

“A War Between Buffoons”? Censorship and Self-Censorship in Postcolonial Literature

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1. Censorship, Self-Censorship and Postcolonial Allegory

While Censorship Studies is a flowering discipline with notable outcomes (Jansen 1991, Holquist 1994, etc.), its developments in the field of Postcolonial Studies are still tentative. In particular, the lack of definitions such as “postcolonial censorship” might be due to a number of reasons, including the absence of comparative surveys in favor of the specific analysis of individual case studies. On the other hand, an enduring suspicion of Orientalism (Said 1978) is equally cast on the attempt to represent the postcolonial world as a homogeneous political entity. From the perspective of censorship, such a koiné would be inevitably affected by severe limitations to the “freedom of expression”, reinforcing, thus, those clichés which are inextricably related to the stereotyped conception of “postcolonial dictatorship”. The latter, in fact, often works as a mystification of that postcolonial nationalism which was, in turn, an essential historical stage in the constitution of many postcolonial nations (Lazarus 2011).

While avoiding such clichéd representations, the main goal of this article is to show how issues of censorship – in particular, their cultural and political implications, rather than their impact in terms of textual philology – are crucial to at least one definition of postcolonial literature, considering allegory as its dominant rhetorical mode (Jameson 1986, Slemon 1988). «In the simplest terms», in fact, «allegory says one thing and means another» (Fletcher 1964: 2): it is fundamentally distinct from the mimetic mode, as «this double meaning is indicated in the work in an *explicit* fashion: it does not proceed from the reader’s interpretation (whether arbitrary or not)» (Todorov 1975: 63). This conventional definition of allegory, as historically codified in the tradition beginning with Aristotle’s *Poetics*,

underlines the necessity for writers to find a rhetorical solution for their struggles with censorship and self-censorship without necessarily putting their lives or their works at risk.

In view of this, some critical perspectives on postcolonial allegory might also contribute to this conjectural discussion of "postcolonial censorship". Stephen Slemon, for instance, conceives allegory as «involved with questions of history and tradition», since «[a]llegorical writing involves doubling or reduplicating extratextual material» (1988: 158). This leads to a relationship of anteriority/posteriority between textual and extratextual worlds which – following Paul De Man's notorious study on the "rhetorics of temporality" (1969) – places «an awareness of the passage of time [...] at the heart of allegory» (Slemon 1988: 158). The nexus of allegory and history turns out to be different in Western literature, where allegories are concerned either «with redeeming or recuperating the past», and in postcolonial literature, where allegories specifically intend to transform «the imperial myth of history» (1988: 158). By restoring those histories which were systematically denied and/or omitted within colonial narratives, postcolonial literature struggles against the silence imposed on the colonized populations as a peculiar form of colonial censorship (Chin 2009). At the same time, the transformation of history which is inherent to postcolonial literature is based on a series of elements which are inevitably marked as "new" and "other". This leads to a case for «paradoxical doubleness or ambivalence», as postcolonial literature is «already constituted within institutional and generic constraints whose work it is to package and displace the counter-discursive force [...] under a sign of secondariness, derivation, simulacrum, or mimicry» (Slemon 1989: 100).

"Newness" and "otherness" are not only ambivalent: they are also what the «postcolonial exotic» capitalizes on, that is «both on the widespread circulation of ideas about cultural otherness and on the worldwide trafficking of culturally 'othered' artifacts and goods» (Huggan 2001: 28). As a consequence, the struggle against the censorship of colonial narratives is always coupled with the never-ending entanglement of censorship and self-censorship which is specifically due to market rules (Jansen 1991). Market-produced censorship and self-censorship are also part of that «negotiation» which Holquist (1994: 17) considers to be the characterizing feature of all types of censorship – avoiding, thus, the interpretations of the relationship between freedom of speech and censorship as either a bourgeois romantic opposition to the political order or an entirely bureaucratic issue.

