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The Performance of Madness as Resistance in Nuruddin Farah's *Close Sesame*

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Abstract: This article explores the representation of madness in Nuruddin Farah's *Close Sesame* (1983) as a performance of resistance against the Somali dictatorship of Mohammed Siyad Barre. I argue that Farah presents madness as a performance rather than a manifestation of mental illness in order to protect those who speak and act out against tyranny as well as their associates and families. The novel's presentation of these counter-hegemonic performances has implications for the study of narrative representations of dictatorship in Africa as well as for understanding the linkage between the colonial and neocolonial disciplinary attitudes toward resistance fighters in East Africa. In particular, I consider the "Mad Mullah" and J. C. Carothers in light of their contributions to colonial discourse about madness and resistance. Farah's novel explicitly makes connections between colonial history and Barre's dictatorial regime, yet the place of madness within that history and the function of madness in *Close Sesame* have not been adequately explored. In focusing on resistance in Farah's text, this article also provides a broader reading of resistance and repression in colonial states and neocolonial dictatorships.

Keywords: dictator, madness, Nuruddin Farah, Somalia, neocolonial, East Africa

In "Why I Write," Nuruddin Farah uses theatrical terms to describe his inspiration for the trilogy he calls *Variations on the Theme of an African Dictatorship*: "Somalia was a badly written play . . . 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). The trilogy explores different ways in which members of the Group of 10 struggle against and suffer because of Mohamed Siyad Barre's dictatorship in Somalia. In *Close Sesame* (1983), the last novel in the trilogy, the protagonist, an older man named Deeriye, explores the connections between the colonial era and the current regime and argues with his son, Mursal, about the nature of justice and law. Mursal is a member of the Group of 10 and one of the characters who attempts to assassinate Barre. Ultimately Deeriye finds himself carrying a gun to a meeting with the dictator. Near the end of *Close Sesame*, Deeriye characterizes Barre's dictatorship in similarly theatrical terms to those used by Farah but with an additional emphasis on other possible actors—actors of resistance. His description is not only an apt figuration of this particular dictatorship but of many regimes of this type, both in Africa and throughout the world. Deeriye remarks that "Somalia has become a stage where the Grandest Actor performs in front of an applauding audience that should be booing him. Anyone who wishes to share the spotlight either goes mad or in the end is imprisoned. Otherwise, everyone is made to join the crowd and applaud with it" (Farah, *Close* 214). His description of the political theater of dictatorship renders the political sphere a site for performance, both by the hegemonic regime and its willing and unwilling fans as well as those who seek to "share the spotlight" and perform resistance. In the dictatorship depicted in Farah's novel, those who want to perform resistance are left with a pair of unappealing options: go mad or end up in prison.

I read Deeriye's statement against its more apparent connotations, which consider literal 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. My reading of the novel, however, argues for an alternative reading of Deeriye's formulation in which madness can be a performance strategy rather than merely the result of a performance. Farah's novel presents the performance of madness as both a strategy for resisting hegemonic power and a protective strategy for the individual actor.

In this case, performing madness functions as a kind of barrier or shield that allows individual characters to (sometimes violently) resist the dictatorial regime and prevent themselves or their families and friends from being implicated by or imprisoned for their actions. Farah's novel stages various performances of madness in order to emphasize the counter-hegemonic function it can play as a mode of resistance.

Two attitudes about madness should be considered in the context of performed madness as act of resistance. First, what about madness as a category allows it to function as a mode of resistance? Second, how does the dictatorial regime's view of madness allow for this counter-hegemonic performance? Commenting on the work of Michel Foucault, Georges Canguilhem notes an important distinction between the terms we use to discuss the central issue of madness or mental illness: "[I]t is *madness* that is primarily at issue, not mental illness; it is exclusion, internment, and discipline that is primarily at issue, not asylum, assistance, and care" ("On 'Histoire'" 284; emphasis added). This crucial distinction, which situates madness in the realm of exclusion and discipline rather than the clinical/medical realm of care and cure, is central to understanding how the imposition of the colonial/neocolonial diagnoses of madness serves the needs of the regime rather than the individual. Yet it is the regime's diagnoses or perceptions that open up the critical space necessary for the performance of madness. The clandestine resistance movement in *Close Sesame* avails itself of the Barre regime's self-justificatory diagnoses of madness in order to protect other members of their organization and, more importantly, their families. This article considers the question of madness within the social and political space of Farah's novel as well as the context of the British colonial administration's approach to madness in East Africa. Farah's novel explicitly connects colonial history with the dictatorial regime, yet the place of madness within that history and the function of madness in *Close Sesame* both need further exploration.

In focusing on resistance in Farah's text, this article also provides a broader reading of resistance in colonial states and neocolonial dictatorships. I begin briefly with the opening of *Close Sesame*, which sets the scene for Deeriye's and the reader's perspective on the "mad" character in the novel, Khaliif. I examine the novel's initial representation of Khaliif

and the performative elements that trouble readings of his madness as purely literal or purely metaphorical. Reading Khaliif in terms of performance recognizes his agency and acknowledges the discursive nature of madness and state discipline. From the novel, I briefly turn to Foucault to consider this disciplinary function of madness. *Close Sesame* invites a reading of madness situated in the discourses of power, largely because of Deeriye's unique (to Farah's trilogy) historical perspective that treats and critiques Barre's neocolonial dictatorship as an extension of colonial history. This leads to a consideration of the discursive function of madness in relation to resistance within the historical context of the late colonial period in East Africa. Two figures emerge: J. C. Carothers and the "Mad Mullah," Muhammad 'Abdullah Hassan. The latter is frequently referenced in the novel while the former is totally absent. I turn first to Carothers' work in Kenya to examine the discourse of madness in the late colonial period, focusing specifically on the British administrative response to the Mau Mau, a name given to Kenyan freedom fighters in the 1950s by the British colonial administration. Although *Close Sesame* does not explicitly reference Kenya and Carothers, Carothers' work illustrates the British colonial state's use of the diagnosis of madness as a disciplinary measure against resistance. From Carothers I turn to Muhammad 'Abdullah Hassan, whom Deeriye admires and often mentions. The Mullah's persistent presence in the novel orients its presentation of the performance of madness as a strategy of resistance. After this historical excursion, I return to *Close Sesame* to demonstrate how the resistance to dictatorship in the novel, figured as madness, deliberately reappropriates the colonial discourse of madness seen in the cases of the Mau Mau in Kenya and the Mullah in Somalia.

I. The Discourse of Power and Madness

Khaliif's backstory, presented by Deeriye early in the novel, foregrounds the link between madness and the dictatorial regime. It also suggests that his emergence as a public figure of madness is an act of resistance. He was "[o]nce 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 or his survivors and dependents a fat pension if . . . ! If what?

Here everything became shrouded in mystery" (Farah, *Close* 14). The real mystery is what happens to Khaliif to provoke a transformation so sudden that he appears to become mad overnight. He leaves his house one evening "as he always had done" and then suddenly, "the following morning, he was mad" (14). His "overnight madness" causes him to scream, profane, and disrobe and prompts his family to consult with doctors, psychoanalysts, and sheikhs (15). The narrator notes that "one daredevil of a psychoanalyst spoke of the dangers of the haloperidol treatments and left it at that" (15). The reference to haloperidol treatments hints at the possibility of state-sponsored torture and interrogation as the origin of Khaliif's dramatic transformation.[1] Derek Wright suggests that "Khaliif's madness is, immediately, politically induced . . . at the behest of a regime which itself hovers between madness and sanity . . . in its eagerness to foster madness among its subjects" (*Novels* 94). Although Khaliif's behavior indicates that he has suffered at the hands of the dictatorial regime, the narrator does not explicitly pursue this line of evidence to reach a conclusion. Rather, the narrator presents Khaliif's behavior and words in ways that trouble a definitive diagnosis of madness.

