment? No one could tell. (16)

As we can see from the above, no one knows what happened to Khaliif that made him mad between one evening and the following morning. With all its suddenness, what happened to Khaliif can be considered a tragedy, which Ruth Padel defines as “something that goes suddenly wrong—in a house, family, city, and the inner correlate of this, the mind” (Padel 244).¹³⁴ In the present case, it seems that something has gone wrong in Khaliif’s mind, which causes him to exhibit indecently, therefore bringing chaos to his house and family. But Khaliif’s madness is even more tragic because it is shrouded in mystery. The first element that troubles people about Khaliif’s fate is that they cannot pinpoint the exact cause of his madness. As we learn from the quote above, even the doctors who examined Khalif do not know what has caused his madness or what treatment to prescribe. Only one psychoanalyst hints at the dangers of haloperidol, but without giving much of an explanation. And neither does the narrator, who brings the issue to the reader’s attention, try to explain what the psychoanalyst is alluding to. But what is haloperidol, and what does it do? Is it a medication that the daredevil of a psychoanalyst prescribed to treat Khaliif? Why did the psychoanalyst not want to clarify his diagnosis? Moreover, why does the narrator call the psychoanalyst a “daredevil”?

¹³⁴ In *Whom Gods Destroy: Elements of Greek and Tragic Madness*, Padel argues that the idea that gods interfered in all human affairs was common in Greece. Madness was seen as the result of human transgressions of divine law, which gave all its meaningfulness to the belief that “[w]hom God wishes to destroy, He first makes mad” (3). Padel’s book, inspired by the popular saying, explores the theme of madness in its multiple aspects to which the idea of the divine was central. The evasive nature of madness first presents itself on the linguistic level. To understand madness in Greek tragedy, Padel argues, one must start by looking at the words that were used to refer to the phenomenon. For example, nouns such as *anoia*, *paranoia*, *Aphrosuné*, *Parakopé*, *lussa*, *oistros*, and *mania* variably translate as madness in English. For Padel, these words, which seem interchangeable in tragedy, are “not different sorts of madness, but different words for the same thing. Someone who has *paranoia* has *mania*” (21).

There have been few scholarly attempts at explaining the mystery of Khaliif's illness. In their attempt to unpack the mystery of Khaliif's madness, both Derek Wright and Robert Colson point to the possibility that Khaliif might have received a haloperidol injection at the hand of the regime. For example, Wright suggests that "Khaliif is, immediately, a political victim, his madness politically induced by drugs administered during his detention by the regime" (*Novels* 94). And Colson confirms Wright's charges against the regime when he states that the narrator's "reference to haloperidol treatments hints at the possibility of state-sponsored torture and interrogation as the origin of Khaliif's dramatic transformation" (5). Here, both Wright's allusion and Colson's explicit reference to haloperidol as the probable cause of Khaliif's madness should necessarily guide a critical reader's attention to the fact that haloperidol is not only a psychotic drug that treats symptoms of mental disorders such as schizophrenia, but it is also used as a torture medication by some authoritarian regimes around the world.¹³⁵

But what is interesting about the quote under analysis is the confusing way the narrator delivers his message. At first, one can be misled to think that when the narrator speaks of "the dangers of the haloperidol treatments," he is talking about prescriptions for Khaliif's insanity. But the use of the *past perfect* tense in the question that follows the narrator's remark already undermines such a hypothesis. It is only after one understands the other use of haloperidol that one understands that the narrator's question ("Had Khaliif been given the treatment?") that the narrator is not talking about a treatment that is prescribed to treat Khalif after his madness but probably an injection that could have caused his mental breakdown. Therefore,

¹³⁵ Pharmacological torture: is the forcible injection of drugs to political detainees. There are numerous alleged cases of the use of haloperidol for torturing in Soviet and Iranian prisons. In a U.S. Supreme court case, James Joseph Knochel, the Petitioner, alleges that haloperidol "was used by the Soviet psycho prisons for dissident re-education. In response to the agony induced by haloperidol treatment, dissidents rapidly 'cured' themselves of their feigned mental disorders and were allowed to return to the gulags" (4). Knochel assumes that American psychiatrists, who have described this practice as torture, have themselves subjected their patients to the same treatments because they believed it was "medically necessary."

the psychoanalyst's decision not to clarify his diagnosis can be considered justified by the general climate of fear that permeates the whole of society. It would be a grave accusation and a dangerous venture to accuse the regime of such treatment openly. This also suggests that the other doctors whom the family consulted may not be that clueless regarding Khaliif's case, but they were merely afraid to affirm, or even suggest, that Khaliif had been tortured and rendered mad by the regime. This explains why the only one who put us on a bit of a track about this medication is qualified as a "daredevil" of a psychoanalyst by the narrator. But there are more mysteries to Khaliif's case than the inability to give a definitive diagnosis of his mental illness.

However, between the moment when Khaliif's madness occurred and the moment we encounter him in the novel, a few more contradictions have already appeared regarding his language and his appearance. These only contribute to deepening doubts about his mental illness as everyone wonders whether he is genuinely mad or not:

Now Khaliif's overnight madness might never have been a mystery in itself were he not prone to making weird statements such as: 'night plots conspiracies daylight never reveals'; also his family and friends might never have questioned the hand of providence were it not for the fact that during his lucid intervals he mentioned names, responsible names, in particular one name. But was he *majnuun*? You could say he was insane (using the term in its general sense), that he was a man who, while walking up and down the streets of Mogadiscio as ugly a sight as anyone had ever seen, spoke a language whose construction was grammatical although not all the time logical; a language which was not disjointed but whose inferential and referential senses can be questioned; and therefore a madman. (*Sesame* 16, original italics)

As this passage suggests, one thing that makes people think Khaliif is mad is his language. The narrator clarifies: Khaliif's sentences are grammatical and not disjointed, but they are not

all the time logical because he says things no one understands. So, the narrator believes that if we judge Khaliif based on his language alone, he can be called a madman. But can the way a person speaks alone determine whether he is mad or not? The narrator seems to respond with the negative as he continues his story: “Yet if you got near him, you sensed that he had washed, that his body did not smell sordid like a bedpan; neither would you associate him the down-trodden among the urban populace who woke up before first cock-crow to attack the garbage-cans in the hope of salvaging a morsel from tropical decay of waste” (16-17). Now, when it comes to Khaliif’s hygiene, we learn from the narrator that his physical appearance is that of someone who washes regularly and whose garments look neat. To give readers a picture of how neat Khaliif is, the narrator first compares him to the lower classes of the population who usually dress in rags and smell bad and scavenge for food in the city’s dustbins. But the narrator does not stop at that. He goes on to Khaliif’s clean apparel and to that of the people who have come out of their houses informally dressed, with their hair uncombed and their teeth unbrushed to listen to him, suggesting that the people who have come to hear the Khaliif the madman “looked madder than Khaliif” (19). It also seems difficult to say whether someone is mad by looking at his dress and corporal hygiene. If one were to rely on physical appearance, many of Khaliif’s listeners would also be categorized as mad when they are not. Not coincidentally, when Khaliif starts speaking, and people start gathering around to listen to him, Deeriye, the protagonist, leans forward from his window to see what is happening. The Khaliif he sees does “not suggest a broken man on the fringes of society; nor an alienated man whose mind [buzzes] with mysterious messages so far undeciphered; nor a man invalidated by or overburdened with guilt ... His discourse was grammatical and logical” (18).

But what is it that Khaliif says that makes people want to listen to him? Here is one of Khaliif’s messages followed, by the narrator’s comment:

‘There are wicked houses in which live wicked men and wicked women. Truth must be owned up. We are God’s children; the wicked of whom I speak are Satan’s offspring. And night plots conspiracies daylight never reveals.’ And he held his hands together in a *namaste*, clowned a bit, entertained the younger members of the audience by doing a somersault, a karate ghost-dance, and then returned to his peaceful corner and fell quiet. Applause. He curtsied; grinning, grateful and graceful. (18, original italics)

Focusing on the word conspiracy, Colson views Khaliif’s message as a veiled criticism of “political wickedness in the logic of religion” (22). Although this claim has some truth in it, we should also note that Khaliif need not only assume a political or religious role at a time and veil one in the logic of the other. I propose that his religious rebukes should be considered as such—which is also consistent with the common belief that Islam is not merely a religion but also a social and political doctrine that regulates both private and public conduct. In his introduction to *The Princeton Encyclopedia of Islamic Political Thought*, Gerhard Bowering writes that Islamic political system or thought “not only deals with matters of government, politics, and the state but also addresses questions of acceptable behavior and ethics of both the ruler and the ruled before God” (viii). Besides, as has been discussed in Chapter Fourteen, the General’s ideology of Scientific Socialism is a mix of Marxism and Islam. This also makes the character of Khaliif as a holy and wise fool credible. For example, one of Khaliif’s religiously infused messages, which addresses the General’s personality cult, addresses how the new bourgeoisie has turned away from God and the Islamic tradition to worship the General: “Upstarts of the worst kind, upstarts who had upturned our sacred traditions and have begun worshipping him...would you believe it...worshipping him...a mortal and a fool at that in the place of Him” (*Sesame* 20). Here, Khaliif’s condemnation not only reminds us of Soyaan’s denunciation of tribal politics but also of the divisive debate over the General’s mental capabilities. But this message is undoubtedly also a stark condemnation against people

who sing the litanies of the General referred to, here, as him instead of God, alluded to as Him, God-like capitalized.

The role of the Fool: How the mad help society remain sane

Another element that may intrigue Farah's reader is that the religious significance of Khaliif's figure not only derives from his words but also from the attire he wears. That morning, Khaliif is dressed in a priestly fashion, "all in white, his movements suggestive like a sheikh's, his voice rich, like a prophecy, with its own cadences, his proclamations saintly" (19). As we can see from this description, not only is Khaliif dressed all in white like a sheikh but his movement, voice, and proclamations are imbued with the saintliness and solemnity usually associated with sheikhs. To the profane observer, the contradictions in Khaliif's appearance, actions, and words can be the source of legitimate doubt. However, the fact that someone can be mad and address social and political issues purposefully, as Khaliif does, is not unusual in the Arab Islamic world. According to Michael Dols, there are numerous reports, dating back from the early Abbasid period, about different classes of madmen such as the wise fool, the romantic fool, and the holy fool.¹³⁶ Khaliif, for instance, seems to belong to the class of the holy and wise fools, of which an appreciable number appeared in the early Abbasid period, who played, and continue to play in postcolonial Somalia, a pivotal role on the political scene. As the narrator observes in *Close Sesame*, among the many madmen and madwomen who patrol the streets of Mogadiscio, some are "famous and [have] even entered the annals of national politics" (17). In an interview with Maya Jaggi, while drawing parallels

¹³⁶ In *Majnun: The Madman in Medieval Islamic Society*, Dols writes: "In the early 'Abbasid period, there appears to have been an appreciable number of 'wise fools' or, alternatively, they were given particular prominence by those who labelled them as such. Reports about the 'intelligent insane' were gathered by a number of authors, forming a virtual literary genre; the literary aspect of these stories is evident in the large amount of poetry attributed to the wise fools and the neglect of prosaic details about their lives" (349).

between his works and those of other Islamic writers, Farah notes that the themes of sexual identity and madness are recurrent features in many works from the Islamic world. For Farah, “madness occupies a mystical position” in the Arab Islamic tradition because it is believed that “all people who receive wisdom from the mouths of the mad remain sane” (182). In *Close Sesame*, Khaliif himself would challenge his listeners with a variation of this proverb: “Don’t the Arabs say, ‘Pinch the wisdom, O people, out of the mouths of the madmen’” (21). The character of Khaliif thus demonstrates Farah’s knowledge of the political role of the madman in the Islamic tradition as he combines characteristics of the wise fool or the intelligent insane with those of the holy fool to create his character.

But Farah’s Khaliif is also, in many respects, comparable to the European medieval and Renaissance figure of the court jester as his speeches are often interspersed with clownish performances destined to amuse his listeners. After Khaliif’s first message cited above, the narrator’s comments show the madman performing acrobatics to amuse his audience. Here is Khaliif performing more acrobatics after delivering his message of condemnation of the General’s cult of personality: “Without a moment’s hesitation, without losing the balance of mind and the logic of the sane, he fitted out of the priestly tradition into that of the actor-clown; he somersaulted, half revealing his underpants; he put his hands to his mouth, pretended to be a modest little girl, moved his head to one side, then the other and was silent” (20). Khaliif’s actions in this passage are entertaining and place him in the same role as the fool at a medieval court. Then, what was the role of a court jester exactly, and what role does Khaliif play in his society? As Beatrice Otto has demonstrated in her book *Fools Are Everywhere: The Court Jester Around the World*, the function of the jester generally exceeded simple entertainment: “Of at least equal importance with his entertainer’s cap was the jester’s function as adviser and critic,” which “distinguishes him from a pure entertainer who would juggle batons, swallow swords, or strum on a lute or a clown who would play the fool simply

to amuse people” (244). As we shall see below, Otto’s description of the medieval court fool matches Khaliif’s role as a political critic in *Close Sesame*.