According to Fredric Jameson, on the other hand, postcolonial allegories are inextricably linked to the national. He establishes this relationship on the basis of a different nexus of public and private in the Third World, compared to the First World¹: «[t]hird-world texts, even those which are seemingly private and invested with properly libidinal dynamic, necessarily project a political dimension in the form of national allegory: the story of the private individual destiny is always an allegory of the embattled situation of the public third-world culture and society» (1986: 69, emphasis in the original). The public-private split characterizing Western societies is eventually reconciled within postcolonial literature, since, according to Jameson, «third-world cultures» act according to Deleuze and Guattari's «conception of desire that is at once social and individual» (1986: 79), as proposed in their fundamental essay titled *Anti-Oedipus* (1977). Although social desire can be explored in many different ways, due to its “de-territorialization”, Jameson argues that its main “re-territorialization”, in the case of third-world cultures, should be found in the realm of the postcolonial nation.

As a consequence, the national allegories theorized by Jameson should not be read as pure literary renderings of postcolonial nations or of the postcolonial bourgeois nationalism (Irr-Buchanan 2005: 173-188). For Jameson, «[t]he “nation” is the name for a discursive, epistemological problematic [...] a reified “cultural pattern” that “having once been part of the solution a dilemma, then become[s] part of the new problem”²» (Szeman 2001: 816-817). Being a cultural pattern, the nation works like the cultural logic of late capitalism – in Jameson's theory of postmodernism (1991) – or like the political unconscious (Jameson 1981), that is, as a «metacommentary» (Buchanan 2006: 16). This is a crucial argument in Jameson's work, as it directly derives from Jameson's conception of the work of art:

The work of art does not make [...] things meaningful – they are already meaningful – but rather transforms their meaning, or else rearranges them in such a way as to heighten and intensify their meaningfulness. This process is not arbitrary, however, but follows an inner logic that can be abstracted [...]. Jameson's hypothesis is that this logic takes the form of a censorship, the

¹ Jameson's terminology derives from the Cold War political lexicon, as he explicitly contends (1986: 67), avoiding, thus, the axiological considerations which are linked to the use of these definitions in neocolonial discourses.

² Both quotations are taken from Jameson's essay (1986: 78).

internally consistent and inwardly felt need not to say some things and try to say other things in their place. [...] Metacommentary "implies a model not unlike the Freudian hermeneutics"³ [...], provided it is understood that the object of the game is not to redeem or to restore the suppressed content, but to uncover the logic of that suppression. (Buchanan 2006: 14-15)

In other words, national allegories clearly expose the content of the Freudian process of repression and censorship which is constantly faced by any work of art. In view of this, Jameson's focus on the national is far from restoring the idea of "postcolonial censorship" as a purely national issue, pointing, instead, at that entanglement of censorship and self-censorship which is common to the work of every writer, be it from the First or the Third World.

Whether postcolonial allegory entails a transformation of colonial and postcolonial history or a metacommentary on the form of the newly decolonized nations, both interpretations are of an help in the deconstruction of the nexus of "postcolonial censorship" and dictatorship. In particular, they avoid the emphasis on the romantic opposition between the freedom of art and political constraints, as well as the identification of the latter with the clichéd, colonial figures of "bloody dictators", suggesting, instead, an allegorical interpretation which enlarges the scope of the analysis beyond the clichés and their ideological outreach.

Given these premises, this article focuses on some literary texts – Salman Rushdie's *Haroun and the Sea of Stories* (1990) and *Shalimar the Clown* (2005), as well as Nuruddin Farah's trilogy "Variations on the Theme of an African Dictatorship" (1979-1983) – in which postcolonial allegory is deployed as a means to resist the nexus of "postcolonial censorship" and "dictatorship", be it of political or religious origins. In addition to this, all these texts resort to a specific narrative device in order to deal with censorship and self-censorship, as they invariably include a couple formed by the clown (as a peculiar embodiment of the writer) and the dictator in their narratives. The relationship between "clowns/artists" and "dictators" is at once staged and deconstructed, partially coinciding, thus, with the most renowned theorization of this coupling, which can be retraced in Norman Manea's 1992 book *On Clowns: The Dictator and the Artist*.

Triggered by his own experience of censorship during Ceaușescu's regime (1967-1989), as well as by Fellini's film *I clowns*

³ The quotation is taken from Jameson's *The Ideologies of Theory, Essays 1971-1986. Vol. 1: The Situations of Theory* (1988: 13).