Overnight, Khaliif begins to make "weird statements such as: 'Night plots conspiracies daylight never reveals'" and in so-called "lucid intervals . . . mentioned names, responsible names, in particular one name" (Farah, *Close* 15). Although the narration characterizes the first of those statements as "weird," Khaliif's seemingly nonsensical comment about plots and conspiracies hints at their existence. One might conclude that he is talking about the plots and conspiracies of the regime or his suspected involvement in a plan directed against the dictator. Either way, Khaliif's rants suggest that his detention and possible treatment with haloperidol were politically motivated. Moreover, because Khaliif was formerly a highly placed official in the government, the reader can reasonably assume that the "responsible names" he mentions are those of other government officials. Deeriye affirms this when he wonders "[w]hy [Khaliif] . . . 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" (15). Khaliif's listing of names implicates the

officials in his arrest and possible torture. This public naming challenges the officials' power over Khaliif, who is, as it seems to Deeriye, "beyond fear"; although his actions should place him in harm's way, he manages to avoid imprisonment or other harm (15). Khaliif's performance of madness is what shields him from reprisal.

But whose "one name" stands out from the litany of names that Khaliif mentions in his so-called lucid intervals? A clue is cleverly encoded in the narration that immediately follows the phrase "one name": "But was he *majnuun*? You could say he was insane (using the term in the general sense), that he was a man who . . . 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 could be questioned; and therefore a madman" (15). The "one name" Khaliif speaks in his lucid intervals is that of General Siyad Barre. This does not necessarily follow logically from the preceding statement, but if you read the parenthetical's use of the word "general" against the grain it is the periphrastic implication. This kind of playful reading of the text is suggested by the narrator's description of Khaliif's particular use of language: not quite logical, replete with questionable inferences and references, and reflective of an apparently disordered mind.

The connection between Khaliif's mind and the dictator's regime in Farah's novel points toward the colonial/neocolonial state's disciplinary measures against those who resist it. A brief turn to Foucault's work on the subject of madness and discipline provides helpful context. Canguilhem sums up the project: "Foucault essentially endeavors to show that madness is an object of perception in a 'social space' structured in diverse ways throughout the course of history, an object of perception created by social practices" ("Report" 278). By situating madness within social space, Foucault allows us to discuss madness within particular social and historical contexts and attend to the dynamics of power in those contexts. John Masterson's recent book *The Disorder of Things* provides a Foucauldian perspective on Farah's work. Masterson's approach to *Close Sesame* focuses primarily on the disciplinary and carceral aspects of Farah's novel, draws apt comparisons to Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o's work and Ngũgĩ's prison experience, and presents a compelling reading of

Deeriye as "an exemplary protagonist" in the context of the novel, the trilogy, and Farah's work as a whole (100). In what he calls "an intriguing supplement" (108), however, Masterson turns from his central argument about Deeriye to the question of madness as a means of "cop[ing] under autocratic rule" (108) and considers Khaliif and the Mullah in ways that intersect with my argument. He acknowledges the "transgressive position" that allows Khaliif "to speak out against repressive power" and treats madness in a Foucauldian framework of "social constructions" (110). Yet because Masterson sees the question of madness in the novel as supplementary to his argument, he does not trouble Khaliif's supposed madness enough or explore how Farah critiques the dictatorship's repressive diagnostic practices through the novel's representation of the performances of madness.

Madness, when seen as a challenge to reason, demands a kind of distancing. Foucault argues that "asylums [were] not the result of a progressive introduction of medicine . . . but the result of an internal restructuring of a space that the classical age had designated as a place of exclusion and correction" (*History* 437). Madness, as a challenge to the rational, needs to be excluded or kept at a distance.[2] In *Close Sesame*, this impulse leads the General's regime to label each individual who tries to assassinate the General as "mad." Because the violent, political act challenges the General's authority and claim to legitimacy, the resistant act must be pushed outside the bounds of the rational; it must be made illegitimate, irrational, and thereby "mad" in order to preclude the possibility of any challenge to the dictator's authority. The regime's politically motivated diagnosis replicates colonial discourse on madness and resistance. The regime assumes the medical gaze that allows for the abstraction and disempowerment of the patient. In *The Birth of the Clinic*, Foucault links sovereign power to the medical gaze (and vice versa) through the doctor/patient relationship. It is through the doctor's gaze, he writes, that "the sovereignty of the gaze gradually establishes itself—the eye that knows and decides, the eye that governs" (89).

Yet this disciplinary maneuver of exclusion by virtue of madness poses a problem for the very authority that tries to sustain itself in this way. Placing the mad political act outside the legitimate realm of political

theater delimits the boundaries of political space and creates a space beyond the confines of the stage set by the regime for the excluded to offer their critique. Thus a kind of power is generated by the act of exclusion. Foucault notes that "madness is language that is excluded—those who, against the code of language, pronounce words without meaning (the 'insane,' the 'imbeciles,' the 'demented'), or those who utter sanctified words (the 'violent ones,' the 'furious'), or yet still, those who bring forth forbidden meanings (the 'libertines,' the 'headstrong')" (Foucault, Stastny, and Şengel 295). Although the powerful seek to exclude from discourse that which they deem the transgressive opposite of reason—madness—the act of exclusion provides a space, a stage, that legitimizes the discourse of the forbidden. It marks the mad act of resistance as "other" to the order of the regime. This is perhaps what Farah means when, speaking of what he calls "desperate, almost kamikaze, acts of bravado" against the regime, he says "it is the dictator that has compelled these people to behave in this irrational manner" (Jaggi and Farah 178).

In *Close Sesame*, anyone who resists or opposes the dictator is labeled "mad" by the regime (as illustrated in the story of the asylum from Khaliif's first appearance in the novel). From the dictator's point of view, this labeling isolates the individual and fixes him or her in the discourse of madness and outside the norm of social and political relationships. On the other hand, those who oppose the dictatorship are aware of the General's perspective and perform their resistance in a way that deliberately invites the regime to define their actions as mad. In this way, members of the Group of 10 are able to make public and violent attempts on the General's life, and Khaliif is able to voice criticisms of the regime publicly. Their performances of madness allow them to present themselves as lone actors and thereby potentially protect the members of their clandestine movement, families, and clan.

II. The Madness of Resistance in Colonial East Africa

The politically motivated characterization of resistance as madness in Farah's novel has two strong historical corollaries in the colonial history of East Africa: the Somali national hero, the Sayyid or "Mad Mullah" who is frequently mentioned in *Close Sesame* and who represents a source

of inspiration in Deeriye's version of resistance and nationalism, and the work of Carothers, a doctor who practiced in colonial Kenya. Although Carothers and the Kenyan resistance fighters he wrote about do not figure in Farah's novel, his work provides a late colonial example of the disciplinary diagnosis of resistance as madness.[3] The Kenyan narrative provides a parallel to Deeriye's generation's resistance to colonial authority and bridges the historical gap between the period of the Mullah and the Barre dictatorship. Indeed, in the case of both the Sayyid and Carothers, madness is externally "diagnosed" and applied to resistance fighters, a similar disciplinary approach to the one taken by the dictatorial regime in Farah's novel. The Sayyid and Carothers, however, are very different actors in the colonial drama: the Sayyid is a resistance fighter labeled as mad, and Carothers is a medical professional attached to the colonial state who labels others (and Others) as mad. I will focus on Carothers first in order to establish how a colonial discourse about madness is authorized and mobilized against resistance fighters and then turn to the Sayyid to reconnect with the Somali historical context and show how this discourse singles out individual figures of resistance.