At the political level, Khaliif’s messages are well received. But then, what in his messages makes people want to listen to Khalif, a madman at that? As the narrator stresses, it is not only his charisma, his charm, and his magical voice that makes people like him and stop to listen to him. If men and women gather around him wherever he goes, it is mostly because they want to “hear him speak *for* them, on their behalf, saying what they could not have said” (*Sesame* 17, original italics). And just like the court fool, Khaliif has one characteristic that makes people love him: the ability to speak his mind. As Otto notes: “It is in the nature of jesters to speak their minds when the mood takes them, regardless of the consequences. They are neither calculating nor circumspect, and this may account for the ‘foolishness’ often ascribed to them” (244). Unfortunately, however, the foolishness ascribed to jesters and madmen such as Khaliif is also often ascribed to sane people who happen to speak openly without fear. This observation holds some truth in *Close Sesame*—and in *Matigari*, which I will discuss in the next chapter. As to *Close Sesame*, it seems that the association of speaking one’s mind regardless of consequences and foolishness or madness is common knowledge. That is why every now and then, as the narrator clarifies,

some young man or young woman would make a stealthy approach with a view of putting into Khaliif’s mouth words the young man or young woman would never dare to say—for this young man or this young woman not mad enough to speak their sane thoughts; and the young man or the young woman would be thrown in jail if these words were attributed to him or her. (17)

As this quotation shows, Khaliif can speak his mind without risking going to prison while others do not. Knowing the risks that they incur for criticizing the General openly, these young people sometimes try to put their words into Khaliif’s mouth because he is safe from reprisal. On a closer look, we can see that Khaliif’s role transcends that of a simple political or

religious critic. Indeed, by saying openly what is on other people's minds, Khaliif functions as a safeguard, preventing the rest of society from descending into the same madness. As the above quotation suggests, one element distinguishing the mad Khaliif from the sane young people is his ability to speak without fear. But how exactly does fear or its absence separate the sane from the insane? How does Farah use the element of fear to show the interdependence between sanity and insanity? To answer these questions, I will focus on the protagonist's deepest interrogations and fears.

Deeriye's fears: mad sanity or sane madness

In the interview with Maya Jaggi mentioned above, Farah continues his explanation of the role of the madman in the Islamic tradition in the following fashion: "The mad are also a mirror to the sane. You look at yourself in them, and you ask yourself why they have become as they are, and how you have remained untouched. And in Islam, you are supposed to thank God for being spared" (182). Farah's statement can explain the protagonist Deeriye's fascination with the character of Khaliif, his questions regarding the sanity of his own mind, and his devotion to God in *Close Sesame*. While recalling his trip to the United States, Deeriye remembers something Natasha's father said: that New York was a mad city and that maybe New Yorkers, including himself, are mad because of their frenetic and extravagant lifestyle. This leads Deeriye to reason as follows: "*They said the Sayyid was mad. We love him all the same. It is the mystery in the mad that one loves. They describe all unexplained mysteries and powers as signs of madness. Was the Sayyid mad? Was Wiil Waal mad? Is New York a mad city? Is Mogadiscio? Is Khaliif a madman? Or am I mad?*" (58, original

italics).¹³⁷ Here, Deeriye's questions are a call to think about the many connotations behind the word "mad," as his reflection not only questions the sanity of the human mind and the soundness of lifestyle in cities such as New York and Mogadiscio but also his own sanity.

Deeriye's question regarding his own mental soundness is legitimate in many ways. Physically, he is an old man who suffers regular asthmatic attacks, which makes him dependent on his children. Besides his asthma, there are no hints in the novel that suggest that his old age causes him to be senile or demented. He does, however, have visions about his late wife, the causes of which will remain unknown until the late pages of the novel.¹³⁸ Although his children know about these visions, they nonetheless remain a "family secret and no one [speaks] about it openly, not with strangers around anyway" (25). As understanding as they are of their father's old-age weaknesses, Deeriye can sense from the way his children respond to him that they frequently take his visionary dreams with a grain of salt. Deeriye knows how hard it can be for his children to believe in his sanity after hearing the content of his visions. This explains, for example, his reluctance to confide in his daughter, Zeinab, and tell her about the visions he regularly has of a little boy pelting stones at him: "You'll think I am mad if I tell you the truth. You'll say I've gone mad, I'm sure. Or weak in the head. You will think I'm weak in the head," Deeriye warns his daughter (66). After his daughter has reassured him, Deeriye finds the courage to confess to her that he regularly has visions in which their neighbor's grandson gathers pebbles-stones to pelt him with, as he does with Khaliif the madman, and that he (Deeriye) is afraid. Our protagonist further develops his thoughts and

¹³⁷ Wiil Waal is a Somali folktale character. He is a wise king whose riddles are far too advanced for his people, some of whom have come to see him as a mad king. Sayid Mohamed Abdullahi Hassan (there are many spelling of the name), referred to as the Sayyid in the novel, was a Somali historical figure. According to the *Historical Dictionary of Somalia*, he was the "the leader of *darwiish* (dervish; also *daraawiish*, the plural form) resistance against British, Italian, and Ethiopian imperialism in northern Somalia from 1899 to 1920. His rivals in the *Qadiriyya* order called him *wadaadka waalan* (the Mad Mullah), a term the British later adopted. He is also known as Ina (the son of) 'Abdulle Hasan. For some Somalis, Sayid Mahamed is a hero and one of the greatest poets of his era" (196). See below, p. 364-65 and footnote 139 for the Sayyid's relevance in the novel's approach to madness.

¹³⁸ See below, p. 391 for the explanation Deeriye gives about his visions.

explains that he is envious of Khaliif: “Khaliif, because he is mad, *if he is mad, that is*, is immune to fear. But I am not. Oh, how I envy him at times, how I envy him” (66, original italics). Deeriye’s interrogations and fears here suggest that madness and sanity are not mutually exclusive.

Thus in “Mystery and Madness in *Close Sesame*,” Claudio Gorlier notes that there are a series of contradictions and paradoxes in the novel that arise from the constant “interdependence between action and speculation, imagination and the debate of ideas, and between phenomena and mystery, reason and madness” (421). Gorlier’s remarks accurately describe the interplay between madness and reason insofar as neither is absolute in an individual. This is precisely what Deeriye’s further elaborations on his own fear and Khaliif’s fearlessness suggest as he argues that just as Khaliif the madman can have lucid moments, the sane person also has his moments of madness. What Deeriye laments, however, is that while the madman speaks his sane thoughts and is redeemed by them, he who is not insane only makes a fool of himself when he expresses his mad thoughts:

He says his sane thoughts and is redeemed by them and thus becomes a living saint; because I am not endowed with the same sort of immunity, my mad thoughts turn me into a ridiculous and pitiable person such as I am, an ancient man who has reached the highest heights of political and social life but is frightened of being pelted with pebbles by a young urchin. (66)

As can also be understood from Deeriye’s reasoning, fear is key element in how people generally define madness. Deeriye’s rationale proceeds from the belief that madmen have lost reason and, with it, their sense of hygiene and danger. They seem to be immune to fear and unaware of the severity of their words and actions and the consequences these entail. For example, Deeriye suggests that Khaliif is not afraid of being pelted with stones because he is mad.

The mad are fearless, so every fearless man is mad

However, Yassin's stones are not the only threat Khaliif seems unafraid of. As the narrator tells us in the first pages of the novel, one of the greatest mysteries surrounding Khaliif's insanity is his capacity to say uncomfortable truths in public without fear. People thus wonder: "Why was it that he could grind out the names and titles of those men in high government offices who were suspected of being responsible for his insanity and go unharmed? He would do this in public; the man was beyond fear. Did he believe nothing more could be done to him?" (17). As this quote shows, Khaliif seems to have lost his sense of danger. This makes him talk about things sane people are afraid even to whisper. When we compare the narrator's interrogations with Deeriye's remarks, we can understand why courage and boldness have come, at times, to be interpreted as madness. Both the mad and the bold seem beyond fear and can speak or act where others are afraid.

This reasoning also explains a few things in *Matigari*. First, during his verbal confrontation with the two policemen who set their dog on Guthera, Matigari appears so bold that one of the police officers thinks that Matigari could be an eminent person dressed plainly: "Or why do you think he is so bold?" he asks his colleague, who has a different opinion and hints at the fact that someone that bold must be mad (31-32). But is Matigari mad for speaking boldly against injustice and asking for truth and justice? At first, we may be tempted to say no, but the answer is more complex than that. The fact of considering bold individuals mad comes from a simple syllogistic proposition: madmen speak openly without fear. An individual like Matigari speaks openly without fear and asks questions others are afraid to ask. Therefore, he must be a madman. This is the reason why one of his cellmates warns him: "Don't think that I am slighting or insulting you. But if you continue asking questions of that kind, you will find yourself in a mental hospital or in a pit of everlasting darkness" (61).

However, the way the government later treats Matigari for asking questions about truth and justice does not merely proceed from this syllogistic reasoning but from a deliberate instrumentalization of madness for political ends, as I will show in the next chapter.

Chapter Nineteen

The “Pathologization” of Resistance in *Matigari*: From Colonial Practice to Pervasive Postcolonial Pattern

In my discussion of propaganda in *Matigari*, I have highlighted how the government unjustifiably uses labels such as “criminal” and “madman” in their radio announcements to stigmatize characters who have simply exercised their right to express themselves freely. I have discussed these announcements only as propaganda without inquiring about the reasons why the government uses accusations of madness in the first place. The question that now faces us is how this whole madness affair began and why the government employs such a tactic. In *Matigari*, the government’s recourse to the accusation of madness against political activists starts when Matigari confronts the Minister for Truth and Justice. After telling the assembly how he defeated and killed his colonial master and his black servant during the war for independence, the judges declare Matigari insane because his narrative differs from that of the government. For the minister, Matigari is mad because the minister believes no one in their right mind would publicly boast about defeating his oppressor in a deadly duel. He also thinks that the kind of questions Matigari asks cannot come from a sane mind, and that is why the court recommends that Matigari be confined. Later, following Matigari and his mates’

escape from the madhouse, madness becomes a recurrent motif in the government's announcements about the political escapees:

The public are requested to report to the nearest police station anybody found speaking like a madman, or dressed in rags like a madman, or anyone with unkempt hair like a madman's or anybody seen asking awkward questions like a madman or doing things which only a madman would do. The police are saying that those who are not mad must shave off their beards, cut short their hair and keep it tidy at all times. They must not, repeat must not, wear rags... (133)

The absurdity and ludicrousness of the situation does not take long to fire back at the government. For instance, a poor couple scavenging for food comes across pictures of Jesus Christ and Karl Marx on a poster and bring them to the police, thinking they had found the madmen announced in the news. At the police station, an agent angrily tells the couple that they "must be mad" for bringing pictures of supposed madmen instead of the real madmen. Later, after the United States and the British government's embassies complain that their citizens are being harassed because of their long beards and long, unkempt hair, another radio announcement warns the public not to harass "white people even if they are wearing long beards and have unkempt hair or even if they are dressed in rags and dirty clothes" (135). Ngugi's use of irony and humor here not only shows how absurd the whole situation is but also indicates how ineffective and counterproductive the government's strategy is.

Still, as ridiculous as the government's narrative of madness sounds, the characterization of resistance as madness has been a well-established practice in and outside politics and fiction. Thus, a runaway slave in the nineteenth century was believed to suffer from *drapetomania*, a mental illness that caused slaves to flee forced labor and other degrading human treatments (Cartwright 707). The colonial era also came with its share of labels for those who rejected the actual order of things. Depending on the situation, colonial governments referred to indigenous people as savages, primitives, cannibals, and rebels when

they took to arms and fought colonial domination. Although semantically acceptable, applying the term “rebel” to people who defend their own territory against aggression is a fallacious political statement, aiming to mischaracterize the power relations between colonizer and colonized, aggressor and aggressed. The rebelliousness of a liberation movement fighting against foreign occupation is not the rebelliousness that is acted out against a legitimate establishment. The former is, in essence, an act of self-defense. This kind of revolutionary violence may involve killing, “but as counter-violence, not as violence,” writes David Cooper (15). Consequently, the *Mau Mau* rebellion, as the British colonial administration called it, was not a “rebellion” but the expression of the Kenyan people’s legitimate frustration at colonial inequality.

Pathologized rebellion in colonial times

The British took several measures to crush the rebellion, including repression, concentration camps, imprisonment, and demonization of the liberation fighters. One common form of demonization was to characterize those who rejected colonial domination as mentally ill. When it comes to colonial administrations’ use of racially biased scientific theories, Kenya, claims Sloan Mahone, looms large in psychology and related domains (“Three psychologies” np). Many notable accounts that emerged at the time of the conflict tried to negate the legitimacy of the *Mau Mau* uprising by situating it outside the political realm. As Jock McCulloch explains in *Colonial Psychiatry and the African Mind*, the histories of the rebellion rather tended to pathologize the motivations of the *Mau Mau*. For example, McCulloch mentions the case of Michael Kirby, who relied on the notion of the clash of cultures to explain that it was the Gikuyu’s exposition to two sets of values and the frustrations this provoked that encouraged them to rebel (65). Ultimately, McCulloch notes,

when the British government sought to explain the causes of the uprising, it turned not to ethnologists and historians, but to a British psychiatrist named J.C. Carothers.