(“The Clowns”, 1970), the reflections of the Romanian writer are based on the assumption that both the artist and the dictator are buffoons. Differently from Rushdie and Farah, however, Manea strongly emphasizes the polarized dichotomy existing between the two figures. Whereas the artist embodies the “poor Auguste” – the definition is taken from the title of Manea’s previous book *Auguste the Fool’s Apprenticeship Years* (1979) – trying to expose political evil by causing laughter, the dictator is the «White Clown» (Manea 1993: 37) who laughs while committing atrocities.

Later in the essay, Manea eventually admits that the two buffoons share much more than expected: according to him, this is due, first of all, to human psychology, which is intrinsically ambivalent (1993: 55). Therefore, he points at the authoritarian behaviors of artists, while he also investigates the possibility of an artistic penchant in the attitude of dictators and tyrants.

Despite his interest in human psychology, however, Manea does not conceive the work of art as a perpetual entanglement of censorship and self-censorship in a Freudian, or Jamesonian, sense. Neither is he concerned with issues of market censorship as producing self-censorship, as his criticism exclusively regards political and institutional repression.

Finally, his treatment of the couple formed by the clown/artist and the dictator is clearly essayistic (holding a clearly subjective and detached point of view), rather than novelistic and allegorical. Manea’s suggestion about «history of the circus as History» (1993: 37) is more ironic than allegorical, as it does not lead either to the transformation of history or to the constitution of the work of art as a metacommentary on the “cultural pattern” of the nation. The analysis of Rushdie’s and Farah’s works, on the other hand, might help to shed a proper light on these two aspects of postcolonial allegory.

2. Salman Rushdie: from *Haroun and the Sea of Stories* (1990) to *Joseph Anton* (2012)

Published in 1990, *Haroun and the Sea of Stories* – hereafter called *Haroun* – is Salman Rushdie’s first book after *The Satanic Verses* (1988) and the *fatwa* issued in 1989 by the Iranian ayatollah Khomeini. Starting from this evidence and from the specific genre chosen by the author – the children’s tale – *Haroun* has been often read as Rushdie’s

creative response to the censorship caused in many countries by the *fatwa*⁴.

In this regard, *Haroun's* plot seems to be quite revealing, with most of the names of characters and locations being taken from the Hindustani language and providing the text with multiple linguistic and semantic layers. While the storyteller Rashid Khalifa is touring the country of Alifbay ("the alphabet") to support local politicians with his wonderful tales, he suddenly loses his ability to tell stories. He is travelling with his son Haroun, who soon discovers that his father had taken his inspiration as a storyteller from the legendary Sea of Stories. Thanks to some magic helpers, they both embark on a journey to the Sea of Stories, in order to restore Rashid's power. They reach the land of Kahani ("story"), where two populations are at war: the Guppees (living in the illuminated part of the country, where reality is thoroughly based on the inventiveness of imagination), led by Prince Bolo (his name means "speak!", in Hindustani), and the Chupwalas (living in the shadow, without any capacity to speak), led by the priest Khattam-Shud (meaning "completely finished", "over and done with"). Haroun plays a decisive role in the battle in which the Guppees defeat the Chupwalas, eventually restoring the alternation of light and dark all over the land. Once returned to the country of Alifbay, Rashid recovers his storytelling skills, but he does not intend to use it anymore on behalf of politicians.

The allegoric potential of the chosen genre, the easy identifications of Rashid with Rushdie and the priest Khattam-Shud with ayatollah Khomeini, as well as the repeated dichotomy of "words" and "silence" have contributed to the interpretation of *Haroun* as a fable about the opposition between censorship and freedom of speech, which is eventually won by the latter. *Haroun*, however, is not only a «banal didactic fiction» siding with «pluralist individualism» (Aravamudan 1995: 327-328): it is, instead, a contemporary postcolonial allegory with multiple layers of meanings, which are not even exempt from contradictions⁵.

⁴ A *fatwa* is a legal opinion or learned interpretation provided by a qualified Islamic jurist or religious leader. Although a *fatwa* does not require full conformity in the whole Islamic world, *The Satanic Verses* was banned in several Muslim countries, as well as in other nations like India or South Africa.