Carothers was considered the "foremost authority on mental illness in Africa" in the 1950s (McCulloch 1).[4] In *Writing Madness: Borderlines of the Body in African Literature*, Flora Veit-Wild gives a reading of Carothers' work that indicates how diagnosis in a colonial context contributes to the discourse that demonizes resistance to the colonial regime. Just as Deeriye finds strong parallels between the Barre dictatorship and the colonial period of Somali history, Carothers' discussion of African psyches bears similarities to the Barre dictatorship's diagnostic repression. Carothers' work is doubly significant because in 1954 the British government commissioned him to study the Mau Mau rebels.[5] His report, *The Psychology of Mau Mau*, situates the Kenyan people's resistance to British colonial authority in the realm of "psychopathological behavior" rather than in a particular ideology of resistance or liberation (Veit-Wild 14). This strategy is not dissimilar from the way that the dictatorship in *Close Sesame* brands any attempt at resistance as madness rather than a coordinated, cooperative effort to overthrow a repressive regime. Carothers situates the resistance fighters "outside the framework

of modern Western European psychology—at least at fully conscious levels" (12). His diagnosis of the origins and development of the resistance movement are telling. He suggests that the Africans believe that the "grievances" they seek to redress are not "[their] own fault" and makes a sweeping generalization about an African psyche that situates evil elsewhere (Carothers 12). Veit-Wild comments on this externalization of blame in Carothers' work: "If something went wrong, the African would place blame on an external force such as gods, enemies, or ancestors, never on himself: hence he did not have any sense of responsibility or guilt" (13–14). The absence of the colonizer on this list of the culpable seems glaring. One could certainly read Carothers' analysis as a colonial projection of its own displaced guilt for its treatment of the colonized peoples.

Carothers' diagnostic imprimatur provided the colonial authorities with a scientific justification for their response to the uprising. His was the "authoritative account the government wanted" to legitimate its approach to the uprising in the State of Emergency, an approach which included forced resettlement of villages, detention, work camps, torture, and executions (Anderson 284).[6] It also provided a way for the colonists to devalue the Kenyan people's resistance by pathologizing the Mau Mau's agitation as the result of "a type of contagion or 'mind-destroying disease'" (Elkins 106). Such a diagnosis renders their political and social grievances irrelevant and strips the movement of any kind of reason, organization, or deliberate structure. Ngũgĩ, looking back on the State of Emergency on its thirty-year anniversary, presents a radically different diagnosis of the Mau Mau. Writing about the British colonial administration's repressive and violent policies during "a 10-year rule of colonial terror," he describes the Kenyan people's response in terms that forcefully challenge Carothers' assessment:

> But the same years saw the Kenyan people organize and resist on a scale they had never before attempted. People, peasants, and workers, organized in their villages, towns, fields, forests, mountains and refused to be cowed by the colonial tyrant. Led by Mau Mau, they fought back, deliberately, consciously, tena-

> ciously, courageously, driven on and strengthened by their conviction that their anticolonial cause was right and just. (Ngũgĩ, *A Barrel of a Pen* 29)

Ngũgĩ links the Mau Mau fighters to the people at large and highlights their deliberate and concerted efforts to oppose the colonial order out of a sense of justice. However accurate Ngũgĩ's characterization of popular unity between Kenyans during the anticolonial struggle might be, Carothers' diagnosis of the Mau Mau provided a way for the colonial authority to discredit their resistance.

The colonial administration's response in Kenya is quite similar to the case of the Mad Mullah as well as the actions of the dictatorship in *Close Sesame* in response to the clandestine movement's attempts to assassinate the General. To label an attempted assassination an act of madness perpetrated by a lone madman, as happens several times in the novel, removes the threat of a coordinated, underground organization bent on removing the dictator from power. If the resistance to tyranny in a colonial or postcolonial state is merely the byproduct of a diseased mind then the state's raison d'être is not challenged by an act of resistance. As a discursive move, this categorization situates resistance outside of the natural order of reason and civility while simultaneously arguing for the naturalness and reasonableness of the tyrannical regime that inspires the resistance.[7] As Ngũgĩ observes in his prison diary, a text motivated by the disciplinary force of a neocolonial government brought to bear on a critic of the regime, "[m]adness 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" (*Detained* 120).

The case of Mohammed 'Abdullah Hassan, the so-called Mad Mullah, foreshadows the colonial disciplinary gesture of resistance-diagnosed-as-madness that manifests itself in Carothers' report on the Mau Mau in the 1950s.[8] What made the Mullah "mad"? His "madness" seems to be predicated on two attitudes viewed as extreme and hostile by others but neither of which indicate any particular mental illness: his religious devotion and his fierce opposition to outsiders (primarily European colonizers, but also Ethiopians). These two points also converge in creating

the public image of his madness. Before his campaign took on a particularly anticolonial military component, his religious views made him unpopular, as Douglas Jardine notes, and led "his fellow countrymen [to dub] him *wadad wal*, which, translated from Somali, means 'the Mullah that is an idiot' or 'the lunatic Mullah'" (53; emphasis in original).[9] His religious views caused people to think him a lunatic. Although in the Mullah's religious context madness has a potentially different valence, Jardine deliberately tries to dismiss out of hand the divine madness of certain holy men in the Islamic tradition. Instead, Jardine locates the Mullah's madness in his fellow countrymen's response to his religious zealotry.

Islam as a religious context is significant for both the Mullah as a historical figure and for the characters in *Close Sesame*, particularly Khaliif. Deeriye wonders early on if Khaliif is "*majnuun*," the Arabic word for insane (Farah, *Close* 15). Madness acquires a particular set of meanings that complicate how we might view the Mullah or Khaliif. On one hand, madness carries with it the same connection to reason it does in the Western tradition. Eleventh-century scholar Al-Sarakhsi writes that "*majnūn*" (Shoshan's spelling) is "one who is lacking in reason" (qtd. in Shoshan 332). Yet in some uses, including in the Qur'an, it can also mean "a divinely excited individual" (Shoshan 335). This sense of the word is expressed in its etymology, as the word refers to being possessed or "captured by a *jinn* (plural, *jnun*)" (Bullard 128). This situates the *majnuun* in the novel, particularly the Mullah and Khaliif, within a particular tradition of madness that potentially places them in the tradition of the holy fool.

In *Divine Madness*, Abdi Sheik-Abdi draws on a wide variety of sources, including Somali oral culture, to present the fullest account of the Mullah to date and to place him "in the proper historical perspective" (x). Sheik-Abdi takes up the question of madness in direct response to Jardine's pro-colonial interpretive bias and considers the Somali social context. He notes that "[i]n Somali society, the sobriquet 'mad' could also be given to men who are exceptionally brave or bright, as in the case of Wiil Waal" (55). Wiil-Waal, as readers of Farah's novel remember, is the subject of the stories that Deeriye tells his grandson and is, along

with the Sayyid, Deeriye's favorite historical reference point for Somali nationalism. Sheik-Abdi's turn to the variety of uses of madness—from genius to bravery to lunacy—suspends, without erasing, the question of whether the Mullah is mentally ill and places him in a position similar to that of Farah's characters such as Khaliif, Deeriye, and other members of the resistance movement.[10] Certainly the Mullah's behavior seems unconventional, and one can understand why "his adversaries, as well as some of his admirers" might arrive at the conclusion that "he was without question quite mad, totally out of his mind" (Sheik-Abdi 55).