In *The Psychology of Mau Mau*, a report commissioned by the British government, Carothers, like other writers before him, turns to culture and psychology to depoliticize the causes of the *Mau Mau* uprising. The report arrives at many conclusions that were instrumental in the way the British government responded to the situation. To Carothers, the root causes of the conflict were to be found in distinctive features of Kikuyu culture and psychology, such as their reliance on animism, and their inability to properly manage anxiety. Carothers believed, for instance, that the African child was not encouraged to cultivate their natural sense of curiosity throughout their early development. This natural curiosity, which was stifled because of all too facile and final animistic explanations, was supposed to contribute to “frustrate man’s urge for speculation. So that the individual remains relatively unintegrated—an assemblage of memorized and disparate rules. Reflection, foresight and responsibility are rather components of his culture than of himself; misfortunes are never wholly his fault” (2). Carothers goes on to suggest that such African psychology is unfit for sustaining anxiety for long. In the absence of proper psychological development combined with the impossibility of evacuating anxiety through ritual procedures, the African must resort to some sort of action which “often takes forms that are marked by the highest degree of unconstraint and violence—a common experience in psychiatric practice in Africa” (3). Carothers also believed that Kikuyus, more than any other tribal group in Kenya, had a “forest psychology” that subjected them to “rumination on more personal lines, to secretiveness, to suspicion and to scheming” (5). In addition to the Kikuyu people’s “forest mentality,” Carothers also diagnosed a facility for dissociation that allowed Africans, in general, to live two incompatible lives alternately or simultaneously. This made them untrustworthy and unworthy of rehabilitation, especially the leaders of the movement and “others who are

simply psychopathic criminals” (19). As this quote suggests, the expert that the British colonial administration commissioned to explain the causes of the *Mau Mau* uprising blames everything on the Kikuyu and their psychology.

No wonder, McCulloch notes how Carothers and many of his contemporaries preferred to view the *Mau Mau* uprising as the result of a mental disturbance arising from the combination of the Kikuyu’s weak psychological processes and the anxieties generated by the cultural clash following European settlement. What the colonial commentators did not address, however, are the political, economic, and social disparities that may have led to such an armed revendication. For, example, there was no “reference to the varied impact over time of a cash economy, wage labour, urbanization or the segregationist policies of the colonial government” (66). It is the same process of delegitimization and depoliticization of opposition that we observe in *Matigari*. By depicting His Excellency Ole Excellence using the label “madness” against “the Patriots who survived the war of liberation,” Ngugi implicitly connects the colonial past and the postcolonial present. Pushing the absurd to the extreme, therefore, is simply a parody of a practice the postcolonial government has copied from the British colonial administration.

Postcolonial replication of colonial mad accusations

The accusations of madness and the characterization of political dissidents with other derogatory labels were frequent during the Arap Moi dictatorship when Ngugi was detained without trial because of the political significance of his writings. Ngugi also had direct personal experience with the government’s use of the madness narrative to discredit political dissidence. In his prison memoir *Detained*, he devotes some lines to explaining the significance of insanity both for the person in detention and the government detaining him. As

Ngugi recounts in his book, being detained for one's political views is a trying experience, one in which it is extremely difficult to remain sane. He notes how the state employs a variety of demoralization techniques to rob the individual of his sanity, starting at the moment of arrest, throughout the detention period, and even afterward. Detention without trial acts not only as a tool of physical and mental torture but also as "a calculated act of psychological terror against the struggling millions" (14). The center where Ngugi was detained had a few particularities that reinforce the belief that the government sought to foster madness among the political prisoners.

First, as Ngugi recalls, the place "used to be for the mentally deranged convicts before it was put to better use as a cage for 'the politically deranged'" (*Detained* 120). And while there, he came to view himself and the other detainees as lunatics in an asylum wandering, aimlessly, in circles in a compound too tiny "to give anybody the feel of purposeful walk or even the illusion of one." Ultimately, Ngugi concludes that, in a sense, they were truly mad because madness "after all is relative. It depends on who is calling the other mad. In a state of madmen, anybody who is not mad is mad." Although paradoxical, this remark seems coherent when viewed through the concept of the spiral of madness because, ironically, it is the people who are afraid to denounce state madness as well as those who believe in it and support it, who label those who reject it as being "mad." What is more shocking in the state's efforts to demonize dissidents is that it does not stop at labeling them mad, but also goes as far as to make them mad literally by administering psychotic drugs to political detainees who suffer from ordinary physical ailments.

Second, it appears that the government made the detention conditions so psychologically taxing that the prison doctor "expected a detainee to be mad or depressed unless proved otherwise" (*Detained* 7). In Adam Mathenge's letter, which Ngugi reproduces in his book, we can see how the detainee was denied proper treatment for his aching back.

Mathenge reports having the impression that someone in the government had misinformed the doctors about his mental state. To add insult to injury, the escorting police officers always chained him and treated him like a violent lunatic. He also reports that instead of being taken to a clinic for orthopedic treatment, he was being given pain-killers for his pain, and ativan and valium brain-tranquilizing tablets for mental instability: “cannot be given brain-tranquillizing tablets unless I am assumed mentally disturbed,” Mathenge adds (197-98). Mathenge’s deduction is logical. Are these drugs safe for mentally sane people? What are the effects of these drugs on mentally sane people? But what if these drugs were intentionally used to render political dissidents mad?

Psychotic treatment or Punishment?

As suggested in the case of Khaliif’s overnight madness in *Close Sesame*, there is a possibility that his madness was caused by haloperidol, which is supposed to treat the mentally disturbed. Usually, haloperidol is administered to patients who exhibit aggressive behavior or resistance. Since in the world of madmen, to borrow Ngugi’s word, political resistance is synonymous with madness, we find the regime injecting politically non-compliant individuals with antipsychotic drugs. Had the captives not been liberated from the mental hospital in *Matigari*, they would have most certainly been injected with such drugs. This would have reduced their power of resistance against the government. Far from being antithetical, injecting the medically sane with psychotic drugs has its logic because, in the eyes of the regime, docility and submission are normal, while resistance is abnormal. And as suggested before, since people generally assume that abnormal behavior must necessarily come from an abnormal mind, it is only normal for a dictatorial regime to administer psychotic medicine to politically deranged individuals. But it sometimes also happens that a government fails to capture and

give psychotic drugs to political activists. In such cases, as has been satirized by Ngugi in *Matigari*, a government may resort to public shaming and false accusations of madness against the political recalcitrant they cannot render mad through medication.

This is not something that just happens in the fictional universe. The Kenyan government has used this strategy been against Ngugi and other political dissidents in November 1988. A newspaper article reports that nationwide pro-government demonstrations were initiated to denounce jailed and exiled dissidents, including Ngugi, who is described as “simply a confused ideologue of suspect political leanings” (qtd. in Wamwere 192). Some demonstrators could be seen displaying placards with the names of the dissidents and derogatory labels attached: “I am called *mjinga*, (a fool), Professor Ngugi *wazimu* (a mad man), and Andrew Ngumba *mwizi* (a thief),” writes Wamwere (192, my italics). Here, we can see that what Ngugi paints as fiction in *Matigari* materialized in his own life a few years later. Unfortunately, what happens to *Matigari* in the fictional world and to Ngugi himself in the real world is a widespread tactic that many postcolonial regimes employ against their critics. Thus, what Ngugi portrays in *Matigari* about Kenya is, in many respects, comparable to the way Farah tackles the instrumentalization of madness in postcolonial Somalia in *Close Sesame*, which offers a more philosophical reflection on madness.

Chapter Twenty

From Medical to Metaphorical Madness in *Close Sesame*

In *Close Sesame*, Farah also situates the dictatorial regime's discourse on resistance as madness in the continuity between colonial and postcolonial practices. For Robert Colson, Farah achieves this end by creating a protagonist who has lived through various colonial administrations (18). But concerning the issue of madness in particular, the comparison between past and present political practices becomes more evident when Deeriye, compares Khaliif the madman to two figures in Somali folktale and history, namely, Wiil-Wall and Sayyid Mohamed Abdullahi Hassan, surnamed the Mad Mullah.¹³⁹ However, only the case of the Mad Mullah is relevant to my demonstration here. In *Close Sesame*, as a person who has lived under colonial domination, Deeriye has learned from an early age that the Sayyid was "the most important figure the Somali nation had ever produced," and he was "encouraged to learn all the Sayyid's poems by heart, which he did: his favourite was 'Death of Corfield,' composed and recited in 1912: the year Deeriye was born" (35). Like the historical Sayyid,

¹³⁹ According to Abdi A. Sheik-Abdi, the Sayyid "is considered by many in the Somalias and abroad as a national hero; a mighty warrior in the service of liberty, a grand mufti or a learned man and a tireless defender of the faith; and perhaps more importantly, for the purposes of this paper, one of the greatest poets, if not prophets, of all time" (2).

Deeriye in the novel has grown to be a national figure. After standing up against various colonial and postcolonial regimes, he ¹⁴⁰But was Deeriye mad because he defied the order of the Italian officer? Are other characters like Mursal, Deeriye's son, and his friends mad because they resist the General's tyranny? How does resistance to oppression lead to madness? What is the difference between this madness of resistance and other forms of madness such as clinical madness or the madness of dictators themselves?

“Now, who is mad?”

To answer these questions, we must first go back to Khaliif's first appearance in *Close Sesame* and the political implication of his madness. Here is some context from the neighborhood discussion. Taking advantage of a moment's silence from Khaliif, a young woman comes forward to tell the story of an African dictator who visited a madhouse, where he gave a two-hour-long speech before the assembly of madmen. After he finished his discourse, all the patients were asked to “sing the praise-names of their beloved benefactor: they all sang, save one man. The dictator noticed the man's sulky silence, he saw the man's defiant smile and thought he could even hear a slight chuckle from time to time as others sang loudly” (20). But who was this man who refused to sing the litanies of the dictator and who, even seemed to mock the whole spectacle? The dictator was so intrigued by the man that he asked the director who “*the madman*” (original italics) was before leaving the institution. The director tells the dictator that the man he referred to as the madman had been actually certified

¹⁴⁰ This had also been the history of the Sayyid, labeled the “Mad Mullah” mainly, but not only, because of his resistance to British and other colonial regimes. In *The Mad Mullah of Somaliland*, Douglas Jardine notes that the Sayyid's sobriquet first originated from his own people when he started preaching his unpopular doctrines. He was called *wadad wal*, which either translates as “the Mullah that is an idiot” or “the lunatic Mullah” (53). Although Jardine concedes that the qualifier “mad” can also signify divine inspiration, he ultimately suggests that the Sayyid's madness must have been a medical condition on the premise that, when he was young, “a Somali medicine man removed a bone from the top of his head, and this may have been the cause of his insanity” (54).

sane that same morning. Then, he jokingly said to the dictator: “You might say he was the only one in the room who had a certificate of sanity.” Although technically correct, the director’s comment can be interpreted in many ways.

Is Farah insinuating that the dictator is also mad because he does not have a certificate of sanity? Or is he mocking the dictator whose discourse and panegyrics can only be appreciated by the insane? Whatever the director meant by his remark, the dictator first laughs at the joke and gets angry right after that. After telling the director, “You are mad yourself,” he orders his guards to straightjacket the director, who now becomes the latest patient in the very institution he was administering (20-21). The story is ironic in many ways. Of course, the most obvious irony is the director of a mental institution who gets straight-jacketed and confined in his own institution. But Farah uses the young woman’s story to illustrate a few other crucial points as well. First, Robert Colson suggests that the mentally deranged patients’ attentive listening to the dictator’s long speech indicates that the only people who accept his discourse are the mentally ill (25). Colson’s conclusion certainly is legitimate. But it deserves further development. For instance, one can read the story in light of the link I previously established between propaganda, indoctrination, and madness. Thus, we can see the dictator’s discourse as propaganda and the fact that the patients are asked to sing his litanies as an indoctrinating process. As the dictator comes to propagate his inconsistencies in the hospital for the mentally ill, his speech is attentively listened to by all the patients, except the one who refuses to be indoctrinated by refusing to sing his panegyrics, and who ultimately turns out to be the only sane person in the room.

Another thing to learn from the story is how limited the dictator’s perception of madness is. It is even possible that he did not know that he had been speaking in front of the assembly of lunatics. Being mad himself but considering himself sane nonetheless, it seems like he is incapable of seeing madness as a medical or psychological condition. One way

Farah signals this to the reader is by using the definite article and italics for emphasis in his reference to the recalcitrant as “*the madman*” instead of “that madman”—which would have been more appropriate in an institution where all the patients are supposed to be madmen. The dictator’s use of “*the madman*” suggests that there is only one madman in the assembly, whereas “that madman” would mean that the dictator is talking about one specific madman among many. This ultimately suggests that the only madness the dictator can ever see is the madness of people who disagree with him.