⁵ In this regard, Eva König maintains that *Haroun* should not be qualified as an allegorical fable at all, since «the narrative has several elements that contradict this allegorical level of signification. Allegory must have a decodable meaning if it is to signify at all, and its meaning cannot

It might be fairly argued, for instance, that the war between the Guppees and the Chupwalas does not represent a neat binary opposition between an army defending “freedom of speech” and another one supporting “censorship”. There are many similarities, indeed, linking the Guppees and the Chupwalas, starting from linguistic evidence: «[t]he very words in the phonetic minimal pair Gup and Chup sound very much alike to English-speaking readers. This underlines the essential similarity of the two cultures and points to the fact that the perceived differences between the worlds they signify are only arbitrary» (König 2006: 55). In addition to his, after meeting both the Guppees and the Chupwalas, Haroun concludes: «‘Opposites attract, as they say’» and, more importantly, «[...] silence had its own grace and beauty (just as speech could be graceless and ugly)» (Rushdie 1990: 125).

Decisively, it is the similarity between the two armies in the final showdown which entails a cultural and political reconsideration of their opposition:

Chup City was in the deep heart of the Perpetual Darkness, and the air was so cold that it would freeze into icicles on people’s noses, and hang there until it was broken off. For this reason, the Chupwalas who lived there wore little spherical nosewarmers that gave them the look of circus clowns, except that the nosewarmers were black. (1990: 179)

However, also the Guppees wear nosewarmers: «Red nosewarmers were issued to the Pages of Gup as they marched into the Darkness. ‘Really, this is beginning to look like a war between buffoons,’ thought Rashid the storyteller as he put on his false red nose» (ibid.). The identification of both the Guppees and the Chupwalas with clowns, wearing red or black nosewarmers, erases much of the difference between the two factions, whose war might be apparently codified as the opposition between censorship and freedom of speech, but it is only slightly different from a «war between buffoons». Earlier in the novel, Haroun had also noted that: «“I always thought storytelling was like juggling. You keep a lot of different tales

stand in contradiction to its own textuality» (2006: 54). Whereas the first part of her contention proves to be true, the conclusion is not equally evident, as internal contradictions might undermine the unilateral didacticism of a fable, but they do not necessarily clash with the structure of a contemporary allegory (Copeland-Struck 2010: 267).

in the air, and juggle them up and down, and if you're good you don't drop any. So maybe juggling is a kind of storytelling"» (1990: 109).

While this helps to neutralize the opposition between storytellers and dictators, the double linkage – between storytellers and jugglers and between Guppees and Chupwalas – does not lead, however, to a complete cultural and political relativism. The war is eventually won by the Guppees and the only casualty – although he is not directly killed by anybody – is Khattam-Shud, embodying Khomeini.

In this regard, Butt the Hoopoe, one of Haroun's magic helpers, comments: «"[W]hat is the point of giving persons Freedom of Speech, if you then say they must not utilize the same? And is not the Power of Speech the greatest power of all? Then surely it must be exercised to the full?"» (1990: 119). It might be fairly argued that «the Hoopoe's response, however it appears predicated on a monologic view of freedom and democracy, yet points to the inherent use as well as abuse of such freedom» (Krishnan 1995: 70), by placing this analysis in the context of the relationship between freedom and responsibility. The same passage, however, could be also read as an enlargement of the allegorical scope of the narration, towards that transformation of colonial and postcolonial history which is, according to Slemon, the main goal of postcolonial allegory.

Other elements are equally relevant to this interpretation. The land of Kahani has been divided into two regions – the Guppee's side is illuminated, while the Chupwalas' one is left in the darkness – since the tecnocrats working for the Guppees, significantly nicknamed Eggheads, actually stole light from the Chupwalas' territory (Rushdie 1990: 80). In addition to this, the Sea of Stories is polluted not only because the Chupwalas poisoned it, but also because the Guppees let it rot, as they explicitly confess: «"We let [the stories] rot, we abandoned them [...]. We lost touch with our beginnings, with our roots"» (146). Both elements can be interpreted as references going beyond the case of censorship suffered by Rushdie: they point, instead, at colonial history, which saw colonial powers purportedly exporting Western liberal values, including "freedom of speech", while they were technologically enforcing their brutal -rule on the colonized populations, with native cultures rotting in an irremediable way.