Although, as Jardine notes, some fellow Somalis labeled him mad, the Mullah's resistance to colonial rule, not merely his "fanatical zeal," is most likely what cemented the nickname "Mad Mullah," despite Jardine's attempts to shift responsibility onto the Somalis (Sheik-Abdi 55). In September 1899, the colonial administration received a letter from the Mullah with an ultimatum: "This is to inform you that you have done whatever you have desired. You have oppressed our ancient religion without cause. . . . If you want war, we accept it; if you want peace, pay the fine" (qtd. in Jardine 43). In response, Colonel James Hayes Sadler, who served as the first consul-general of Somaliland from 1898 to 1900, officially denounced the Mullah as a "rebel . . . and urged his government in London to prepare an expedition against the Dervishes" (Lewis 70), a military force organized by the Mullah. This move set the scene for the "twenty-years [of] Dervish struggles against the British, Ethiopian, and Italian colonizers . . . in Somali territory" (70). This official declaration also fixed the Mullah in the discourse of the colonial administration and helped solidify his role as both a religious and political leader. This political discourse of colonization set the scene for the colonial administration's "diagnosis" of Hassan as a madman. When British and Indian armies (along with a Somali levy) set out in 1902 to pacify the Mullah-led Dervishes, Hassan was already being referred to as the Mad Mullah in British newspapers and government communiqués (Lewis 72).

The public diagnosis of the Mullah's madness was preceded by the colonial administration's diagnosis. Jardine, citing an official report, offers that

> [i]nsanity was first officially attributed to him on the 30th July, 1899, when the Consul-General reported to the Foreign Office as follows: "Reports from the Dolbahanta, apparently on good authority, are to the effect that the Mullah has gone off his head. It is said that he fired twice at his nephew, killing his horse, and that he was only prevented from doing further damage by being seized by his followers." From this time forward he was always known to the British public as the Mad Mullah, although those who had an intimate acquaintance with the very real ability with which he conducted his affairs often ventured to question his insanity. There is now, however, no reason to doubt that he was cursed with a madness that was akin to genius. (53–54)

By citing the official report, Jardine allows us to examine its particular language and observe its rhetorical attempt to authenticate what seems to be hearsay. Signs of this attempt appear with the report's reassurance that it has its information "on good authority" and its use of the passive construction "[i]t is said," which introduces the narrative that purportedly confirms that the Mullah is "off his head." The British public, Jardine observes, seized on this diagnosis. Yet Jardine also qualifies this idea by emphasizing that it was not merely the public perception of the man but also potentially the opinion, at times, of his more "intimate acquaintance[s]."

Jardine suggests that a bone removed from Hassan's head during his youth may have caused his insanity. This would provide a physiological reason for the diagnosis. However, Jardine offers no further evidence of either the Mullah's supposed physical ailment or the opinions of those close to the Mullah. Rather, he examines the Mullah's motivations. The way he does so demonstrates the discourse of colonial power at play, to which the Mullah posed a challenge. Jardine indicates that a member of "the House of Commons, a prominent Irish Nationalist . . . boasted that he had received an invitation from the Mullah to . . . visit . . . [and] described the Mullah and his Dervishes as 'brave men striving to be free'" (54). Jardine refers to this statement as "one of those untruths

which constitute the most dangerous of falsehoods" and claims that the Mullah's motivations were "stirred by the passion for power and the plunder which rewarded victory" (54–55).

More recent historians undermine Jardine's apologist point of view, which situates the Mullah's anticolonial resistance as the power grab of a greedy individual rather than resistance to European colonial domination. Sheik-Abdi's text does perhaps the most work to "rehabilitate the Mullah, without deifying him" (Sheik-Abdi 1). His book delivers on its promise "to show that though the Mullah started out as a spiritual leader, the nature of his leadership and the tenor of his political acts and public utterances became increasingly secularized and even nationalistic, while transcending both religious considerations and clan affiliations" (1). Sheik-Abdi is not alone in countering the image propagated by Jardine. I.M. Lewis argues that "to suppose that the Sayyid's followers were motivated merely by the prospect of loot and livestock is to misjudge the Somali character" (82). Lewis attributes the Mullah's appeal to "his magnetic personality, his ruthlessness . . . his complete and utter defiance of his enemies . . . [and his] unswerving strength of purpose and unwavering determination . . . directed towards a noble end" (82). Lewis, unlike Jardine, treats the Mullah as a leader committed to fighting against the tyranny of colonization. From the colonial perspective, however, this fight is madness and is branded as such; to label it madness, as when Carothers diagnoses the Mau Mau of Kenya, is to situate it as the "Other" of rational discourse and behavior and thereby align colonization with reason, civilization, and that which is right. Diagnosing one's enemies as "mad" is simply a matter of colonial public relations.

III. The Madness of Dictatorship and Resistance

The similarities in the histories of the Mullah and Carothers connect with Deeriye's perspective in *Close Sesame*. Deeriye consistently considers and references Somalia's colonial past to help make sense of the country's present dictatorship, which he sees as a neocolonial institution. This attitude is most apparent in a conversation about rights that he has with his daughter, Zeinab. He says, "We Africans did not struggle against the white colonialists only to be colonized yet again by

black nincompoops" (Farah, *Close* 93). Deeriye emphasizes "whiteness" to describe the colonial period and spotlight the neocolonial aspect of African dictatorship. He goes on to describe the "nincompoops": "[W]hen Africa attained its political independence, black apes took over and aped the monkeys who trained them" (93). Deeriye reappropriates the racist, dehumanizing discourse often found in colonial writings, although he represents both the colonizers and the neocolonial elite as primates. Farah echoes Okot p'Bitek's scathing criticism of Africans' political and cultural aping of Western tastes, values, and styles in the wake of political independence.[11] Zeinab suggests that her father would also "be a dictator if [he] were the head of a government" (Farah, *Close* 93). Deeriye's response to his daughter's chiding accusation is perhaps one of the strongest statements in the novel on his views of government: "I am not a black ape imitating the monkeys who trained me. For no man trained me. I did not learn what I know from a white man whose ways I hold sacred" (94). Deeriye channels the Sayyid, his national hero, in rejecting Western ideals of governance and suggesting a more religiously centered perspective ("no man trained me").

Deeriye's argument for his independence is not just a rejection of the colonial or neocolonial discourses of power; it is also a claim to standing alone, operating according to one's own principles, and taking the stage *contra* the great actor, the dictator. Deeriye aligns himself with the madmen even if he does not articulate it as such. Yet there is something lonely and isolating about this fellowship with the mad. Khaliif remains a figure who "mistrusted everybody . . . [and] shunned human contact" (16). Deeriye's first consideration of the solitary nature of the madman occurs after Mahad makes the resistance group's first attempt on the General's life. He makes his move at a meeting of jurists by grabbing a bodyguard's revolver and attempting to take the dictator's life, an event that is characterized as "an unpremeditated act of madness" by eyewitnesses (75). Mahad performs resistance in such a way as to be interpolated into the discourse of madness that the regime uses to demonize opposition. Deeriye, on the other hand, wonders "if the action's unplanned nature was to dislodge, disorient and send everybody off the track of the (movement's?) calculated logic" (117). Despite Mahad's

apparent lack of premeditation, his actions bring his friend Mukhtaar under suspicion, and Mukhtaar is taken in for questioning. When Mukhtaar reappears, he seems to be mad, and Deeriye compares him to Khaliif, who also emerged from a night of questioning as a madman. The events lead Deeriye to contemplate the solitude of the madman in juxtaposition to the bonds of family and clan, which unite by blood, and the bonds of friendship, which transcend these relations. Deeriye notes that "[t]he madman is an intensely lonely person; friendless in so far as we define this concept, the madman seeks no one but his own company" (121–22). Mukhtaar's isolation results from political action on the part of his co-conspirators and the regime's intervention. While madness isolates, it only does so in this context because of the political milieu. Within this milieu, the solitary condition of madness is further emphasized when Deeriye thinks about it near the end of the novel. When he decides to make his own attempt on the General's life, he chooses to do it alone and commit to "*the madness* of . . . a political statement" (229; emphasis in original).

