

The politics of paranoia: Reading Alioum Fantoure's *Tropical Circle* as a circle of madness

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ABSTRACT: This study explores the manifestation of political disenchantment and emotional disintegration in Alioum Fantouré's influential novel, *Tropical Circle* (*Le Cercle des tropiques*). This is the result of a vicious political tyranny and state-sponsored terror experienced in the records of African post-colonial history. Thus, the principal objective of the study is to investigate how political power is reinforced through paranoia, successfully shifting the post-independence African state into a metaphorical circle of madness. Exploring the novel through the lens of a "circle of madness", this reading avers that autocratic governance in post-colonial Africa aggressively launches a psychopathic reality in addition to debasing social institutions. Bari Kouli, the imaginary dictator, creates paranoia that extends beyond a mere clinical anomaly into becoming the prime machinery of citizen survival and state control. This paper probes the political repression that ruptures both personal and collective psyches, exposing the clogged sphere of horror and treachery amid state-sponsored brutality, which is represented by the emblematic construct of the "Circle". It is anchored in the theoretical framework of post-colonial psychoanalysis and Marxist literary theory. Questioning the vicious cycle of psychological collapse of dictatorship on both the oppressor and the oppressed under Bari Kouli's despotic government, the reading reveals that paranoia is a deliberate political strategy used to produce panic, contain opposition and regularise communal agony. In conclusion, the reading shows that the novel remains a sarcastic critique of the early post-colonial African ruling class, exposing how they institute paranoia as a systemic malady that subverts national well-being. This study, thus, accentuates the imperative need for dismantling psychopathic power structures to break the cycle of socio-political degeneration in post-colonial Africa.

Keywords: Political paranoia, totalitarianism, Alioum Fantouré, *Tropical Circle*, post-colonial Africa, circle of madness.

INTRODUCTION

This investigation is a reading of Alioum Fantouré's (1981) *Tropical Circle* as a "circle of madness". It exposes the politics of paranoia by stressing the dark experiences associated with post-colonial African governance through the lens of psychological and political disintegration. It centres on how state-sponsored terror, autocratic rule and systemic domination deform man's rationality, shifting the socio-political milieu into a factual and metaphorical "circle of madness" in the fictional world of the novel, *Tropical Circle*. Set in the imaginary, but largely representative state of South Majiland with Port Equator as its capital, this

cardinal prose narrative by Alioum Fantouré portrays how the promise of political freedom is hastily betrayed. It reveals how the liberty granted by European colonisers is turned into a mirage and capricious dystopian nightmare under the tyrannical regime of Bari Kouli, the dictator and the Messiah-Koi.

The conscious breeding of paranoia is apparent in the novel. Fear, mistrust, terror and bloodletting are applied to achieve control and suppression of the masses. The dictator Bari Kouli establishes his administration through large-scale ethical abuses, assassination and the institutional-

sation of terror. He establishes a squad of hooligans, killers, heartless fraudsters who constitute the high-powered, protective and dogmatic militia that is absolutely loyal to him. He is the paragon of totalitarianism which characterises post-colonial African leadership. This entails that the political terrain is drastically emptied of its democratic transparency and inclusiveness, which constitute the natural and fundamental antidotes to general political conspiracy and terror. Accordingly, the regime's fear is marked by its permanent state of emergency in which the ruler's mental disintegration characterises state policy. The leadership style of Kouli reflects the basic tenets of political paranoia. This is a situation in which the ruler's permanent fear of betrayal and coup d'état pushes him into an abnormal, extreme, self-protective and belligerent security consciousness. This is the infectious disease that beset the entire colonised peoples of the world (Thiong'o, 2006).

Noticeably, a close reading of the novel exposes another angle, which is politics as the contagion of paranoia. The state launched a policy of mass imprisonment and informant convention. This is seen in the State-sponsored paranoia manifesting itself as an incurable and horrifying disease. In the narrative, this takes the form of a colossal spate of imprisonment, daily torture, endless murder and an ubiquitous fear of censure on the part of the informants. A regime would certainly and aggressively place its population as a collective "Other", that is, a potential threat, if it operates on paranoid reasoning. Within the arena of the selected text, the masses are represented through the daily life-and-death struggles of characters like Bohi Di, the narrator, who internalises this anxiety. The citizens become "paranoid subjects" ensnared in an atmosphere where vigorous distrust develops into existential terror. This is the inevitable consequence of the disintegration of the society beset by political hostility, social anomie and a total loss of public trust.

The politics of paranoia takes another angle, which is the paradox of independence as a deceptive loop.

Hence, the "circle of madness" is structural. With the cruelty perpetrated by Europeans and their local agents during the era of colonialism, freedom was naturally welcomed by the natives. However, the experience that followed this autonomy was entirely unexpected. Thus, the narrative demonstrates how the lofty expectations of independence were swiftly swapped by home-made tribulations. The novel highlights the spate of harrowing incidents of bribery, nepotism, corruption, harsh taxation, economic hardship, harassment and a terrifying cult of personality, which turned freedom into an unbearable experience. Through the narrative, therefore, Fantouré profoundly condemns the transition from Western colonialism to indigenous dictatorship, depicting the entire post-colonial independence experience as a paradoxical delusion. The quest for genuine freedom has been an ongoing, seemingly evasive and hopeless circle, since the basic subjugation of the colonial era remains structurally

unbroken and merely becomes rebranded under African overlords. The socio-economic rot and lack of liberty continue to ensnare the masses in a cycle of anguish, upholding the allegory of the "tropical circle" as a recurring ordeal from which the characters cannot easily get away.