Yet the use of irony is not an end in itself. It always serves to make a statement or to bring readers to ask themselves some critical questions. That is why, when the young woman has finished the story, Khaliif reassumes his role as a conscientious objector by posing what is probably the most crucial question in the novel: “Now who is mad? Down with those who kill, who humiliate and torture! Down with those who make use of unjustified methods of rule [...] Don’t the Arabs say, ‘Pinch the wisdom, o people, out of the mouths of the madmen’” (21). Although this quote is interesting in many respects, I am only interested in the challenging question Khaliif throws at his listeners. Khaliif’s question is an interesting one, and for Colson, Khaliif’s question is not a simple one, but it can be simplified by breaking it into a few more digestible questions:

Are the mad the mentally ill patients who listen unresponsively to the dictator? Are the mad those who are labeled mad, like the director of the institution, for crossing the dictator? Are the mad those who deliberately choose to resist, knowing that potential consequences for their actions include imprisonment, torture, or death for themselves and their loved ones? Or are the dictator and those who support him the mad? (26)

Khaliif’s question, as Colson breaks it down, moves the discourse on madness from the social to the political sphere. As it appears in this quote, multiple categories of people can be called mad. Firstly, there are the patients of the psychiatric institution who are clinically insane, and

who applauded the dictator's absurdities. Secondly, we have the man who refused to sing the litanies of the dictator, and who the dictator thinks is mad because of his non-conforming behavior. Thirdly, there is the director of the psychiatric institution, whom the dictator label mad because of a mad joke. And lastly, we have the dictator himself, who, possibly, did not even know he wandered into a madhouse. Now, he serves his poisonous cocktail of contradictions in front of lunatics and believes that the only person there who does not believe in his illogicalities must be mad.

In many respects, the question ("Now who is mad?") quite succinctly sums up the paradox this dissertation attempts to unpack: the spiral of madness is composed of behavior patterns that either surrender to or resist tyrannical methods of governing. Perhaps, instead of looking for who is truly mad among the categories listed above, we could ask the following question: in what sense is each of these categories mad? I have answered this question in part already. For instance, in Chapter Fifteen on "mad" dictators, I used the notions of derangement and personality disorder to demonstrate that some dictators can be said to be mad in the sense that their behavior exhibits some form of systematic derangement in perception, intention, or affect. For example, the Ruler of Aburiria can be considered mad because he firmly believes that he can erect a modern-day Tower of Babel that will reach into the heavens so that he can converse with God one-on-one. For the sake of my argument, let us now suppose that it was the Ruler of Aburiria who went to the madhouse to deliver a discourse on his project through propaganda and indoctrination. Would it be reasonable to claim that the dictator's discourse is an attempt at propagating his madness? And, would it be fair to call those who believe in the dictator's delusion "mad"?

Derek Wright would certainly respond in the affirmative, as he notes in consideration of *Close Sesame*, that the General's regime "itself hovers between madness and sanity and regularly strays beyond the bounds of reason in its eagerness to foster madness among its

subjects” (*Novels* 94). As Wright’s words indicate, Farah uses the story of the dictator talking to lunatics to show that madness is not just something the regime suffers from but also a method of ruling. Moreover, we can also see throughout the text how the regime’s attempt to make its citizens mad is both literal and figurative. In Khaliif’s case, for example, it was probably literal since the haloperidol injection affected the functioning of his brain. Therefore, we can argue that the dictator in the young woman’s story has gone to the mental hospital to foster madness in those who already are insane and to share his madness with those whom he has not yet rendered insane either through drugs (a medical or clinical condition), or propaganda and indoctrination (false beliefs and perceptions). It should be noted, however, that the dictator’s kind of madness, which proceeds from systematic derangement of perception, intention, or affect is different from the madness of those patients who are clinically insane, and of those who resist his tyranny. But what does it mean to be mad concerning that last category?

The madness of resistance

In *Close Sesame*, we reach the culminating point of the characterization of resistance as madness when we move from Khaliif’s public performances and Deeriye’s philosophical reflection to a more confrontational discussion about madness. The following extract is part of a conversation between Zeina and Mursal, the protagonist’s children. Zeinab begins:

‘Have you all gone mad? What is all this?’

‘Mad? No, we are not mad’

‘If you are not mad, I don’t know anyone who is.’

‘Each of us, woman or man, adult or child, is grabbing what he or she can; and doing it his or her way. The road is lonely, the journey tedious and long, the ideology

flimsy and badly defined. But we're not mad. We may be said to be badly organized.

But not mad.'

'Showing no care: Natasha. Samawade. Your father. Us. Do you care?'

'Each of us is doing it the lonely way, all the way, towards a healthy autonomy, Zeinab; one of self-definition or self-destruction, and away from familial (tribal) dependence. Are we mad? We're exacting the precise price and vengeance. But we're not mad. *Lex talionis!* Justice.'

'Do you know what this sounds like? This seems to be a very laborious way of justifying the madness in which we dwell, the kind of madness we've witnessed in this country and many countries in Africa, Asia and Latin America. And you know how I define it? Mass madness.'

'That's a beautiful phrase, I grant you.'

'Which is what dictatorships are, or create. Mass madness. Mass euphoria.'

(*Sesame* 138)

The dramatic dialogue between Mursal and his sister Zeinab is interesting as it plunges the reader into a philosophical debate that offers a *relativistic* and *perspectivistic* outlook on madness. Later, when their father enters the argument, Mursal exposes the hypocrisy with which society treats those who step or try to step out of conventional lines.

But this heated exchange takes place in a particular context that we should consider before thoroughly analyzing this dialogue. Mukhtaar, a member of Soyaan's underground group, who went missing for a few days (probably abducted by the regime), comes home looking disturbed. After observing Mukhtaar attentively, those who are present in the room immediately remember what happened to Khaliif a few years back: sane one evening, mad the following morning. The narrator's remarks once again suggest that the General's regime might be responsible for Mukhtaar's state: "A mind made into the symbol of disorder and indecision by the powers that be, a mind rendered useless because it cannot decipher these symbols, cannot tell apart good shadows from the bad, cannot distinguish between the

virtuous and the wicked. Mukhtaar—mad” (*Sesame* 130). Here, we can see that the word “mad” is used to refer to Mukhtaar, whose mind has been rendered dysfunctional by the regime. It seems, therefore, problematic to see Zeinab use the same word to characterize her brother, who, at the time of their conversation, is well in his mind. We can understand why Mursal denies being mad at first since the same word is used to describe two different realities.

Here, Mukhtaar’s clinical madness acts as a backdrop to Mursal’s categoric rejection of his sister’s claim of madness, which stands not for lack of reason only but for disorder, chaos, and violence. For instance, before calling her brother mad, Zeinab uses the same word to qualify the pandemonium of “toing and froing of men and women, some standing in corners whispering to one another, some in civilian clothes and yet others in military uniforms: they either entered or came out of Sheikh Ibrahim’s” (133). “We are witnessing a world gone mad,” she says. For Zeinab, then, madness, or “mass madness” as she calls it, is characteristic of dictatorships, the disorder, and chaos they engender. Ronald Aronson would undoubtedly agree with Zeinab’s rationale. In his essay “Social Madness,” Aronson offers a similar interpretation for some of the devastating twentieth-century state decisions, including Nazi Germany’s genocidal policies, the American attack on Vietnam, and Stalin’s authoritarian handling of Russia (which is comparable to the General’s in many respects). Aronson nevertheless warns about the risk of versing in rhetorical excesses, of being imprecise and confusing the social with the individual when we use the term “mad” as carelessly as does Zeinab in *Close Sesame*. As we can judge from the conversation and what happened at Sheikh Ibrahim’s, Zeinab’s use of the word is confusing, imprecise, and contradictory at times. For instance, she claims that dictatorships create madness, but she also calls people mad who seek to put an end to that madness.

Therefore, Mursal's disagreement with Zeinab's reasoning is rightly understandable. In a later conversation involving their father, Mursal offers his definition of a certain kind of madness and puts the weight of madness not on the person who is said to be mad, but on the people who call them so. Mursal attributes madness to societal biases and judgments that describe individuals as mad whose actions or words are not necessarily deranged but simply out of the unconventional. In Mursal's logic, his decision to kill the General or his friend Mahad's failed attempt to do so is only "exacting the precise price and vengeance" (138). When we look closer at the situation, Mursal and his friends are not as deranged as the regime, and Zeinab would like people to believe. They have their own logical explanation for their actions that the masses, as well as some members of their own families, cannot understand or are not willing to accept. Mursal goes on to expose a certain kind of hypocrisy in which the masses ostracize people stepping out of conventional borders at one time, but will immediately celebrate those same people as soon as their words or actions produce positive change in society: "It is only when the person so called proves to be right when history is on his or her side, it is only then that one hears a different position taken: that the person in question has been a visionary all along and the masses do not understand him" (141-42). To convince his interlocutors of the existence of this socially constructed madness, Mursal then reminds his father how people had called him mad because of his defiance of the colonial regime and how the British dubbed *the Sayyid* mad for the same reason. Now, the General's government is making people believe that his friend Mahad is mad because he attempted to kill the General.

Madness is a label

But would people still call him mad if he were to succeed? For Mursal, "if Mahad were to achieve what he set out to do: then he would become a hero. I am addressing myself to that

brand of madness as opposed to the one Zeinab refers to” (142, original italics). As we can see from this quotation, Mursal is implying that there are multiple brands of madness. I have previously distinguished three categories of madness but in the present case, Mursal’s distinction highlights two of those categories. The first one, which Mursal categorically rejects, is clinically and medically determined. We can situate Khaliif and Mukhtaar, whose state of mind requires some kind of psychiatric care, in this category. The second brand of madness, in which Mursal recognizes himself, is more social in nature and is determined by the outcome of an action. But how exactly does society decide what behavior is deviant or mad? To understand what Mursal is trying to convey, we may need a theoretical digression here and learn more about *labeling theory*.

The appeal to labeling theory at this point seems opportune to understand what Mursal means by society’s changing attitude regarding the result of an act of resistance. *Labeling theory* is a sociological approach to the study of deviance and crime that investigates the influence of labels on the behavior of people to whom they are applied. In *Outsiders: Studies in the Sociology of Deviance*, Howard Becker, the most influential labeling theorist, offers a new perspective on deviance and deviant behavior. He starts his line of thought by drawing attention to the social creation of deviant behavior. It consists of rules created by a particular society that determine the appropriate behavior and those that are not. The people who break the rules of good behavior are thus considered outsiders and deviants. But as Becker notes, many problems spring from this very process. The first one is that the person who is labeled an outsider may view that the rule they have supposedly broken is illegitimate, or that the people who judge them do not have the authority to do so. For Becker, therefore, a second meaning emerges when the rule breakers consider their judges to be outsiders (2-3). This may explain how, as Ngugi suggests in his memoir, everybody in the state of madmen ends up calling everyone else mad.

The second problem with the sociology of deviance is that behavior considered deviant by one social group may not be defined as such by another. I can relate this to the many incidents discussed in the chapters above when acts such as demanding government accountability or denouncing political and social injustices are taken for granted in democracies but described as deviant and even criminal in dictatorships. This observation, Becker argues, should alert us to the fact that a study of deviance need not stop at analyzing the deviant act and its perpetrator, but should also consider the “person making the judgment of deviance, the process by which that judgment is arrived at, and the situation in which it is made” (4). This remark confirms how I approach the spiral of madness in many respects. The individuals who label political activists as criminals or madmen and the situations of authoritarianism that elicited such political contestation, should be seen in a context of deviance in Becker’s sense.

Before giving his definition of deviance, Becker first has a critical look at other definitions and models of deviance, ranging from the statistical definition, considered “too far removed from the concern with rule-breaking which prompts scientific study of outsiders,” to a sociological perspective that “identifies deviance as the failure to obey group rules” (4-8). Although he accords some credit to the latter and considers it closest to his definition, Becker nevertheless maintains that this sociological view fails to account for many ambiguities and, notably, that people sometimes belong to multiple social groups at once. As Becker notes, one “may break the rule of one group by the very act of abiding by the rules of another group” (8). Becker’s definition rests on the premise that deviance is created by society and that “social groups create deviance by making the rules whose infraction constitutes deviance, and by applying those rules to particular people and labeling them as outsiders” (9). By this definition, deviance is located not so much in the perpetrator or the act, but rather in how society responds to the act labeled as deviant. After providing a definition of deviance that

accounts for both unambiguous and ambiguous cases, Becker proposes a sequential model of deviance in which can be found different types of deviant behavior as shown in the table below:

Table 2: Types of Deviant Behavior

	Obedient behavior	Rule-breaking behavior
Perceived as deviant	Falsely accused	Pure deviant
Not perceived as deviant	Conforming	Secret deviant

In this classification, my attention will rest on the two types of behavior perceived as deviant. The first type of behavior, false accusation, is described as a type of behavior that is perceived as deviant although it does not break a rule agreed upon. In *Matigari*, for example, I have demonstrated that people such as the teacher and the student have earned the label of criminal, not because they have disobeyed a law, but because they were treated thus for merely exercising their right to freedom of expression—which the government perceives as deviant. It is even possible to see the lives of Farah and Ngugi themselves in this light. As writers, they have both been driven into exile because they wrote something, a behavior that did not break any rule but which has been perceived by their respective regimes as wrongful and deviant. This analogy is possible because the dictatorships we have reviewed, whether in fiction or history, adorn themselves with the robe of democracy and all the rules that it entails. Hence, by calling themselves democracies, dictatorships theoretically guarantee the exercise of fundamental freedoms. Therefore, accusing artists and writers of committing a crime by the very exercise of their rights is a typical example of false accusation. The phrase generally goes that he who wants to kill his dog accuses it of having rabies. From what we have

witnessed so far, we are entitled to make a similar statement regarding politics by saying that the government that wants to imprison or kill a perceived political opponent will most likely accuse him of breaking the law.