In spite of the apparent loneliness of the madman or the political actor, Deeriye's perspective, which is dominant in the novel, presents madness in a different way. The reader has access, at times, to his thoughts, dreams, and even possible hallucinations in which he converses with his late wife. That so much of the narrative is focalized through Deeriye gives extra weight to his consideration of other characters' madness, particularly that of Khaliif. Deeriye "is a unique specimen in [Farah's] writing: a patriarch who is not a tyrant" (Wright, *Novels* 87). The link between domestic dictatorship and Barre is clearest in *Sardines*: "[I]n an authoritarian state, the head of the family (matriarch or patriarch) plays a necessary and strong role; he or she represents the authority of the state" (Farah 66–67).[12] Wright argues that Farah "posit[s], through Deeriye's behavior in the family and at the Council of Chiefs, . . . an alternative, non-authoritarian model for both the domestic and national households, a counterforce to the absolute despotism of the General" (*Novels* 107). Many critics note Deeriye's unique behavior as a patriarch and clan elder, which marks him as an alternative kind of authority figure, who does not repress those in his circle of influence.[13]

Deeriye's role as the novel's protagonist and the narration's principle focalizer gives added weight to his historical perspective on the colonial period as well as his fondness for Somali oral culture, particularly the Sayyid's poetry. Deeriye is unique as a major character in Farah's trilogy because "he straddles regimes both colonial and neo-colonial, thus bringing an extended historical perspective to proceedings" (Masterson 97). His critical perspective on the Barre regime connects the postcolonial dictatorship's origins and its performance of state power back to colonial rule.

Given the importance of Deeriye's point of view in the novel, it is significant that Khaliif, the novel's madman, is introduced in the text's first chapter. The certainty of his madness, however, is problematized by Khaliif's words and actions as well as the way in which Farah juxtaposes Khaliif with Deeriye and the historical figure of the Sayyid.[14] Khaliif functions as the prototypical mad figure and, in my reading, stages the performance of madness in ways that inflect our understanding of the other "mad" characters in the text. When Khaliif is first introduced, the reader encounters him in Deeriye's thoughts: "Khaliif: the madman" (Farah, *Close* 14). This first mention of his name along with the descriptive appellation of madman inextricably links Khaliif with madness. Yet there are many elements of this initial appearance, first in Deeriye's thoughts and then in a public performance, that trouble the diagnosis of his behavior as mad. Khaliif first appears in the novel at dawn and walks around quietly. Deeriye marks this as unusual for Khaliif because "there was no audience to hear him proclaim himself, no crowd to cheer him on, no sympathetic listener to act as the *suggeritore* if the well of this man's mad imagination had dried up. Saying nothing, shouting no messages, speaking not a word. . . . Yes, he looked a madman" (14). Although Derriye's meditation on Khaliif is punctuated by descriptions of his madness, it also implies that Khaliif's madness is regularly on display for an audience. The mention of an audience is the first hint, of which there are many in the passage, that Khaliif's madness is a public performance whereby he proclaims and shouts messages to the crowd that gathers to watch him. The performative language Deeriye uses to describe Khaliif's behavior seems to an-

ticipate his later formulation of the theatrical stage of dictatorship and the performance of resistance.

Literary critics tend to read madness in *Close Sesame* in one of two ways: either Khaliif's madness is a fait accompli (the novel calls him a madman and therefore he is mad) or it is a metaphor. Neither approach treats seriously enough the novel's presentation of Khaliif that, from the outset, troubles the certainty of either of these readings. Claudio Gorlier reads Khaliif as a sign of a "'wonderful' mystery" (425) and in terms of the "interchange between mystery and reality" (424). By adopting the language of mystery present in the novel, Gorlier situates, in abstract terms, Khaliif's mental state, which he figures as "hidden and unfathomable" (Gorlier 424). He thus avoids engaging with the crucial question of whether Khaliif is mentally ill or a cunning performer. The novel's initial presentation of Khaliif all but demands that the reader engage with this question and thereby consider the role of madness in every further instance in the novel. The question of Khaliif's mental state, while mysterious, is not unfathomable. Nor is it the case, as Wright claims, that "the mysterious Khaliif's literal madness and symbolic sanity" can simply be read in hermeneutic terms, with the question of Khaliif's sanity situated in the figurative realm ("Mapping" 100). Madness is not merely one of the "novel's numerous aporias, a subject from which explanation is absent" (Wright, *Novels* 95). Nor do Khaliif and his madness simply serve, as Masterson claims, an "axiomatic function" in the text (117).[15] Although I agree with Wright's diagnosis that madness in the novel "is essentially a politically manufactured phenomenon and a measure of political despair" (*Novels* 93–94), I find room in *Close Sesame* to read resistance and madness in ways that highlight the agency of the actors of resistance. This agency is suggested in the text's initial description of Khaliif's unusual first audience-less appearance. Deeriye's observation that Khaliif usually performs for and engages with a crowd and that his behavior when alone is quite different troubles the notion of his authentic madness.

From the beginning of the novel, Deeriye mulls this question: "Was [Khaliif] really mad?" (Farah, *Close* 15). Although most critics seem to accept the epithet that introduces the character ("Khaliif: the madman")

as a statement of fact, Deeriye observes that "some people believed he was not" (14–15). Deeriye briefly maintains a neutral position on the matter, but his exploration of the argument of "some people" believing that Khaliif is not mad makes up an entire paragraph. Although "some people" question Khaliif's public madness, Deeriye seems to suspend judgment on the issue by asking rhetorical questions: "Why did he always choose to deliver his messages of condemnation before a crowd? Why did he always choose his victims well? Why did he always choose to make his cursory remarks in the presence of or within hearing distance of the new *priviligentsia*?" (15; emphasis in original). The repeated presence of the word "always" speaks to a marked pattern in Khaliif's behavior, a method to his madness. Khaliif regularly and consistently speaks to a crowd, has a clear target for his speech (his "victims"), and not only performs for an audience of eager listeners but ensures that the privileged can hear him as well. This evidence suggests that Khaliif has a deliberate strategy and that his madness is a public performance on the Somali political stage.

Deeriye appears to find his own reason for understanding Khaliif's actions, perhaps indicating that Deeriye is relinquishing his neutrality on the question of madness. He observes that in Mogadiscio "there were many madmen and madwomen. Some were famous and had even entered the annals of national politics. Others had become figures as renowned as the class they represented. Yet others had enriched the language as a new idiom might" (15–16). His thought situates Khaliif in the mentally ill population, but it also situates the mentally ill within the discourse of national politics and the important cultural realm of oral performance or orature, a double positioning that is significant considering the role of the Sayyid in the novel's rendering of nation and resistance. Deeriye's subtle rhetorical positioning of Khaliif within these important traditions allows for the possibility of authentic mental illness while also allowing him to consider Khaliif as a political performer trying to share the stage with and combat Barre, the central actor in the dictatorship.