Following Slemon's theory of postcolonial allegory, *Haroun* might be read, then, as an attempt to transform both colonial and postcolonial history, restoring light and darkness – that is, "words" and "silence" – on an equal basis. In addition to this, *Haroun* is also an attempt to face the "postcolonial exotic" which is connected to the emphasis of "newness" and "otherness" in postcolonial literature, as Rushdie manages to do through the character of the Walrus. He is «the Grand

Comptroller» (1990: 58) of the land of the Guppees, ruling over the Eggheads and the Processes Too Complicated To Explain (P2C2E) which help in the creation of stories. His name might be related to the Beatles' song *I Am the Walrus* (1967), where «eggmen» are actually quoted, but it could also be interpreted as a subtler reference to the literary market. In fact, considering the role of the Walrus in the story, as well as the metaphorical analogy linking walruses and penguins (as both species live in the arctic and subarctic regions), the Walrus might be identified with the Western literary market, which is led and organized by some majors like *Viking Penguin*.

In addition to this, the Walrus is modeled upon the Wizard of the *Wizard of Oz*, «who is at once at the heart of things, the fount of wisdom towards which the travellers journey, and the rather disappointing reality that awaits them at the end» (Cundy 1996: 93). In fact, although the Walrus lends a happy ending to Haroun and Rashid's own stories as a special gift to Haroun (1990: 199-202), he still rules over the construction of stories in the land of Kahani at the end of the war; therefore, he might order the Eggheads to steal light again from the territory of the Chupwalas. In addition to this, the last chapter is titled «Was It The Walrus?» (1990: 195), casting a doubt on the responsibility of the Walrus, as the chief of the story-making industry, on the conflict between the two populations.

If the role of the Walrus (representing the insidiousness of market censorship) cannot be fully compared to the one of Khatam-Shud (representing Khomeini and his *fatwa*), the ambivalence in the description of the Walrus is a further nuance of the differences between Guppees and Chupwalas and, on the allegorical level, between Western liberalism and radical Islamism, degrading once again the dichotomy between freedom of speech and censorship into «a war between buffoons».

Both the allegorical investment on the figure of the “clown” and the reflections about the relationship between Western liberalism and radical Islamism are not limited to *Haroun*, as they also have an influence on Rushdie's later production. Both these elements, however, change in time, leading to a different political and aesthetic position for Rushdie's oeuvre.

Although the novel does not directly deal with issues of freedom of speech and censorship, a clown is, indeed, the major figure of *Shalimar the Clown* (2005), where the couple “clown/dictator” is replaced by the one formed by the “clown” and the “terrorist”. Similarly to the previous book, where the opposition between the Guppees and the Chupwalas is very nuanced, also *Shalimar the Clown* simultaneously stages and deconstructs the dichotomy it is based on.

This happens through the figure of Shalimar, alias Noman Sher Noman, who is an acrobatic clown – rather than a proper buffoon – and, at the same time, a terrorist.

The emphasis on the description of Shalimar as a clown is particularly important as it regards the political positioning of the novel within the historical setting of the plot, the Kashmir conflict⁶, and the ideological context of its publication, after the 9/11 events (O' Gorman 2013). The inspiration of the novel, in fact, is to be found in an earlier work by Rushdie, the feature-length documentary *The Riddle of Midnight* (1987), as the author recalls in his subsequent "third-person memoir" *Joseph Anton*:

In Kashmir he spent several days with a group of traveling players who performed *bhand pather* or, literally, "clown stories," of Kashmiri history and legend, one of the last such troupes, driven to near penury by the harshness and violence of the political situation in Kashmir, but also by movies and TV. [...] Because he could not get their story on film he had to cut them out of the final version of the documentary, but he never forgot their unfiled stories, never forgot the woodland glade full of tumbling and tightrope-walking children where a next generation of "clowns" was being trained, clowns who might no longer have an audience to perform to, who might even, when they were grown, relinquish the fake swords of actors and pick up the real guns of the Islamic jihad. Many years later they became the heart of his "Kashmir novel" *Shalimar the Clown*. (2012: 83)

These «clowns without an audience», however, cannot be compared to artists, as they are going to become "jihadists"/"terrorists" right away. It might be fairly argued, then, that here Rushdie exclusively aims at an ironic representation of terrorism on the basis of its buffoonesque side, without comparing the freedom and the constraints of his own artistic role with any type of clownerie.