On the whole, this study would consider the notion of paranoia in diverse ways. However, most importantly, it considers the concept from the perspective that political fiction uses it to depict post-colonial African leaders and their unpopular regimes. This is seen in Frantz Fanon's (1963, p. 249) theories on imperialist psychosis and in Foucault (1965, p. 276) perceptions on madness and civilisation. Literary artists scarcely view paranoia as a personal pathology. They use it to depict an institutional strategy, avowing that the "circle" implies an enclosed, self-sustaining circle from which there is no escape. Therefore, in the novel, characters live in a claustrophobic mental landscape where reality is essentially distorted. Since the line between irrational anxiety and rational fear (of a brutal regime) is blurred, the entire society is completely trapped in a shared madness. Thus, paranoia filters down from the leadership to the country's citizenry like a disease enmeshing all the people. In addition, trust is entirely eroded; neighbours suspect neighbours, while survival requires unconditional compliance with the evil system. Through the analysis of the interface of political dictatorship along with its associated corporal torments and psychological tribulations, this inquiry intends to accomplish, among others, an exposition of how the shared nightmare of colonisation remains indelible, transforming the post-colonial era experiences of the colonised (Fanon, 1963, p. 249). It also depicts Foucault's notions of institutional, state-based weaponisation of "madness" in containing revolt.

Therefore, the central aim of this study is to analyse how political despotism and repression lead to shared psychological degradation in a post-colonial African world. However, the specific objectives for this paper are to:

1. examine how political power breeds paranoia in the text;
2. deconstruct the metaphor of the "circle" as an inevitable cycle of post-colonial disappointment;
3. evaluate the psychological disintegration of characters as an indication of a decayed society; and
4. assess the artist's narrative procedures in depicting the aesthetics of horror in the text.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This study adopts a two-fold theoretical framework blending Post-colonial Theory, with a particular spotlight on the notion of political paranoia, and Psychoanalytic Criticism. This hybridity will enhance the critical exposition of Fantouré's *Tropical Circle* as a narrative of systemic degradation. Particularly, it draws from Frantz Fanon's (1963, p. 249) theories on imperialist psychosis along with

Foucault (1965, p. 276) perceptions on madness and civilisation. Pioneered by scholars like Frantz Fanon in *The Wretched of the Earth* (1963, p. 249), Post-colonial theory avers that the movement from colonial suppression to independence often reproduces autocratic structures left by the colonisers instead of getting rid of them. Fanon contends that the post-colonial elitist class adopts the psychological ferments of the former colonisers along with their brutal tendencies. Consequently, a pathological ruling class emerges. Fanon's theoretical perception is harmonised with political psychoanalysis, aiding the inquiry to view "paranoia" (p. 264) not purely as a personal medical diagnosis, but as a systemic and institutionalised machinery of control. Hence, in the stated study structure, the term "circle of madness" entails the self-perpetuating response circle wherein an administration's paranoid anxiety over rebellion pushes it into implementing excessive acts of state horror. In the long run, the imaginary paranoid action generates the actual communal ordeals, hostilities and ensuing resistance, thus confirming the original paranoia of the regime. The essence of this theoretical framework is to sharpen the investigation by probing into Fantouré's textual constructs, seeing the imaginary "Tropical Circle" as a symbolic sphere of confusion, inhabited and ruled by the mental degradation of both populace and leadership. Anchoring this study on Fanon's post-colonial perception of alienation increases the chance of interpreting the emblematic transmission of political power into the realm of mental pathology. The study would verify the regime's paranoia as the core organising code of the state for shifting the socio-political setting into a precise and figurative penal complex. Hence, the burden of despotic surveillance, along with erratic state brutality, determines the line between sanity and insanity, confirming that the characters are launched into a situation of shared psychosis or a punctured psyche through political oppression in the postcolonial state.

REVIEW OF RELEVANT LITERATURE

Scholarship regarding post-colonial African authoritarian literature normally juxtaposes political strains with psychological dimensions. This proffers an enabling starting point for investigating novels like Fantouré's *Tropical Circle*. Scholars like Frantz Fanon (1963, p. 249) and Achille Mbembe (1992, pp. 3-37) have long ascertained that the postcolonial nation frequently reflects the psychological ruptures of its leaders, turning authority into an exercise of unlimited control and paranoia. Hinged on this theoretical code, Fantouré's novel cannot be viewed as a plain political metaphor. Instead, it becomes an accurate "circle of madness", exposing the state's total reliance on the systematic generation of dread and illusion. Existing studies such as Jatoe-Kaleo and Koffi (2016, pp. 11-26) on Fantouré's work centre on interpreting the transition from one form of systemic nightmare to another,

justifying the thesis that colonial suppression was replaced by indigenous tyranny, laying the foundation for political instability in Africa. Many researchers dwell mainly on the character of Bari Kouli and his ruling party, the Socialist Regeneration Party. Scholars frequently examine them as models of the malaise that overwhelmed numerous post-independence African regimes. Through the depiction of the imaginary setting of South Majiland as a mental asylum, contemporary studies tend to tag the particular machinery by which political paranoia envelopes the entire society, enmeshing the psyche of both the despot and the community.