On the other hand, if we look at the behavior of the dictator and his collaborators, it will certainly not be an overstatement to classify them in the purely deviant category, which is the kind of behavior that both breaks a rule *and* should be perceived as deviant. By indulging in the imprisonment, torture, and murder of others for exercising their fundamental rights, and by misappropriating public resources, the ruling elite violates the core principles of democracy. Although these acts break the rules of democratic governance and freedom, labeling them as deviant is much more complicated than in the first case. The problem arises regarding both social groups—the elite and the political activists—because only the former has the legal authority to label the latter as criminal or deviant. When a political activist or a citizen tries to label the government’s behavior as deviant, they are punished and assigned derogatory labels. In other words, they are assigned false labels for justifiably labeling a deviant act of the dictatorial regime as such. The arbitrariness with which dictatorial governments label deviant behavior is also a pivotal argument in Foucault’s analysis of power relationships: for Foucault, those in power define the judgmental or truth value of propositions. But in the *Order of Things*, Foucault’s absolute theory of categorial arbitrariness leaves no room for universally accepted principles such as those that govern the structures of democracy or authoritarianism, for example. Therefore, Foucault cannot cope with our case because everything is not arbitrary within the “madness” category. The scenes and dialogues in our novels suggest that some forms of madness are genuine while others are social inventions.

The use of false labels by dictatorial regimes to discredit people who expose political deviance is at the center of the discourse on madness at play in *Matigari* and *Close Sesame*. If

we consider, for example, Mursal's response to Zeinab labeling him as "mad," we can perceive Farah's effort to show that social groups create a particular brand of madness by calling some people mad. In his attempt to reason with his sister, Mursal refers to their father's history. Deeriye, as mentioned earlier, has been labeled mad by his people, not because he broke a rule. On the contrary, by refusing to betray the man who killed an Italian soldier in self-defense he was abiding by the rule of his social group that guaranteed asylum to a person in need. It is giving the man to the Italians that would have been rule-breaking. For instance, among his tribe, the man who told the Italians that the fugitive was given asylum in Deeriye's community was branded as a traitor of life, and the stigma of this label continues to haunt his descendants (183). But why was Deeriye, then, labeled mad if he had not broken any rule? What label would he have earned if he had handed the man over to the Italians? Deeriye's case is comparable to the popular myth surrounding the Austrian Military Order of Maria Theresa, which was awarded to "officers who turned the tide of battle by taking matters into their own hands and actively disobeying orders. Of course, if things went wrong, they were not decorated but court-martialed for disobedience" (Watzlawick 24). Deeriye himself would have been labeled a traitor for violating the hospitality rule of his community. Here it seems that whatever he does, giving the fugitive to the Italians or refusing to do so, he is doomed, unless he defeats the Italian. But why so?

For Becker and his labeling theory, this happens because some rules are enforced only when the act that breaks them produces certain consequences. The case of the unmarried mother is cited as a prime example of this type of discrimination in that "illicit sexual relations seldom result in severe punishment or social censure for the offenders. If, however, a girl becomes pregnant as a result of such activities the reaction of others is likely to be severe" (13). This is similar to what Mursal is saying in *Close Sesame* when he stresses that people assign labels depending on the outcome of an act of resistance. If his father has been called

mad, it was because his defiance of Italian authority resulted in the decimation of the clan's entire cattle. But had Deeriye's defiance driven the Italian officers away without any punishment, people would probably have called him a hero. The words Deeriye uses while trying to wrap his head around his son's definition of madness also suggest a kind of madness by the result of one's actions: "'It is not a condition then—I mean the one you're talking about?' said Deeriye. 'I don't think it is ... er ... madness if success or failure of one's activities in the end determines it. Do you?'" (142). In a way, Mursal's observation, which his father cannot quite yet grasp, validates the belief that deviance is created when members of a social group react negatively to an act or behavior.

Moving from the premise that society is a mix of competing interests and that interests diverge even within a single family, it is possible to suggest that people's reactions to an individual action will be as diverse as there are interests. The conversation between Mursal, Zeinab, and their father is an illustration of the fact that people seldom have a unified opinion about any act or subject matter. And even concerning the family conversation under scrutiny, it seems obvious that Mursal's intention to take social justice into his own hands does not receive the same response from his father and his sister. On the one hand, not only does his father not try to dissuade him, but he also restrains from asking for too many details about his shenanigans. On the other hand, there is his sister, who calls Mursal mad and attempts to make him change his mind, in other words, to inject some reason into his madness. It is significant here that, when failing to do so and seeing that their father tacitly approves of Mursal's decision, Zeinab ultimately throws in the big word: that they have gone *mad*. In a way, she is right since any attempt on a person's life is fundamentally a form of deviance. However, as I have argued above, any thorough study of deviance must also take into account the situation within which an act is labeled as "mad." In the case at hand, the context is authoritarian and political oppression in its various forms is commonplace. Here it can be

argued that the context that motivated Mursal and his friends' decision to use violence is deviant and mad. But is violence still the same kind of violence when it intervenes to end or prevent violence? Or, to continue with an analogy: is it still madness when a mad act is committed to put an end to madness? Satisfactorily answering these questions requires concepts, theoretical premises, and controversies that fall outside the scope of the present subject matter. Nevertheless, it must be said that violence appears legitimate in situations, such as, in the private context, a woman's use of violence against a violent husband and, in the public context, a state's monopoly on legitimate violence. Responding to his sister's inquisitions, Mursal invokes the rule of the *lex talionis*, implying that violence against a General who kills and imprisons is neither violence nor madness, but justice.¹⁴¹

As for the reason why Zeinab calls Mursal mad, we have to look at the possible consequences she invokes. In her attempt to talk some sense into her brother's madness, Zeinab tells Mursal that he might finish in prison or get killed. What will become of his wife and son? Does he not care about them, or his father? As these questions suggest, Zeinab's reticence has to do with the negative consequences that might ensue from Mursal's attempt to kill the General. Her fears are justified in many respects. First, she lost her husband for the nationalist cause. Second, she is justified because the odds are against Mursal. All his friends who have tried to take action before him have ended badly: Soyaan and Mukhtaar are dead, Ibrahim is taken for interrogation, and Mahad is apprehended after he attempted to take a guard's revolver to shoot the General. Mursal's chances of succeeding are very slim compared to the probability of death or capture.

Yet, despite all the risks incurred, Mursal is not deterred. And this is exactly what Zeinab does not understand. Here, Zeineb's lack of understanding followed by her accusation

¹⁴¹ *Lex talionis*, commonly known as "an eye for an eye," is the law of retributive justice in kind that punishes a crime with a sanction of the same nature.

of madness against her brother proceeds from a simple fact that has already been discussed in my chapter on fearful silence: that living beings are programmed for self-preservation. Anyone whose behavior shows otherwise is considered abnormal, reckless, and ultimately mad. By accepting the risks of death and imprisonment, Mursal appears suicidal to his sister and he, therefore, places himself in the very category of people whose actions seem to defy human understanding. An attentive reading of the conversation between Deeriye and his children also reveals that there is a form of madness that is not a medical condition like Khaliif's and Mukhtaar's after they have been given the injection of haloperidol. Mural's madness is fashioned by the reaction of his sister, who fails to understand his logic. His madness is therefore nothing but a label since it does not have any physiological basis.

A semantic battle concerning madness

The kind of madness disputed by Zeinab and Mursal also finds some validation in the formulations of Michel Foucault and psychiatrist Thomas Szasz on the sociopolitical implications of madness and the role of psychiatry. Of course, there are many differences between Foucault and Szasz, but critics generally agree that they have a similar view on the gradual medicalization of madness. In his book *Hegel's Theory of Madness*, Daniel Berthold-Bond discusses some of their differences and similarities and notes that while both Foucault and Szasz are

temperamentally, philosophically, and methodologically poles apart, they share a basic perspective of madness as essentially constituted or even invented by historically changing social and political interests. Madness, from this point of view, is not finally a medical phenomenon at all, but a phenomenon of social engineering, manipulation, and coercion, and of the politically motivated labeling of deviant behavior. (178-79)

What Berthold-Bond highlights about Szasz and Foucault in this quotation places both theorists within the confines of *labeling theory*, as Berthold-Bond himself states explicitly a few pages later (184). As I have already situated the philosophical discussion between Deeriye and his children within this theory, I see no need to expand on it further at this point. Here, I would like to focus on the proposition, common with both Foucault and Szasz, that madness is not a medical phenomenon but a socially and politically determined phenomenon constructed through a process of *semantic transformation*. Retrospectively, the dispute between Mursal and Zeinab now seems first and foremost a *semantic* battle, as they struggle to define Mursal's behavior through different labels. Zeinab calls Mursal's decision to kill the General *madness*, while Mursal himself calls it *justice*.

To return to Foucault and Szasz's view on madness, Berthold-Bond makes an interesting point that goes in the direction of my conclusion regarding the medical baselessness of Zeinab's accusation of madness against her brother. As Berthold-Bond rightly observes, for Foucault and Szasz, who deny "any reality to madness above and beyond its social constitution, any form of psychiatric therapy will, *ex hypothesis*, have no foundation but be a mask for social control and coercion" (201). Although Foucault and Szasz's denial of any medical foundation to psychiatric care explains some cases of madness we witness in our novels (such as Matigari in *Matigari*), their totalizing approach to madness fails to account for other cases of madness that are the result of medically determinable effects, and which require psychiatric intervention (e.g., Khaliif in *Close Sesame*). Although like Foucault and Szasz, both Farah and Ngugi maintain that psychiatric confinement is a form of social control, their view on madness derives from an approach of a constructed deviance that not only relies on pluralism but also looks for real and substantial issues beyond that pluralism, evidence that acknowledges the usefulness of psychiatry.

Thus, this proposition goes against the inexistence of mental illnesses as proposed by Szasz in his seminal book *The Myth of Mental Illness: Foundations of a Theory of Personal Conduct*. In this book, Szasz not only questions the labels associated with mental illness but goes further to negate the very existence of “such things as mental illness” (1). To support his theory, he proposes a total of ten principal arguments. Although I do not entirely subscribe to Szasz’s theory, many of his points provide meaningful insights into the characterization of madness in both *Matigari* and *Close Sesame*. The core argument of Szasz’s formulation is that a mental illness is not real disease in the same sense as a bodily illness. For Szasz, while the latter is literal in that their identification relies on the observation of the patient’s body, the former is metaphorical and is identified by observing the patient’s behavior (12). According to Szasz, the myth of mental illness was invented when psychiatrists and physicians started considering problems of living and the unhappiness of human beings as literal diseases (73). The metaphorical nature of mental illnesses is also a fundamental argument in Szasz’s formulation.¹⁴² The third supporting claim of the myth of mental illnesses is that psychiatric

¹⁴² To support his theory, Szasz offers a number of core arguments:

1. Strictly speaking, disease or illness can affect only the body; hence, there can be no mental illness.
2. ‘Mental illness’ is a metaphor. Minds can be ‘sick’ only in the sense that jokes are ‘sick’ or economies are ‘sick.’
3. Psychiatric diagnoses are stigmatizing labels, phrased to resemble medical diagnoses and applied to persons whose behavior annoys or offends others.
4. Those who suffer from and complain of their own behavior are usually classified as ‘neurotic’; those whose behavior makes others suffer, and about whom others complain, are usually classified as ‘psychotic.’
5. Mental illness is not something a person has, but is something he does or is.
6. If there is no mental illness there can be no hospitalization, treatment, or cure for it. Of course, people may change their behavior or personality, with or without psychiatric intervention. Such intervention is nowadays called ‘treatment,’ and the change, if it proceeds in a direction approved by society, ‘recovery’ or ‘cure.’
7. The introduction of psychiatric considerations into the administration of the criminal law—for example, the insanity plea and verdict, diagnoses of mental incompetence to stand trial, and so forth—corrupt the law and victimize the subject on whose behalf they are ostensibly employed.
8. Personal conduct is always rule-following, strategic, and meaningful. Patterns of interpersonal and social relations may be regarded and analyzed as if they were games, the behavior of the players being governed by explicit or tacit game rules.
9. In most types of voluntary psychotherapy, the therapist tries to elucidate the inexplicit game rules by which the client conducts himself; and to help the client scrutinize the goals and values of the life games he plays.
10. There is no medical,

diagnoses “are stigmatizing labels, phrased to resemble medical diagnoses and applied to persons whose behavior annoys or offends others” (267). Again, as I contended before, I do not entirely subscribe to Szasz’s totalizing perspective on mental illnesses but what he claims in this quotation accurately describes cases of instrumentalized madness in our novels.