On the other hand, *Joseph Anton*, Rushdie's third-person memoir about the *fatwa* years, constantly goes back to the issues of censorship and self-censorship. Rushdie's own statements are committed to the fictional character of Joseph Anton – whose name is formed by the ones of two writers loved by Rushdie: Joseph Conrad and Anton Chekhov (2012: 163) – but they are still quite explicit: «Freedom of

⁶ The Kashmir conflict is rooted in the decolonizing processes of India and Pakistan and from the Indo-Pakistani War of 1947, leading to other two major conflicts, in 1965 and 1999.

speech, freedom of the imagination, freedom from fear, and the beautiful, ancient art of which he was privileged to be a practitioner. He would never again flinch from the defence of these things» (2012: 283)

This position is only partially contradicted by Rushdie's embodiment of «[a] contemporary, male Sharazad» as, after the *fatwa*, «he [...] acknowledges he needs to feed the media a different story to keep himself, and public attention on his case, alive» (Guarracino 2014: 20):

Tell us a new story, that was the general opinion, or else please go away.

There was no point telling the world it was wrong. No mileage in that approach. So, yes, a new story. If that was what was wanted, that was what he would provide. (Rushdie 2012: 339, emphasis in the original)

In other words, Rushdie here complies with the imperative of “newness” of the postcolonial exotic (Huggan 2001), as fully manifested by the clichéd reference to Shahrazad. This shows that Rushdie now fully accepts the rules of the literary market: although *Joseph Anton* provides the reader with a continuously judgmental commentary on Rushdie's literary environment, there is no Walrus, like in *Haroun*, who can be held responsible for a market-led censorship which could be as despicable as political or religious censorship (or, if there is, «there is no point» to fight against it). With *Joseph Anton*, Rushdie aims to write «something other than a simple autobiography» (2012: 340), but he does not resort anymore to that form of postcolonial allegory which had characterized his previous attempts to deal with his own condition of censorship and self-censorship.

3. Nuruddin Farah's Trilogy “Variations on the Theme of an African Dictatorship” (1979-1983)

Rushdie is not the only postcolonial author engaged in the staging and deconstruction of the dichotomy “clown/dictator” within the mode of postcolonial allegory. Another postcolonial author who resorted to the same narrative device was the Somali writer of English expression Nuruddin Farah, in his trilogy of novels titled “Variations on the Theme of an African Dictatorship”: *Sweet and Sour Milk* (1979), *Sardines* (1981) and *Close Sesame* (1983).

Farah suffered censorship at the hands of Siad Barre's regime (1969-1991), starting from the suspension of the publication of his only novel in Somali language, *Tolow Waa Talee, Ma...!* ("We Need to Take A Decision...!", 1973), and culminating with Farah's decision to go into exile, in 1976. Although *Sweet and Sour Milk* (1979) is not the first novel published by Farah after these events⁷, it is the first one which deals with Barre's regime through postcolonial allegory.

The whole trilogy, in fact, is based on the deployment of a Jamesonian national allegory, where, as many scholars have pointed out (Petersen 1981, Wright 2002), Somalia is depicted through the narration and representation of individual families. The relationship between family and nation varies throughout the trilogy⁸, showing that this nexus is not exclusively based on the analogy of microcosm and macrocosm; it points, instead, at a particular osmosis between the private and public dimensions of life, echoing, thus, Jameson's arguments (1986: 77).

Sweet and Sour Milk clearly insists on this connection between different levels: Keynaan, the authoritarian father, recalls the figure of Siad Barre – as explicitly suggested by Farah himself with a quotation from Wilhelm Reich's *The Mass Psychology of Fascism* (1933): «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» (Farah 1979: 98) – while his sons Soyaan and Loyaan represents the resistance both to his father and to the Somali regime.