Khaliif enters into public discourse with the government in the realm of oral performance, which is of great importance in Somali culture.[16]

Ngũgĩ argues that "[p]erformance is the central feature of orature. . . . Performance involves performer and audience, in orature this often being a participatory audience; and performance space, in orature this being anything from the fireside, the village square, the market place, to a shrine. But whatever the combination of location, time and audience, orature realizes its fullness in performance ("Notes" 7).[17] Ngũgĩ also contends that performance is the site and mode of struggle in the postcolonial state between "those who defend the continuity of colonial traditions and those who want to see reflections of a new nation and a new people" (*Penpoints* 69). This struggle for and against the continuance of colonial traditions is at issue in *Close Sesame*, particularly when we consider Deeriye's historical perspective.

Through the "power of performance," Khaliif's performed madness intervenes in the struggle against "the performance of power by the state" (Ngũgĩ, *Penpoints* 38) and, given the nature of his interactions with audiences and the space in which he performs, participates in the tradition of performance orature. Farah's trilogy is concerned from the outset with oral culture and the struggle between the General's regime and its opponents. The trilogy's first installment, *Sweet and Sour Milk* (1979), captures the regime's use of Somali oral culture in the "Dionysius's Ear" memo. The memo, as described by one of its coauthors, details the network of informants interfacing with security services and leads to waves of undocumented detention under the Barre regime. The memo labels this network "an ear-service of tyranny" in which "[e]verything is done verbally" (Farah, *Sweet* 137). In the trilogy's final installment, Khaliif's public performances present themselves as a counterculture of oral resistance with Khaliif playing the role of "the trickster . . . difficult to understand, ambiguous, the essence of heroism" (Scheub 197). In Deeriye's eyes, Khaliif is clearly a performer because he has "[t]he charm, the charisma, the voice [to make] everybody stop and listen" (Farah, *Close* 16). His audience gathers not merely to gaze at a deranged man on a street corner but to hear him speak.

It might seem that Khaliif attracts a crowd simply because of his charismatic performances, yet Deeriye claims that something deeper draws audiences to Khaliif:

> Men and women, wherever he went, assembled round him and heard him speak *for* them, on their behalf, saying what they could not have said. Every now and then some young man or young woman would make a stealthy approach with a view to putting into Khaliif's mouth words the young man or young woman would never dare to say—for this young man or young woman was not mad enough to speak their sane thoughts; and the young man or young woman would be thrown in jail if these words were attributed to him or her. (16; emphasis in original)

Khaliif's audiences are enticed by his powerful political message; he publicly expresses their political grievances and serves as a protest proxy that shields them from the threat of imprisonment. Khaliif is protected by the appearance of madness that his performance creates. The regime believes that no sane person would publicly share the thoughts Khaliif does.

After Deeriye's extended reflection on Khaliif, the first public performance of madness begins. The sounds of Khaliif's "magical voice" and the "welcoming remarks" of the assembled small crowd abruptly draw Deeriye out of his thoughts (16). Khaliif begins his performance in terms that Deeriye characterizes as "clear, grammatical and logical" (17), yet he unsettles this appearance of rationality by performing madness (17). The moment is an example of Deeriye's attempts to paint Khaliif as something other than the madman fixed in public and political discourses. Khaliif's opening statement skirts both the political and religious line that saw the Mullah labeled as mad. The first words Khaliif speaks during this performance and, in fact, in the novel itself are: "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" (17). Khaliif veils his reference to political wickedness in the logic of religion. The political nature of his comments is marked by his focus on conspiracies.

His opening remarks are followed by and contrasted with a set of actions: "[H]e held his hands together in a *namastee*, 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" (17; emphasis in original). Khaliif's applause-seeking actions underscore the performative nature of what he says as well as what he does. He is highly aware of his audience and their reaction to him. The start of Khaliif's show brings more people out of their homes and into his audience, including Deeriye's son, Mursal. The people joining the audience, many of whom wear "garments thrown quickly over their bodies after a shower—their hair in disarray, uncombed, teeth unbrushed," seem to Deeriye to be "madder than Khaliif" (17). This is another subtle assertion from Deeriye that Khaliif, for all the trappings and costume of madness, is sane. Khaliif's veiled sanity is heightened by Deeriye's description of Khaliif's costume and stage presence for this initial performance: "[H]e was decently arrayed in a priestly tradition . . . robed all in white, his movements suggestive as a sheikh's, his voice rich, like a prophecy, with its own cadences, his proclamations saintly" (17). Deeriye situates Khaliif in a much different discourse of madness than the state-sponsored labeling of troublemaking rebels. Khaliif is one of the *majnuun*, the divinely mad or holy men of Islam.

Khaliif then turns his attention to the home of Cigaal, Deeriye's neighbor and a member of the dictator's clan, leading Deeriye (and the audience) to wonder: "Was Cigaal's the wicked house of which he spoke? The members of the audience thought so and somebody provided further notes to Khaliif's broad references" (17). This moment of audience participation appears to be a feature of Khaliif's performances, invited by Khaliif himself. Facing Cigaal's residence, he launches into a diatribe on the wickedness of the house and turns, just as before, from the religious to the political. He ends by calling the members of Cigaal's house "[u]pstarts of the worst kind, upstarts who upturned our sacred traditions and have begun worshipping *him* . . . would you believe it . . . worshipping *him* . . . a mortal and a fool at that in place of Him" (18, emphasis in original). His accusation paints the dictator as an idol and attacks those who worship "him" rather than "Him."

As he did previously, Khaliif follows his public pronouncement with acts of physical comedy: "Without a moment's hesitation, without losing the balance of mind and logic of the sane, he flitted 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" (18). The way Khaliif blurs the line between the priestly tradition (the divine madness of wise utterances) and the actor-clown (the performed madness of physical comedy) draws attention to the performative nature of his public actions and pronouncements. He is highly aware of the spectacle he provides and seeks to engage his audience. His awareness of his audience heightens his political critique, while his comedic behavior defuses the tension and masks the potential danger of his words and actions.

Khaliif's pronouncement and subsequent physical comedy are again followed by audience participation. This time, Farah presents the audience's contribution at length: "[T]he now familiar story of the African dictator who, touring the country, decided to visit a hospital for the mentally ill," told by "a young woman who singled herself out of the crowd" (18). Khaliif's performance opens a space for this story to be shared and for others to raise their voices and act out. The story told by the young woman is significant in the way that it complicates, early in the novel, the issue of madness in the context of dictatorship. Her story functions as a kind of parable of the madness of dictatorship.

In the young woman's tale, an African dictator visits a mental institution where "the dictator [speaks] to the assembly of madmen and madwomen: no applauding, no jeering, no booing: his speech, two hours long, was listened to very attentively and he was pleased with himself" (18). This peaceful reaction on the part of the mad is contrasted with the actions of one man who does not participate in singing the "praise-names of their beloved benefactor," the dictator (18). This lone man sits in silence, but seems to the dictator to have a "defiant smile" (18). The dictator asks the director of the institution about the lone man. The director responds: "The man you refer to as the *madman* was actually certified sane this very morning. . . . You might say he was the only one

in the room who had a certificate of sanity" and laughs as if the situation were humorous (18–19; emphasis in original). Unsurprisingly, the dictator does not take this well and declares the director mentally ill, ordering his men to "'[s]traitjacket him, quick'" (19). The dictator's course of action is similar to the impulses of the British colonial administration in dealing with the Mullah and the Mau Mau. Those who resist are labeled and excluded as mad. The young woman speaking to the crowd concludes that "[t]he director of the institution of the mentally ill became the newest member of the community of madmen" (19).