Szasz’s arguments regarding the myth of mental illnesses have many applications in the characterization of madness in both *Matigari* and *Close Sesame*. First, in *Close Sesame*, the argument that mental illnesses are metaphorical rather than real diseases supports the distinction that Mursal and Deeriye make between madness as a medical condition and madness as a label. Although there is no debate or reflection on madness in *Matigari*, it also stands clear that the kind of madness that the government assigns to Matigari and the other political fugitives has no medical basis. Following the fact that Matigari’s madness is not a real disease, there is no legitimate reason to confine him. The following quote from Szasz fairly illustrates this point:

Being the member of a community, a religion, a nation, a civilization entails joining the cast of a particular national-religious-cultural drama and accepting certain parts of the play as facts, not just props necessary to support the narrative. Thus, we in the West today accept as facts that the earth is spherical, that lead is heavier than water, that malaria, melanoma, and mental illness are diseases. As against this perspective, I maintain that while there are mental patients, there are no mental illnesses. There is no mental illness or madness either—in the bodies of the denominated subjects or in nature. Instead, there is a mental illness role into which a person is cast by his family and society, which he then assumes and plays, or against which he rebels and from which he tries to escape. Occasionally, individuals teach themselves how to be mental patients and assume the role without

moral, or legal justification for involuntary psychiatric interventions. They are crimes against humanity. (267-68)

parental or societal pressure to do so, in order to escape certain unbearably painful situations or the burdens of ordinary life. (“Sickness or Status?” 25)

This quotation not only reiterates the nonexistence of mental illnesses, and the idea that medical and psychiatric care is a form of social control, but it also introduces the notion of *roleplay*, which I will come back to later in my discussion of feigned madness. What Szasz says in this quotation is consistent with how the governments in both *Matigari* and *Close Sesame* use madness against their critics. In the former, Matigari and other political activists have been cast into the role of the mad while in the latter, Mahad’s assassination attempt has been described by the General’s regime as an act of madness. As Szasz argues in the quotation above, the role of the mentally ill is often imposed on the individual, who either assumes it or rejects it. But most interestingly, as Szasz also points out, occasionally it even happens that some individuals voluntarily teach themselves to play the script of madness without being pressured into it interactively.

From imposed to voluntary madness

Szasz’s analogization of community life to drama and performance also strongly reflects Colson’s interpretation of madness as a performance in *Close Sesame*. In his exploration of the performative and discursive functions of madness, Colson offers a reading of madness in *Close Sesame* that moves away from the more obvious definitions of madness “as a consequence of the trauma that ensues from resisting the regime, a result of the fear of capture and punishment, or a result of actual capture, punishment, torture, and/or detention” (2). Colson rather views madness as a performance strategy that allows the performers to resist unjustified power, and to protect themselves from the adverse reactions of the power they

resist (2).¹⁴³ Colson's words reveal another aspect of the instrumentalization of madness in that it does not benefit only the regime that calls activists mad but also these activists who are called mad.

I have previously discussed the case of imposed madness by family members, society, or the government. The novel thing to stress at this point is to show how characters like Matigari rebel against his role as a mentally ill person. Matigari does not accept the role into which he is cast, and his breakout from the mental hospital can be seen as symbolizing his attempt to escape that role. Mursal's disagreement with his sister's diagnosis in *Close Sesame* is a more complicated case to decide, as it shows both rejection and acceptance. Although this seems contradictory, this is because the dispute between both siblings showcases two brands of madness: one is medical, which Mursal vehemently rejects, and the other is metaphorical and political, which he gladly assumes. It is possible to argue so because there seems to be an evolution in his discourse, as he moves from the categorical "we are not mad" to a definition of the mad person as a visionary individual misunderstood by his people and labeled mad for that very reason.

Another element that may have appeared obvious throughout my discussion of imposed madness, which Szasz also points out, is that a false accusation of madness serves the interests of those who impose it on the individual. If the government in *Matigari* paints political activists as criminals or madmen, it is primarily because they want to divert attention from their incompetence and from the social and political injustices they foster. Similarly, in *Close Sesame*, the General's regime employs the discourse of madness to mask the fact that

¹⁴³ In his analysis of the characterization of political resistance as madness, Colson focuses on two personalities in colonial East Africa. The first one is the Somali national hero known as the Sayyid or the "Mad Mullah." He is frequently mentioned by the protagonist in *Close Sesame*, who views him as his role model. The second figure Colson uses in his analysis is Carothers, a psychiatrist who practiced in colonial Kenya and whom the British government had called upon to produce a report on the motivation of the *Mau Mau* freedom fighters. I have discussed some of this above (see pp. 358-60).

there are legitimate concerns to complain about in the country and that there are legitimate reasons why some would want to kill the General. By painting any attempt at resisting their tyranny as madness, dictatorial regimes in the novels under discussion project the abnormality in their methods of ruling onto those who challenge their false narrative. Considered this way, it is even more justified to see psychiatric care as a form of social control of behavior as suggested by Foucault and Szasz.

Let us now turn to the implications of a voluntary impersonation of the role of the mentally ill, or of any other social role for that matter. This will not only answer our question but it will also shed some additional light on what has already been discussed regarding distortion in the postcolonial state. Szasz defines impersonation as “the assumption or imitation of someone else’s appearance, character, condition, or social role” (*The Myth* 231). For him, impersonation is to be differentiated from *role-taking* which is consistent, honest role-playing. *Impersonation*, on the other hand, stands for inconsistent and dishonest role-playing. Impersonation is a characteristic of human behavior that arises from our desire to be better and more important than what we actually are.¹⁴⁴ But one interesting question that Szasz raises is how to “distinguish ordinary role-taking from impersonation,” knowing that, “in principle at least, every human activity or role can be imitated” (235). This is also, in a way, the biggest question we have in *Close Sesame*: is Khaliif mad, or is he just pretending to be so? However, Khaliif is not the only character labeled mad in the novel. Here, I would like to focus on the case of Mahad, whom the General’s regime describes as mad after he attempted to assassinate the Head of State. But is Mahad mad?

¹⁴⁴ For Szasz, this desire is generally strongest among children and individuals who are, or consider themselves, inferior or oppressed. Retrospectively, we can here recognize the theme of inferiority complex discussed in the previous chapter, which lead a character like Tajirika in *Wizard of the Crow*, who considers himself inferior to the white man, to want to become white not only in his manners but also by his skin color.

Before discussing the case of Mahad's feigned madness, I would like to pause for a moment to summarize certain points. At this point in my analysis of the theme of madness, a few things have been made clear. First, it appears that madness can be medical or metaphorical and that not everyone who is labeled mad is mad in the literal sense of the term. Secondly, labeling someone mad primarily serves the interest of those who label, whether it is the family, society in general, or a particular government. These two hypotheses are well illustrated in *Matigari* and *Close Sesame*, where the holders of power have instrumentalized the psychiatric profession for their personal benefit. They use claims of madness to oppress and discredit political activists and their actions. Also, as mentioned before, most of the time, individuals are cast into this role by the powerful, but it occasionally happens that someone voluntarily endorses the role of the mad. But why would someone want to be considered mad? As shall be discussed below, it appears that albeit there is social stigma associated with the role of the mentally ill, there are also benefits in impersonating this role.

Feigned madness as resistance against madness

Focusing on the case of such a character as Mahad, I want to argue that the regime's attempt to ascribe the assassination tentative to the realm of madness does not benefit the regime only. On the contrary, it appears that being labeled mad was Mahad's objective because it also benefits their movement. Madness, here, should be seen as a strategy intended to distract attention from the seriousness of their actions. And herein lies the greatest advantage that the mad have over the sane: they are not taken seriously.¹⁴⁵ A mad person can, as children and the old often do, hurl the gravest profanities and menaces at somebody and face no consequences. Farah's depiction of Khaliif places madness on a similar trajectory. People wonder how he

¹⁴⁵ See above, pp. 349-51 on the role of the court jester in medieval and renaissance Europe.

can mention the names and titles of high government officers suspected of making him mad and go untouched (17). And for Colson, the protective element of madness is best exemplified in Mursal's reaction when Yassin, whose family Khaliif has pointed accusing fingers at, readies himself to pelt the madman with another round of stones:

Yassin, the ten-year-old grandson of Cigaa whose house Khaliif had described earlier as wicked, was collecting more pebbles and stones and indicating, with great relish, that he would pelt Khaliif if he said another word. Yassin stared stonily at all the inimical gazes trained on him. A moment later, his support came in the persons of his mother and his aunt, both, it appeared, ready to out-shout anyone, mad or sane, ready to protect their Yassin. Someone in the crowd said the women and the little boy were mad. (21)

It is only then that Mursal, who has been a spectator to the scene, steps forward and becomes an active participant in the performance of madness as he offers his protection to the madman by commanding Yassin to drop his stones—which he does. Even in this scene, Farah manages to put madness in perspective and seems to suggest, once again, that no one, unless he is also mad, ever takes a madman seriously.

Apart from the advantage of not being taken seriously, the mad are known to operate alone and without premeditation. Given all the advantages considered here, it is possible to assume that by impersonating the role of the madman, by intentionally making his assassination attempt appear as an act of madness, Mahad manages to reap the benefits associated with being mad. As one eyewitness to the incident would tell Mursal afterward, the General was shaking hands with ministers and other important personalities after delivering his annual speech when Mahad, “possessed by an unpremeditated act of madness, grabbed the revolver from one of the General's guards and tried to shoot the target” (83). Before I go into the details of Mahad's impersonation of the madman, it is important to consider a similar incident of strategic performance of madness. A few days after Mahad's failed coup attempt,

another member of the underground group is caught near the General's residence trying to plant a time bomb. The newspaper's account of the incident, which is also the version of the government that Zeinab reads to those present, has it that the man was caught in the act and "told to drop everything and to raise his hands above his head. But the man, mad that he was (I am translating the text directly), attempted to pull a revolver out of one of his pockets" (218-19). The newspaper also offers a short version of the man's history in which he is painted as a good-for-nothing man, a drunkard who "was working alone and not in collaboration with any dissident either inside or outside the country" (220). For Colson, acts of political resistance like this "have the effect of shielding from harm the members of the madmen's families because the regime is so convinced of its own discourse of madness: only a crazy person, it suggests, would act out against the regime" (27). I can only agree with Colson when he says that acting under the guise of madness protects the relatives of coup plotters from the wrath of the regime. However, whether the version of the story that the government put in the newspaper is what it genuinely believes, or whether it is pure propaganda is another story.¹⁴⁶ But at the same time, Colson's assertion that the regime is convinced of the madness of its opponents can hardly be disputed if I am to apply the perspectivistic approach to madness this study is proposing since, as has been discussed before, each society, regime, and individual can define deviancy or madness on their own terms.

After this little digression, let me now come back to the question of Mahad and feigned madness. If we take the government's version at face value, we are obliged to assume that Mahad and the other man have succeeded in convincing the regime that their assassination attempts are acts of madness committed in the heat of the moment without premeditation. This essentially has the benefit of disconnecting themselves and their acts from

¹⁴⁶ See above, pp. 279-82, on the clandestine group's divisive debate on whether the General is a fool or not.

the rest of their dissident group. Consequently, the government will not look for accomplices—these acts of madness are supposed to be the work of lone men without any political revendication and, therefore, have no legitimate reason whatsoever to take the life of the General. But are these men really mad, as the government reported in the newspaper? To Deeriye, the protagonist in *Close Sesame*, it is difficult to believe that Mahad, whom he knows personally, has effectively gone mad. He has a few questions on his mind, and he does not hesitate to put them to his son Mursal as soon as he has the opportunity: “Was Mahad’s act of madness premeditated?” (90). Seeing his son’s uncollaborative reaction, Deeriye continues his inquiry: “I am not asking you how much you know or contribute towards the planning of this act of unorganized madness. But how premeditated was it?” To his father’s questions, Mursal responds that he is not going to answer. Upon further inquiry, Mursal tells his father that it does not matter whether the act was premeditated or not as long as one refers to it as an act of madness. Seeing that Mursal is determined not to speak, Deeriye offers his interpretation of Mahad’s act of madness:

What if the *four* of you worked out this act of collective madness to make it seem to all concerned that there was nothing planned or premeditated about it? The Head of State, while mingling with the diplomats, jurists and other dignitaries, walks in front of Mahad and this man, sane one second and mad the next, reaches for the bodyguard’s revolver, manages to pull it out of its sheath and tries to shoot. What if you worked it all out beforehand? (90-91)

As we can infer from this reasoning, Deeriye questions whether there is a possibility that Mahad and his friends, including Mursal, planned the assassination of the General but decided to make it look like the act of a madman, a person who acted on the spur of the moment and for no reason. Thus, they may have succeeded in duping a lot of people, but Deeriye is not convinced by the performance.

When Mursal leaves the house one morning without telling anyone where he is going, it becomes clear to his relatives that, like his friends before him, he will attempt to take action against the General. In consideration of Mursal recent discourses on private justice and public justice, Deeriye logically concludes that the time has come for his son to become either a hero or a martyr. It is only after a few days that the family receives confirmation of Mursal death. Deeriye explains to his brother-in-law and Zeinab the difficulties he faced during his various imprisonments and the reasons why he has visions and speaks to his dead wife in his sleep. He starts his explanation by saying: “To speak of that about which others are silent and to remain sane at the same time is a very difficult task. The difficulties I had to face are enormous. I have been on the fringe of *madness* the past forty years: the *madness* of which I talk is in itself a political statement” (252, original italics). The words Deeriye speaks here fall in line with his son’s vision about the kind of madness that is created by society and by totalitarian regimes in particular. Deeriye’s use of the words “the *madness* of which I talk” and the fact that Farah italicized the word madness also suggests, as has been noted previously, that there are multiple kinds of madness, two of which are present in this quote. This, I believe, can be suggested by contrasting the first sentence where Deeriye uses the word sane and the last two sentences where he uses the term *madness* in italics. Through the notion of insanity, we can understand madness as a clinical condition, while madness as a political statement represents the act of doing something irresponsible such as attempting to take the life of the General—which the regime characterizes as madness. In his latter elaborations, it becomes clear that Deeriye has managed to retain his sanity regarding both types of madness because of his visions and the conversations he has with his late wife in his sleep: “But she [Nadiifa] kept me company, she helped me stay sane, she talked to me when I need someone to converse with” (253). From these words, we can understand that the visions

play a crucial role in helping Deeriye stay sane through his difficult times. But will he be able to stay sane after the loss of his son? Or will he lose his mind and avenge his son?