The story begins with Soyaan's murder and Loyaan's choice to investigate on his twin brother's death. Soyaan, an economist in the service of the dictatorial regime, appears to have been involved in clandestine political and military activity against the dictator. The cause of his death cannot be ascertained, but Loyaan discovers the existence of three documents written by Soyaan: Soyaan's own diary, a mysterious "Memorandum" and a short essay. Loyaan, however, cannot draw any sensible conclusion from them.

⁷ *A Naked Needle* (1976) is Farah's second novel in English. It deals with Somali intellectualship under Barre's regime; the mode is mainly mimetic, however, rather than allegorical.

⁸ In *Sweet and Sour Milk*, Keynaan is the authoritarian father of two rebel sons, Soyaan and Loyaan. In *Sardines*, the main characters are all women, providing a gendered version of the Somali nation and its power system. In *Close Sesame*, the old patriarch Deeriye tries to avenge his son, killed during his attempt to attack the dictator, by resorting to his experience as an anti-colonial fighter.

Soyaan's diary, in fact, includes cryptical entries, such as this one: «M to the power of 2. I/M comrade in project» (Farah 1979: 27). Whereas "I/M" might refer to two characters of the novel – Margaritta and Ibrahim Musse Ilmoog, nicknamed "Il Siciliano" – holding a copy of the Memorandum, "M to the power of 2" are equally explained as «Margaritta. Marco. *Marco mio. Margaritta mia.* M to the power of 2» (1979: 71, emphasis in the original) and as «Mogadiscio/Moscow» (1979: 127). The interpretation given by Farah himself is explicitly linked to the Somali government's close involvement with the Soviet state. Farah's opposition to Barre's regime, however, does not coincide with the Western, liberal position against Soviet influences in Africa. As Turfan argues,

Farah's fundamental concern does appear to be the position of Africa (and of Somalia in particular) in relation to the colonial and neocolonial powers. [...] Farah seems to be pleading for a native settlement of native problems and a native development within a native-inspired framework. (Wright 2002: 75)

Farah's plea «for a native settlement of native problems» is evident in the beginning of Soyaan's essay, where he exclusively attacks the ruling class of his country, by defining them as: «Clowns. Cowards. And (tribal) upstarts» (Farah 1979: 33). This might recall the identification of clowns and terrorists in Rushdie's *Shalimar the Clown* for its degrading of the political enemy as buffoonesque. Farah's take on the Somali ruling class, however, is much wider, as it entails the reconsideration of the orality/literacy divide within the Somali nation, as well as its tight relationship with issues of censorship. As Derek Wright resumes,

[i]n the Somalia of *Sweet and Sour Milk* power is still largely oral-based. According to the system of "Dyonisius's Ear", the oral network uncovered in Soyaan's Memorandum, a barely literate General recruits his security corps of spies and informers from illiterates working entirely in the oral medium and reporting verbally everything they hear. (2002: 349)

If the repressive apparatus of the Somali state is largely based on the existence of oral networks, this does not prevent it from concealing Soyaan's documents or, in the case of the real Nuruddin Farah, from banning his novel in Somali. It is, therefore, the perverse collaboration of orality and literacy on behalf of Barre's regime which, according to

the Somali writer, has to be exposed and resisted. A possible resistance, based on a different combination of orality and literacy, is foreshadowed in Farah's subsequent novel, *Sardines* (1981):

[Farah] presents in the barely, literate, eloquent figure of Dulman in *Sardines* a revolutionary image of an ancient oral Somalia, a guest in a century of high-technology which it now turns to its own account by fighting despotism with its own weapons. "Our tradition is oral," says Dulman. "One can communicate with the hearts of Somalis only through their hearing faculties" (1981: 170). [...] Dulman has [...] joined the struggle against the regime by smuggling underground tapes of subversive poems, recorded straight from the mouth, then learned and worked into unscripted theatrical pieces for outside performances. Significantly, the girls arrested for painting anti-government slogans sign themselves 'Dulman,' with the implication that the voices of protest have combined, the power of the spoken word added to that of the written one. In *Sardines* the cassette becomes the oral tradition's answer to the debased oral techniques that help to keep the General in power. (Wright 2002: 246-247)

Dulman is eventually arrested, with a brutal repression of her act of resistance against the regime and its censorship. Her gesture, however, is very important in order to understand the third novel of the trilogy, *Close Sesame*, where Farah's investment both on postcolonial allegory and on the couple "clown/dictator" is certainly stronger.