Her political parable illustrates a number of important points. The patients' respectful response to the dictator's two-hour speech signals that those who accept his words are the truly insane. The case of the sane man, which lands the director in a straitjacket, supports this conclusion. In a direct counter to the disciplinary discourse of resistance as madness evident in the historical cases of the Mullah and the Mau Mau as well as the fictional case of the Group of 10 in *Close Sesame*, the parable also situates resistance as a rational response to dictatorship. The director's mistake draws attention to the capricious and self-serving cruelty of dictatorship and demonstrates the danger of publicly resisting the tyranny of the regime. The young woman's comment is the most interesting of all. The director of the institution, in the young woman's words, is not categorized as mentally ill, as the patients are, but is considered a member of the "community of madmen." This distinction, going back to Canguilhem's distinction between Foucault's use of madness instead of mental illness, marks the director's act, unwitting as it might be, as an act of resistance to or criticism of the dictator's regime rather than the result of a medical condition.

The crowd gathered around Khaliif reacts to this tale with a "sigh of grief," but he takes up the parable as a continuation of his condemnation of the wicked (19). Khaliif resumes his performance:

> "Now who is mad? Down with those who kill, who humiliate and torture! Down with those who make use of unjustified methods of rule." And he burst into a guffaw of laughter which made everybody raise querying eyebrows. Scarcely had every-

> one relaxed than he startled them with: "Don't the Arabs say, 'Pinch the wisdom, o people, out of the mouths of madmen.'" Then a silence. (19)

Khaliif demands that both his immediate audience and the novel's audience ask this question in light of the preceding parable. 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? Khaliif's answer places resistance squarely in the camp of reason and sanity and calls for the straitjacket for the dictator and his cronies. Yet his actions, as part of his performance, complicate his response. His laughter unsettles the audience and aligns him with the director of the institution, the critic of the regime who invites punishment. His startling quotation of a proverb about wisdom in the mouths of the mad also complicates Khaliif's position. As with almost all of Khaliif's words and actions, the question of his sanity is murky. As much as Deeriye wants to believe that Khaliif is sane, his physical comedy makes him seem mad. This, however, is the point of his strategy. By always keeping others guessing, Khaliif can potentially shield himself, his audience, and his co-performers from harm.

Farah emphasizes this protective element of Khaliif's performance of madness as the scene concludes. Yassin, Cigaal's grandson, threatens to throw stones at Khaliif for his accusations against the house. Yet the crowd, led by Mursal, protects Khaliif from injury. Khaliif escapes the potentially violent repercussions of his words and actions because the perception of madness he creates allows the crowd to shield him. So it is with the actions of the characters in the novel who try to assassinate the dictator, which is perhaps the ultimate act of resistance or negation. Bystanders characterize Mahad's attempt as "an unpremeditated act of madness" (75). The next attempt is made by Jibriil Mohamed-Somali who, according to the official account in the paper, is shot while trying to place a bomb near the General's residence. This "man, mad that he

was" (200), according to the paper, shot and killed a security official. Jibriil is described as "working alone and not in collaboration with any dissident group either inside or outside of the country" (200–01).

This notion of the solitary madman is precisely the public image that the regime wishes to use to characterize such acts of political resistance. For the most part, these acts 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. As Deeriye and his family wait to discover Mursal's fate, Khaliif arrives immediately before a news broadcast announcing a bombing, which they assume means Mursal's death in another failed assassination attempt. Khaliif's appearance at this time is unusual because "he had no crowd to address himself to, no audience" (220). The family, however, is Khaliif's true audience, and he has a message to share. He speaks of martyrs and prays for their blessing and the blessing of those who survive them. Then he speaks of a "community of ten . . . a community of brotherhood" who worked and struggled together (221). That Khaliif speaks of the underground movement seems to be confirmed by Mursal's wife, Natasha, who notices that Khaliif is "wearing Mursal's shirt and trousers. How very weird" (221). This is not weird at all, but rather a message sent to the family in code via the novel's "madman," a message that will allow them to interpret the official announcement (the real madness) made over the radio and determine that Mursal is no longer missing. He died in an attempt on the General's life, which will certainly be characterized to the public as the work of a solitary madman.

The novel ends, as it begins, with a performance of madness. At the end, however, Deeriye is the actor who seeks to share the stage with the General. Deeriye surveys his life and says that he has "been on the fringe of *madness* the past forty years: *the madness* of which I talk is in itself a political statement" (229; emphasis in original). Yet it seems he is still not interested in acting out in madness until Khaliif arrives. This time "Khaliif the madman" walks right into the home as the family considers Mursal's death (233). Khaliif is dressed "in military uniforms . . . his chest decked with ribbons of honour and medallions . . . acting big

and very important. You wouldn't think he was mad" (234). 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 (234).

Farah does not provide an account of the meeting between Deeriye and Khaliif. The novel resumes with Deeriye collecting a revolver and heading off to a meeting he has scheduled with the General. He wonders if he will be searched. He is certain that "if his attempt failed, people would say he had gone mad" (235). He then disappears from his family and the novel, his whereabouts unknown for three days. Piecing together rumors and reports, his family wonders:

> 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.) (236)

Wright considers the outcome of Deeriye's mistake with the prayer beads in both versions a sign of Deeriye's potential to "have more power over the General as a political martyr and religious symbol" (*Novels* 106).[18] His failed assassination attempt closes the novel and adds another act of madness—of political action—to the trilogy's list of fallen, imprisoned, or exiled actors of resistance.

The novel—and, indeed, the trilogy as a whole—is decidedly pessimistic about the prospects of resistance.[19] Wright observes that "[t]hough Farah continues to insist on the value and necessity of political commitment, he demonstrates in this third novel that actions by inept lone assassins, easily isolated and targeted by the security police, are no more effectual, and no less futile, than subversion from within the ruling establishment in the first book and passive resistance from without in

the second" (*Novels* 89). If, as Wright suggests, Farah is insistent on the "value . . . of political commitment," how can a reader reconcile that value with the seeming futility of political action? It might be the case, as Masterson suggests, that a "preoccupation with the counter-hegemonic capacity of human nature at its most profound, politically personal level . . . animates Farah's work" (100). He quotes Eyal Chowers, who proposes that "[r]esistance[,] in Foucault's view, takes the form of local confrontations that achieve limited ends and set the stage for the subsequent struggles" (qtd. in Masterson 100). I want to draw once again on the theatrical metaphor of the stage invoked by Farah and Deeriye, noting Chowers' use of the idiom "set the stage." In Deeriye's version, "Somalia has become a stage where the Grandest Actor performs in front of an applauding audience that should be booing him. Anyone who wishes to share the spotlight either goes mad or in the end is imprisoned. Otherwise, everyone is made to join the crowd and applaud with it" (Farah, *Close* 214). Each attempt in *Close Sesame* ends in failure to meet the desired aim and in the individual actor's death. But each attempt to take the political stage by force and remove the Grand Actor from the scene is recuperated in part by the closing line of the novel: "[A]t least neither [Mursal or Deeriye] died an anonymous death—and that was heroic" (237).