While Mursal's family mourns the death of Mursal, Khaliif the madman shows up at the house and demands to see Deeriye. Surprisingly, this time, he is dressed in a military uniform, "his chest decked with ribbons of honour and medallions," in clear imitation of the General (257). For Colson, "Khaliif's costume and actions are quite obviously a reference to the General, but they are also a call to arms for Deeriye. As he goes down to meet with Khaliif, he considers himself part of 'a delegation from the world of the mad, to meet the sane,' again reversing their perceived roles" (28). Colson's interpretation of this encounter rightly notices the inversion of roles between the sane and the mad, which is a consistent motif in Farah's characterization of madness in *Close Sesame*. But I would like to push the reading one point further. The novel does not reveal what Deeriye and Khaliif told one another. However, we do learn that after their meeting, Deeriye decides to follow the path of resistance, or madness if one views things from the regime's perspective. He goes to his late son's study, fetches his revolver, and requests a meeting with the General. He then leaves the house without letting anyone know about his destination or his plans. After walking for a while, he finds himself in front of a door, ready to press the doorbell as he reflects on the possible outcomes of his attempt to kill the General: "If his attempt failed, people would say he had gone mad, he thought to himself as he readied himself to press the doorbell, and if he succeeded he would be made a hero" (259). Will he succeed and thus be made a hero, or will he fail and be considered a madman like the other martyrs before him?

Unfortunately, Deeriye, like his son Mursal, meets a tragic death without being able to hit his target. The account of the incident, which has been pieced together from multiple versions, plunges the reader into another mystery:

No one could account for Deeriye's movements for three solid days. And it took the best part of the fourth day to piece together stories stranded with gaps nobody could fill ... Into what dark hole of mystery did he disappear between being seen with Khaliif and turning up, arrayed in army uniform, marching in rhythm with the other soldiers—and, standing at attention before the General who was awarding medals to the heroes of the land, pulling out, by mistake, prayer-beads instead of a revolver to shoot the General dead? (Another version told how the prayer-beads, like a boa-constrictor, entwined themselves around the muzzle of the revolver and Deeriye could not disentangle them in time.) He was an easy target, now that he hadn't hit his. The general's bodyguards emptied into him cartridges of machine-gun fire until his body was cut nearly in half. (260)

As we can see from this passage, not only the events leading to Deeriye's face-to-face with the General are unclear, but also the reason for his failure to shoot his target is the object of speculation. In his analysis of the politico-religious significance of Deeriye's death, Derek Wright justifiably points to Farah's preference for open-ended narratives and plurality of opinions ("Going to" 25). In an interview with Armando Pajalich, Farah insists on the democratic drift of his writing and associates the act of allowing multiple different views with democracy. For Farah, this is the opposite of "patriarchies, tyrannical regimes, authoritarian policies or peoples, [who] have always insisted there is one way of looking at things" (63). In the case of *Close Sesame*, leaving the circumstances of Deeriye's death open to multiple interpretations is stimulating for the hobbyist reader and a daunting challenge posed to the critical reader. But for my part, I am only interested in how Deeriye's decision to kill the General can be interpreted from the perspective of madness and to understand what made Deeriye, who has "been on the fringe of madness the past forty" years, finally cross the line between sanity and madness. Did Khaliif the madman have something to do with it? Has he infected Deeriye with his madness?

An inescapable spiral of madness

Because previously resistance has been equated with madness, it is here possible to interpret Deeriye's assassination attempt on the General as an act of madness. But did Khaliif the madman have something to do with it? In accordance with the suggestion above that the madness of resistance is contagious, I propose to view the meeting between Deeriye and Khaliif as a madness-sharing moment. The kind of madness in question here may not be a real disease, but it is all the same contagious as a virus. For tyrannical regimes, resistance to oppression is the most infectious disease there can be. The more it spreads, the more their rule and their lives are threatened—which for them justifies all the extreme measures they use against recalcitrant characters in our novels. And somehow, as ridiculous as it may seem to talk about a character infecting another with madness, this is what we read in one of the government announcements regarding Ngaruro, the political activist described as a madman in *Matigari*:

The police have shot one of the escaped madmen. He has been identified as Ngaruro wa Kiri. He was rushed into hospital in a critical condition. Before he was shot down, he demonstrated violent tendencies and boasted how he was going to make the rest of the workers mad. He even tried to influence the security forces, by telling them that they too were workers and that they were being used by the government of capitalists, landlords and imperialists as watchdogs. (135-36)

A close reading of this quote shows that what the government refers to as madness is resistance to exploitation and injustice. By claiming that Ngaruro wanted to infect the rest of the workers with his madness, the government is saying in a veiled manner that he wanted to convince his fellow worker to resist oppression. This is also what we read in the last sentence of the quote when the police claim that Ngaruro tried to “influence” the security forces. We

should also note that what Ngaruro told the security forces is consistent with reality—which in turn makes the claim of madness invalid. Were Ngaruro's words to contradict or distort reality, the police would be right in claiming that he was mad. Following what I suggested earlier regarding propaganda and indoctrination, he would therefore be sharing his madness through propaganda. The fact is that in the present case, Ngaruro's reasoning is grounded in reality, and by trying to convince other workers, he uses persuasion and not propaganda. He is not propagating madness but common sense.

It follows from the above that only if we juxtapose madness and resistance can we understand that madness has become an instrument that dictators use to stigmatize and discredit protesters with legitimate demands for change. The novels have also shown that authoritarian regimes use other derogatory labels such as “criminal” and “rebel” for the same goal. For example, *In Wizard of the Crow*, Nyawira is labeled as a rebel because of her activism against the Ruler's misgovernance. In analyzing accusations of madness in *Matigari* and *Close Sesame*, it appears that dictators mainly make these accusations because they have understood that no one ever takes madmen seriously and that once a person is known as being mad, nobody gives credit to their words, however truthful they may be. Still, dictators and their governments are not the only characters who know this about madness. Some recalcitrant characters like Medina and other members of her clandestine group are also aware that no one takes a fool or a madman seriously. But instead of viewing this as a curse, they have decided to play the role of the mad person, so that their isolated political actions do not draw attention to the whole political project.

All of the above, therefore, leads me to believe that madness is practically inescapable in the postcolonial worlds of the novels I have discussed. To exhibit a behavior pertaining to the circle of madness means to be mad in the sense that one must deny reality in one form or another. At the same time, to act outside of this circle means to be mad, in that one must act

contrary to prescribed behavior. To resist authoritarianism means to be mad as much as it is to surrender to it. In this assumption lies the paradox of the spiral of madness in postcolonial dictatorships.

Chapter Twenty-One

Conclusion: What have we learnt from Farah and Ngugi?

In this study, I have endeavored to demonstrate how Farah and Ngugi's portrayal of certain aspects of dictatorship shows that postcolonial regimes and their citizens are entrapped in an interminable cycle of madness. More specifically, using selected novels by Ngugi wa Thiong'o and Nuruddin Farah, I discussed how some forms of silence, distortion, madness, and resistance are part of a framework of behavior patterns that we can observe in contexts of abusive exercise of power. In demonstrating the existence of what I call the *spiral of madness* in postcolonial Africa as portrayed in my corpus, I have drawn theoretical insight from a wide range of disciplines including, but not limited to, political science, cultural studies, psychology, and sociology. In my analysis of the spiral of madness in my corpus, my objective was not to show how similarly or differently Farah and Ngugi portray postcolonial African dictatorships but to demonstrate how both authors concur to convey a certain sense of African realism regarding the period after colonization when dictatorship was the order of the day.

My theoretical and contextual discussion about silence and the state of freedom of expression in these novels reveals that there is a type of silence in politics that is defined, not

by the absence of speech, but by the act of avoiding the discussion of specific topics or the voicing of certain opinions. In consideration of Jakobson's functional model of language (see Chapter Five), silence can then be characterized as *referential* because its imposition on the individual or its choice by them are both dictated by a person or thing that is spoken of. This places information at the center of this type of silence. As it transpires from my analysis of the novels, in the particular context of dictatorship, silence can be understood not so much as the absence of speech or language, but as the withholding of information or the refraining from discussing certain kinds of social or political issues. It is a type of silence that assumes either a positive or a negative value judgment, depending on the specific form in which it manifests itself.

When silence in the face of injustice is elicited by fear as portrayed in both novels, we can call it *fearful silence*. Thus, in *Matigari*, not only do we see characters such as the teacher and the student refraining from talking about political incompetence for fear of imprisonment, but we also witness the protagonist admonishing them for their cowardly attitude. And because fearful silence can also allow such injustice to endure we can equally call it *complicit silence*. In *Sweet and Sour Milk*, Ahmed-Wellie identifies the same form of silence when he sadly remarks that people generally justify their silence and inaction by claiming that they have a family to care for and that they don't want to go to prison and let them starve. While emphasizing the factor of fear, I have argued that *fearful silence* is not innate but learned through conditioning and social transmission, and that by using force, or merely by threatening to use it, autocratic regimes as depicted in our novels succeed in reducing the masses to silence.

In Chapters Seven and Eight, I explored a second form of silence in the context of politics that our novels allegorize, i.e., *protective silence*. This silence is not motivated by self-preservation like fearful silence but is motivated by the desire to protect sensitive

information, a project, or a person. Throughout the novels, it becomes apparent that governments have set up different mechanisms and systems that allow them to collect information about things the characters plan to do that can affect the functioning and the longevity of the regime. Surveillance apparatuses in *Matigari* and the *Variations* trilogy rely essentially on human means. Informers are disseminated throughout the country in almost every place or gathering, including classrooms and prisons in *Matigari*, and homes in *Variations*. That the regimes have devised such methods to spy on their citizenry is common knowledge in both fictional worlds. We frequently see individuals scan their surroundings before discussing sensitive subjects, pause in their discussion, or lower their voices when in the proximity of strangers. Multiple times also, these informed individuals warn their more credulous interlocutors to observe some sort of restraint while talking to strangers. In *Matigari*, for instance, the character who is a murderer warns Matigari not to reveal all his plans to strangers, in the midst of whom a spy is operating. This also applies to the more obvious cases, when sometimes, regimes opt for a more confrontational and brutal approach to collecting information. Euphemistically called *enhanced interrogation*, torture can pursue various objectives, including punishment and extraction of information. Here, too, if the individual wants to protect the information he holds, he has to maintain a certain form of silence that is protective in nature.

Silence in the face of social injustices and government incompetence as portrayed by Farah and Ngugi is, thus, different from silence in the contexts of surveillance and torture. One is elicited by fear, and the other by the desire to protect. The difference between both forms of silence also reveals the duality of state violence regarding silence. In the case of fearfulness, the state exercises violence to silence the individual. As to protective silence, the state uses violence to make the individual talk. But other than being about concealing information, both forms of silence discussed above have a further similarity: they are also

forms of denial. As a social phenomenon, silence is a common form of denial when we refuse to publicly acknowledge a reality that we are aware of. As a psychological phenomenon, silence as a form of denial can also be seen as a defense mechanism. Then it is only one small step from denying an uncomfortable truth to distorting it. This is also where silence, distortion, and madness interconnect, since all three behavior patterns reject reality in one form or another. But I will come back to this point after recapitulating the remaining elements of the spiral of madness.

Silence and madness are related in a paradoxical way. In *Matigari* the regime considers silence as sanity. When the protagonist persists in asking questions others dare not to ask, he soon starts receiving warnings that his questions will lead him to a mental hospital. Somehow, those who say that Matigari is mad are right because Matigari seems to can speak even with a knife under his throat. For many, only a madman can behave this. The regime exploits this common misconception and later paints Matigari as a madman for speaking and telling the truth. But these claims seem contradictory for many reasons. Yet, it sounds fallacious to call someone mad because he speaks about the uncomfortable reality he sees, while others who deny that same reality through silence are considered sane. Secondly, as portrayed in our novels, the form of silence we observe in the face of repression is most of the time the result of conditioning through terror. I have used Joost Meerloo's concept of *menticide* to demonstrate that in such authoritarian contexts, the masses who are ruled by fear instead of reason are in what we can call a state of mass madness, which is also the term Zeinab uses in Farah's *Close Sesame* to characterize the chaotic and disordered world of dictatorships.¹⁴⁷

Generally defined as a gross reshaping of reality, *distortion* is only a sophisticated word for the common behavior known as lying. Just like silence, it comes in many forms. But

¹⁴⁷ See above, p. 370.