In *Close Sesame*, in fact, the old *pater familias* Deeriye embodies the resistance against the regime, as a counterpoint to the authoritarian power represented by Keynaan in *Sweet and Sour Milk*. Deeriye draws his influence over the family – which can be considered as a "resistant", rather than as a "conformist" family – both from his experience as anticolonial fighter against the Italian rule on the country (1889-1960) and from the tapes of Islamic chants he listens to. Whereas the anticolonial roots of the family support their resistance in the present – providing, thus, a global interpretation of Somali history, both during the colonial rule and in the present – the use of tapes underlines the mix of orality and literacy which had been already exploited by Dulman in *Sardines*.

In addition to this, the figure of the clown is replaced by a contiguous one: a minor character, Khaliif, is repeatedly qualified as a "madman". Due to his performative abilities, however, Khaliif could

also be a clown, or an artist: he appears from time to time, with his face painted in black and white; his street performances draw the attention of the audience to his “mad” speeches. There, he makes cryptic references to the regime, such as the following one:

There are wicked houses and in them 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 off-spring. And nights plot conspiracies daylight never reveals. (1983: 19)

Although Khaliif himself claims that «truth must be owned up», the possibility of a complete truth is lost within his character, who might embody the dictator or a political opponent to Barre's regime. His position remains unclear until the end of the novel, paralleling the uncertainty about Deeriye's ultimate and desperate attack against the General. As Khaliif himself says, «nights plot conspiracies daylight never reveals»: this statement regards both Deeriye's acts of resistance and Khaliif's performances. Like in *Haroun and the Sea of Stories*, freedom/freedom of speech (symbolized by the “light”) and violence/censorship (the “night”) cannot be neatly separated.

However, both Deeriye and Khaliif are, in different ways, positive characters: if Deeriye is the anticolonial *cum* anti-Barre hero, Khaliif is a «wonderful mystery» (1983: 17) who deserves, at least, being listened to. There is no reason to stone him, as some children try to do at the beginning of the novel, since

[m]admen, with whom a saintliness of a kind is associated, are stoned by children--but not by adults; for in children, in a manner of speaking, dwells the divided and unseasoned man or woman. Nobody ever stones the object of one's love (1983: 62).

Khaliif deserves «one's love» because he shares «a saintliness of a kind» with the devout Deeriye and, more importantly, because he could be an embodiment of the dictator, but also a clown and an artist: his obscure speech might be interpreted in several different ways, but it is, finally, an allegorical speech, where Khaliif «says one thing and means another». Khaliif, thus, represents the *mise en abyme* of postcolonial allegory, that is, of Farah's own possibility to speak and write, beyond the binary alternative between political censorship and the Western, liberal myth of “freedom of speech”.

4. Conclusion

Although Rushdie's and Farah's texts enact two different kinds of postcolonial allegory, they are engaged in a similar gesture of representation and deconstruction of the couple formed by the clown/artist and the dictator, as quintessential to their take on "postcolonial censorship". The names of the protagonists of this gesture, Rashid Khalifa, in Rushdie's *Haroun*, and Khaliif, in Farah's *Sweet and Sour Milk*, derive from the same etymology, which can be retraced in the Arabic word for "caliph", a leader holding both the political and religious power in the Muslim cultures such as the Indian and the Somali ones.

By playing with this analogy and underlining differences as well as contradictions, these authors show that the clown/writer has a very similar power. Differently from Norman Manea's essayistic treatment of the same argument, which sticks to the ambivalences of human psychology, both Rushdie and Farah place this peculiar representation within the cultural and political frame of postcolonial allegory.

Such a choice allows them to show that the power represented by freedom of speech, though being a political response to censorship, should not be idealized, as it may reinforce colonial, as well as neocolonial, discourses. In order to avoid these risks, their take on postcolonial censorship and self-censorship is always placed within a larger scope, pointing at the transformation of colonial/postcolonial history or at a metacommentary on the newly decolonized postcolonial nations.⁹

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