Farah's novel, and trilogy as a whole, celebrates the efforts and struggles of those who try to resist the authoritarian Barre regime, despite their inability to effect any kind of real political change. The conclusion of *Close Sesame* also suggests that the performance of madness has concrete, positive effects on the lives of the other members of Deeriye's family, including Mursal's wife and child. Their survival indicates that the performance of madness in the act of political resistance can at least protect one's loved ones from reprisal. In addition, despite the overwhelming sense of the futility of resistance in Farah's trilogy, and in *Close Sesame* in particular, there is a way to read the novels as a productive intervention in the struggle against neocolonial dictatorship. The trilogy offers a discursive challenge to the kind of official hegemonic discourse that marks resistance as mad, irrational, disorganized, and unpopular. *Close Sesame* functions discursively much like the parable of the dicta-

tor and the asylum. Although the characters' attempts to eliminate the dictator are unsuccessful, the stories within the novel demonstrate that the "community of madmen" that the dictator creates to marginalize and malign his opponents is made up of sane and rational people; the real madmen are the dictator and those who support him.

Notes

1 The Barre regime's close ties to the Soviet Union, which lasted until the late 1970s, are well known. It has been well documented that the KGB used haloperidol and other drugs to break prisoners' wills in the late 1970s. For more discussion of the Soviet Union's punitive use of haloperidol, see Podrabinek and Kosserev and Crawshaw. Additionally, Lewis notes that the General's National Security Service was led by "a Sandhurst and K.G.B.-trained commander" (212). Farah alludes to this in the previous novel in his trilogy, *Sardines*, when he writes that Barre used the Soviets "to build himself a system of security, watertight as the KGB" (24).

2 Derrida's response to Foucault and Felman's reading of both Derrida and Foucault in *Writing and Madness* adds an interesting wrinkle to the issue of exclusion and madness. Whereas Derrida complicates Foucault's argument in some ways, he also discusses madness in terms of a "revolution against reason" and a "disturbance" (36). Even as their perspectives differ, Derrida and Foucault both figure madness in terms of resistance. For a perspective on this debate in light of Africa, see Esonwanne.

3 The characterization of resistance as madness also has a historical corollary in the American South in the nineteenth century. In an 1851 issue of the *New Orleans Medical and Surgical Journal*, Cartwright proposed a mental disorder he termed "drapetomania," which described the disease of the mind that made a slave want to be free. For more, see the reprint of Cartwright in *Health, Disease and Illness* as well as Naragon and Bynum.

4 This is ironic considering that when Carothers was appointed director and principal psychiatrist of the Nairobi Mathare Hospital in August 1938 he had no qualifications in psychiatry. Carothers stayed in that position for eleven years, taking a six-month course in psychiatry in 1946 which was "the sum total of his professional training" (Anderson 283).

5 Carothers published reports for the World Health Organization such as his book *The African Mind in Health and Disease* (1953) and consulted with the British colonial government in Kenya. This is not to suggest that his arguments were universally accepted. Henry's "A Report on 'The African Mind in Health and Disease'" presents a scathing rebuttal of Carothers' racially based arguments from the perspectives of psychology, psychiatry, and anthropology. Nevertheless,

Carothers' work had a far-reaching impact on public policy and the treatment of Africans in the mid-twentieth century.

6 Vera's "Dead Swimmers" contains a reference to a hospital "on 23rd Avenue. It is as old as the country. Africans were sent there in Rhodesia for inciting revolutionary behavior" (276). This suggests that Carothers' approach may have influenced other British colonies.

7 For more on the place of mental illness in the colony and its relationship to disciplinary measures and imprisonment, see Mahone.

8 Just what to call him (or how to spell it in English) is complicated, as Abdi Sheik-Abdi discusses. The correct form of his name in Arabic is Muhammad 'Abdullah Hasan; Somalis know him as Seyyid Mohammed 'Abdulle Hassan; he preferred to be called *ina* 'Abdulle Hassan; and he was nicknamed the Mad Mullah (*wadaad waalan*) by his adversaries (Sheik-Abdi 44). The title "Mullah," used chiefly for clerics or educated men, "is seldom, if ever . . . [used] by fellow Somalis. He is either the Seyyid by those who revere him or *ina* 'Abdulle Hassan by the less reverent" (44). I will take the same "middle course" outlined by Sheik-Abdi and refer to the historical person primarily as the Mullah or by the Somali version of his name, unless I am discussing him in the context of Farah's novel, in which he is primarily referred to as the "Sayyid" (29). I only refer to the moniker "Mad Mullah" to reference the colonial state's attitude toward him. For more on his name, see Lewis (69–70).

9 Jardine's *The Mad Mullah of Somaliland* is one of two important early historical sources for this discussion. The book was published in 1923, only three years after the Mullah's death. Jardine had served as the secretary to the colonial administration in Somlaliland from 1916 to 1921, and at the time of writing his book he was "researching and writing in the relative quiet and comfort of British Nigeria, with full governmental support" (Sheik-Abdi 5). The other early attempt, despite its apologetic approach, is Caroselli's *Ferro e Fuoco in Somalia* (1931). Both Jardine's and Caroselli's books received "the official stamp of approval by the British and Italian authorities" (Sheik-Abdi 5). This, quite obviously, accounts for both Jardine's access to official documents and his unabashedly apologetic, pro-colonial reading of the events. Nevertheless, Sheik-Abdi and Lewis both cite these histories as the earliest works to make "a real attemp[t] to tell the story of the Mullah" (Sheik-Abdi 3).

10 Bardolph entertains the possibility that "Khaliif, the mad man" might be "inspired in his raving accusations like the 'Mad Mullah'" (410). Although she does not go beyond simply entertaining this possibility, she argues that Khaliif and the Mullah are connected in the world of the novel and for Deeriye.

11 In an example that seems to resonate with Deeriye's criticism of the Barre regime, Okot concludes a chapter with a call to action: "Apesmanship in high places does not help in eradicating 'apesmanship' among the youth; it does not encourage creativity among the youths. Let the black man use his creativity and initiative to reconstruct his own society and institutions in his own style!" (5).

12 This analogy between state and domestic authority pervades the trilogy. In *Sardines*, Farah writes: "Medina said that one reason why she opposed the present dictatorship was that it reminded her of her unhappy childhood, that the General reminded her of her grandfather who was a monstrosity and an unchallengeable patriarch who decreed what was to be done, when and by whom" (17). Prior to *Part Two* of *Sweet and Sour Milk*, one of the epigraphs, by Wilhelm Reich, reads: "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" (95).

13 On the question of patriarchy in *Close Sesame* and Farah's work more generally, see Dasenbrock and Phillips.

14 Farah expresses his personal admiration for the Mullah in an interview with Jaggi. He says that one of his life goals is "to write a play or a biography about Sayyid Mohammed Abdulle Hassan, the resistance leader and poet. And I hope to do so one day, before I cease" (Jaggi and Farah 185).

15 Masterson's description of Khaliif's "axiomatic function" (117) grounds itself in Foucault's madman who is a "guardian of truth" in farces (Foucault, *Madness and Civilization* 14). This role, while part of Khaliif's performance, is not adequate to describe Farah's portrayal of madness in the novel.

16 For more on how orature, particularly poetry, plays a significant role in Somali culture and politics, see Finnegan and Orwin.

17 Ngũgĩ takes the term orature from Ugandan critic Pio Zirimu. Ngũgĩ describes Zirimu's history: "[Zirimu] never lived long enough to develop the concept; his life was untimely cut short by the brutal Idi Amin dictatorship, whose agents poisoned him in Nigeria during the famous *Festac '77.* Idi Amin hated critical performing artists, and Pio Zirimu was one in a list of his victims" ("Notes" 1; emphasis in original).

18 For more on the religious symbolism of Deeriye's final act, see Phillips.

19 The trilogy's lack of optimism is summed up by Mnthali, who notes that "[n]owhere is the futility of attempting to assassinate the General made more poignant than in the final chapter of *Close Sesame*" (184).

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