I have chosen to orient my analysis towards one major distinction: whether the distortions of the political regimes portrayed in the novels under discussion are intentional or not. The exploration of intentional distortion in *Variations* has revealed that in the realm of politics, distortion is intentional insofar as it is motivated by some kind of material gain. First, I argue that political actors regularly distort facts to advance their self-interest. Second, the conditions for the allocation of economic privileges create a kind of spoils system combined with tribalism that invites the elite and most civil servants to hold a certain political viewpoint to have a job. This, therefore, often leads to a discrepancy between an individual's private opinion that he can express at home and the views he will express publicly. We can also see this as a form of distortion, which I have discussed as *preference falsification*.¹⁴⁸

Moreover, Farah's portrayal of political tribalism shows how some African dictators squander the resources of their country in their search for consent from the various ethnic communities that form their nations. Thus, the General distributes the spoils in *Variations*, using the resources of the country as a carrot to reward his clansmen and his political allies, while he gives the stick to those who disagree with his rule—either by barring them from enjoying the same benefits as his allies or by repressing them. Yet, it also appears that in some cases, a dictator can use wealth to buy the consent of people who oppose him. The examples of Soyaan in *Sweet and Sour Milk* and Samater in *Sardines*, who both work with the General, invite readers to think twice before condemning individuals who collaborate with dictatorial regimes. For example, Loyaan, whom his twin brother calls a saboteur, was working in the General's government before his death, but he only did so to be able to undermine the regime from within. As for Samater, the General forced him to accept his nomination to a ministerial position. Samater's case also shows another dilemma in that he must either accept the post or the General will imprison members of his clan. In the end, Samater succumbs to the

¹⁴⁸ See Chapter Ten

supplications of his clansmen. Ultimately, this also invites reflection upon Keynan's lies about his late son's political convictions in *Sweet and Sour Milk*. Has he also been pressured to behave in the way he did? In any case, lying for material benefit remains a morally debatable question. But what about lies that are unintentional and not materially motivated?

Unintentional distortion is another pervasive phenomenon portrayed in our novels: when an individual tells a lie unknowingly. One way this happens is when a person repeats a lie he is told while believing it to be true—in which case calling such a person a liar can be disputed. Sometimes, distortion simply invites itself into the stories we tell. I recall starting my argument by suggesting that storytelling is naturally prone to distortion for many reasons, some of which are tolerable and even encouraged. But whether distortion is morally wrong, or the symptom of a psycho-cognitive problem depends on the goal of the storyteller. For instance, it has been found that more lies are told when storytelling has an entertaining purpose, compared to storytelling with an accuracy goal in mind. The novels I have analyzed are stories and as such, they can be submitted to the same distinction. Thus, Farah's trilogy, which generally pertains to the literary modernist, realist and historical fiction genre, appears more accurate than Ngugi's *Wizard of the Crow*, which is not only more entertaining but also far more hyperbolic. In the latter novel, the author combines the satirical and the magical to produce an overly exaggerated fictional world of the characters. Ngugi also emphasizes and distinguishes between exaggeration as a literary technique used for emphasis, and exaggeration in real life—or the real life of characters. On the one hand, we understand that the narrator uses hyperbole as a storytelling device—which is perfectly acceptable. On the other hand, the exaggerations of the character Arigaigai, who acts as a witness in the novel, appear disturbing not so much because of the lies themselves, but more because he seems to be lying for no apparent reason. This invites more reflection on the credibility and the mental fitness of the storyteller.

One thing to learn from the above is that although lying may be morally wrong, it remains a normal act and should be considered as such as long as it does not extend across a certain timespan or exceed certain proportions. However, lying can become pathological when it is chronic and disproportionate, and especially when it is used for a discernible end. The difficulty with pathological lying is that it is a behavior that pertains neither to the sane nor the insane since the pathological liar does not believe in his own lies. But whether lying is motivated by material incentives or caused by some cognitive disturbances, it contradicts objective truth and can therefore be equated with madness. In a public context, it is not only difficult to distinguish who lies for one of the reasons mentioned above and who lies for the other, but it is even more delicate to tell the liar from the deluded, or the pretender from the believer. Here also, we are faced with the same paradox we have observed in a society ruled by fear and silence. The sad truth is that a protagonist like Matigari is painted by the government as mad for telling the sad reality as it is, while the lying elite and their collaborators consider themselves sane. And though the pathological liar might not be insane, he is only one step from distorting reality to losing touch with it.

In the fourth part of my study, I have explored the *theme of madness* in Farah's *Variations* trilogy and Ngugi's *Wizard of the Crow*. Madness being a particularly complex notion, I restricted my theoretical chapter to the colonial encounter and the possible psychological effects it had on the colonized. To properly understand the psychology of the postcolonial individual, it was, first, necessary to look back at how colonization inculcated a certain mentality into the colonial subject. While Sigmund Freud's psychoanalytical approach to the human mind suggests that *the ego's failure to mediate between the id and the superego* must have caused some individuals to go insane before the advent of colonialism, findings from cultural and social studies demonstrate that the imposition of new cultural norms during colonization caused other forms of alienation that were passed down to generations decades

after the end of colonization. Hence after my theoretical and contextual analysis, my focus shifted to the postcolonial subject's psychology in *Wizard of the Crow*. Using, for instance, concepts from psychoanalysis and cultural psychology, I have explained, using Ngugi's *Wizard of the Crow*, how most colonized and postcolonial individuals suffer from an inferiority complex that is the result of colonial education. Through the character of Tajirika and the concept of *white-ache*, Ngugi grotesquely but also poignantly succeeds in depicting the black man's inferiority complex, which ultimately manifests itself in Tajirika's desire to turn white.¹⁴⁹ As portrayed in sickness of the Ruler of Aburiria, even a dictator, who has immense powers and riches, can suffer from this inferiority complex.

But typically, the postcolonial dictator has psychological problems that are associated with the exercise of power. Through the characters of the General and the Ruler of Aburiria in *Variations* and *Wizard of the Crow*, respectively, both Farah and Ngugi also raise insightful questions about the mental soundness of political leaders, and dictators in particular. Because dictators exhibit abnormal behavior, it is generally argued that there is something abnormal with their brain and their overall pattern of thinking. While there may be some truth to this common assumption, care should nevertheless be taken not to confine political leaders to the realm of insanity too quickly. Sometimes, madness can be instrumentalized for political purposes, and believing that a dictator is a fool when he is not can prevent his opponents from taking appropriate actions. Such a calculated instrumentalization of madness is known as the *madman theory*. Because some political activists also know that fools and madmen are rarely taken seriously, they take the regime's accusations of madness as an opportunity to act without betraying their project and their accomplices.

The novels also show how dictators often try to infect their citizens with their madness through propaganda and indoctrination. By madness, I mean false beliefs that dictators often

¹⁴⁹ See above, Chapter Fourteen.

try to make their populations believe. Ngugi and Farah present two different, incomplete but complementary, sides to indoctrination and propaganda. In *Variations*, Farah presents propaganda and indoctrination from the outside and paints the phenomenon of personality cults as irrational. Characters who sing the praises of the General are shown as mindless religious devotees. Ngugi's *Wizard of the Crow*, on the other hand, lets readers into the private sphere of power and shows personality cults as instances of preference falsification. All of the dictator's close collaborators, except Tajirika, only praise him for rewards. But in the end, it does not matter whether they sing the praises of the dictator out of devotion or under false pretenses. Both the believers and the pretenders publicly present the same image, of people who worships a human being and who must have obviously lost their mind to partake in such an illogical act. Somehow, to believe in the illogicalities and delusions of a dictator and to prostrate before him as if he were God looks like madness. And when such a phenomenon takes enormous proportions, terms such as mass madness, mass psychosis are also applicable.

Silence, distortion, and madness, therefore, form a circle in which people, willingly or otherwise, deny, distort, or lose touch with reality. Characters like the teacher and the student in *Matigari*, and Keynan in *Sweet and Sour Milk* belong in this circle because their lies and silences not only reject the existence of uncomfortable truths but also give credence to authoritarian mass madness. Other characters such as Matigari in *Matigari*, Nyawira in *Wizard of the Crow*, and Loyaan and Mursal in the *Variations* trilogy have chosen the path of resistance by grounding themselves in reality. In *Matigari*, the protagonist refuses to be silent while the masses live in constant fear of repression. Loyaan, in *Sweet and Sour Milk*, is determined to expose the government's lies about his brother. And in *Wizard of the Crow*, Nyawira risks her life to denounce the Ruler's madness.

Given the preceding observations, it appears that the individuals who resist the dictates of the authoritarian regime are the only ones who *live outside the circle of madness*. As Matigari's actions show, speaking is an act of resistance in a context where silence is imposed. It also means that Matigari is sane because by speaking he acknowledges what he sees. The case of Loyaan demonstrates that telling the truth is also an act of resistance in a setting where lying is the norm. This equally points to the fact that Loyaan is sane because he refuses to repeat the lies of the regime. But the problem is that such acts of resistance entail dire consequences for their actors. Most of the time, dictatorial regimes respond to such acts with repression and intimidation. But there are also softer methods in their arsenal. They may try, as we have discovered with Loyaan's nomination as ambassador to Belgrade, to sway some recalcitrant individuals through bribery and other material incentives. Or, as chapter four shows, they may also use some specific propaganda techniques such as name-calling, labeling, and demonization to stigmatize and ostracize political opponents in an attempt to turn the whole of society against them. I hypothesized that this is an attempt at sharing the regime's madness, i.e., their delusions, and their illogicalities with the masses. Remaining sane in such a world is in itself an act of resistance.

The problem, however, is that *dictatorial regimes often characterize all attempts to escape the circle of madness as madness*. It is, thus, through this accusatory inversion—or projection—that a spiral is created in which the mad call someone else mad because they refuse to be mad. When Matigari and other activists refuse to be silent, the government first paints them as criminals and then as madmen. In *Close Sesame*, all attempts to kill the General have been labeled as madness. Ultimately, as all the novels studied show, whenever dictatorial regimes claim that protesters have no sound reason to protest, they are indirectly calling such protesters mad. But how can protesters who see, acknowledge, and publicly

profess the existence of political injustice be mad? What about the silent, the liars, and the deluded who act as though no injustice existed? Are they not mad as well?

The concept of the *spiral of madness*, which I have applied to the dictatorial regimes depicted by Farah and Ngugi, has been inspired by Carroll Quigley's definition of politics as the business of how consent is obtained. According to Quigley, governments can seek consent in three ways: at the military level by force, at the economic level by wealth, and at the intellectual level by persuasion. It follows from the reading of my corpus through this lens that, although this assumption applies to any type of regime, we will observe an order of preference in the use of the three methods by different types of regimes. Ideally, in democratic regimes, persuasion through an exchange of ideas and debate should be the most common way to seek consent. Mild corruption and bribery would be next in order, while violence would be used only as a last resort. In dictatorial regimes, on which I have been focusing my attention, the use of force is more common, followed by rampant corruption and bribery. At the intellectual level, attempts at persuasion through political debate seem minimal if not inexistent in dictatorships. Instead of persuasion, however, there will be an abuse of persuasion and education in the form of propaganda and indoctrination.

While it transpires that these methods can effectively produce consent, they may also provoke various *forms of resistance*. Thus, the use of force can yield consent in the form of silence, but it can also set in motion some form of resistance. In circumstances where the majority is silent in the face of injustice, a few individuals will denounce it at the peril of their lives. Similarly, when a dictatorial regime uses wealth to buy consent, the elite and most civil servants will distort their political convictions to get or keep their jobs. Here also, some will reject the dictator's material incentives and will tell the truth not only in the secrecy of their bedrooms, but also in public. Lastly, it also appears, that the use of propaganda and

indoctrination can produce consent in the form of madness. While many believe in the lies of the regime, a few others resist indoctrination and propaganda by remaining sane.

To sum up, silence, distortion, and madness can be said to form a *circle of madness* because they allow the individual to *reject uncomfortable reality*. Outside of this circle, some resist and try to escape from the *circle of madness* because they not only acknowledge the existence of injustice but also demand justice. At first sight, there seem to be two categories of individuals: those who are mad and those who resist. Where things become confusing and complicated, however, is that dictatorial regimes often view any deviation from acquiescent behavior as madness. Somehow, people who seek to escape the circle of madness are cast back into it through this characterization of resistance as madness. A spiral of madness is thus created in which everyone calls everyone else mad. Ultimately, it appears that the only person who retains his sanity by speaking up against injustice, telling the truth, and seeing through the government's illogicalities is the one whom society and the regime call mad. On the other hand, the deniers and the deluded, including the members of the elite and the dictator himself consider themselves and are considered, sane. It is precisely in those distinctions that the paradox of madness in postcolonial politics lies.

Through their novels, Farah and Ngugi not only depict an outside postcolonial world but also the inner automatisms that are triggered when the postcolonial individual is confronted with an undue exercise of power. It would be interesting to see future research in political science and postcolonial studies analyze further the behavior of the postcolonial subject through the prism of the spiral of madness. Postcolonial literary critics could, for example, test the validity of the spiral in other works of fiction. Finally, this work is also addressed to all of us as an invitation to reflect upon our own ways of thinking and acting in the face of uncomfortable truths. Working with the concepts introduced in this study will help us better understand in what way our refusal to see or to speak up implicitly contributes to the

endurance of all kinds of discrimination in many different fields. The characters of Matigari, Loyaan, Nyawira, and Deeriye, as well as the authors who created them should inspire us with the ways in which they have resisted tyranny at the peril of their lives.

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