Contemporary literature, theoretically, is based on a hybridisation of post-colonial and psychoanalytic frameworks. Fundamental scholars such as Soyinka (1968, pp. 14-21) (particularly his theories on the writer and the modern African state) and Lazarus (1990, pp. 1-26) are frequently invoked to explore and theorise the disillusionment (*désenchantement*) of the post-independence epoch. Additionally, the scholars draw seriously on Michel Foucault's notions of disciplinary power and bio-politics to analyse the institutionalised madness in the text (Foucault, 1965). Applying these theoretical codes, scholars have been enabled to view Fantouré's "circle" as a clogged sphere where the political rebellion is routinely identified and punished as lunacy or subversion. A comparative analysis shows strong parallels linking the examination of *Tropical Circle* with studies of contemporary texts, such as Labou Tansi (2016) *The Shameful State* or Thiong'o (2006) *Wizard of the Crow*. The scholars concur that these writers portray the post-colonial nation as a monstrous, degrading entity ruled by structures of absurdity. Nevertheless, some discrepancies are noticed in the interpretation of Fantouré's definitive vision.

Thus, different groups offer their diverse perspective in analysing the novel. A group of critics argues that *Tropical Circle* is intensely cynical and nihilistic, without proffering any escape from the sphere of oppression. On the other hand, disagreeing with that thesis, a reformist group avers that with characters like Bohi Di, the novel generates a subtle, radical counter-narrative intended to fracture the vicious cycle. In the long run, a considerable gap in available literature is its propensity towards treating madness purely as a symbol for political dishonesty, as against investigating the literal mental tribulation inflicted on the masses. Moreover, obtainable scholarship frequently ignores how the formalistic and stylistic disintegration of Fantouré's prose reflects the mental degeneration of the characters themselves. While recognising the essence of post-colonial manipulations of African leading elite in the interpretation of the novel, this study intends to ameliorate the gap by moving away from the usual boring thematic readings centred squarely on dictatorship.

Apart from the scholars reviewed above, several others have equally applied different theories in the study of the

novel. Focusing on postcolonial political ideology and socio-historical criticism, Midiohouan (1984, p. 45) approaches the novel from the perspective of political pragmatism, seeing the text as a direct reflection of historical shifts from colonial subjugation to domestic dictatorship. He pioneered the characterisation of the narrative as a “negative utopia” (*l’utopie négative*), revealing how Fantouré exploits the structural disappointment of independence movements under tyrannical leaders like the Messiah-Koi. Critics, however, observe that his strictly ideological approach tends to evaluate the text primarily on its political function, with sometimes disregarding its formal aesthetic qualities and pure literary textuality. Another critic, Chevrier (1981), examines the performative and theatrical nature of postcolonial dictatorship in addition to aspects of the picaresque genre. The limitation of his study is its structural focus on the prototype of the “tyrant”, which rarely abstracts the specific regional and local nuances of Guinea’s socio-political history. The impact of his work is vital. Using a theoretical focus that hinges on Narratology, Structuralism, and Comparative Tyranny Studies, he classified the text along a wave of 1970s “dictator novels”, stressing how Fantouré relies on a dispassionate yet highly dramatic technique to condemn personality cults and political sycophancy.

Blair (1981, pp. 1-10) focuses on translation studies and socio-political allegory in the assessment of the thematic architecture of the novel. She hinges her studies on the perspective of intercultural diffusion and collective political truths. She underscores how Fantouré resolutely generalised definite institutions to structure the text as a universal political emblem of corrupt despotic governance and election-rigging, seeing it as something far and near beyond the immediate ex-French colonies. The shortfalls of the work include her penchant for the abstract notion of “adaptation” over strict translation, which occasionally strips away some of the novel’s unique *français petit-nègre* syntactic rhythms. Again, exploiting the textual and pedagogical literary criticism, another critic, Goursaud, uses a formalist and thematic textual analytic format to guide typical analytical interpretations of modern Francophone fiction. He proffered a vital step-by-step structural synthesis of the narrative arcs of the prose work, including its thematic motifs and character dynamics. His work is exceptional, regarding its penchant for close-reading relevance of a study guide, but lacks the intensity required for the serious, radical, theoretical fields (Goursaud, 1987). From the geopolitical literary criticism and sociological realist mode, Boumazou (2012) hinges his study on how spatial geography and state machinery serve as structures of subjugation in literary works. He expressly looks at how economic underdevelopment and domesticated infrastructural depreciation entangle with the political rot portrayed in Fantouré’s imaginary “Maji Land”. His study visibly segregates the distinct socio-economic realities of West African independence. By intermittently

leaving the artistic and structural prose options under-analysed, his analysis becomes largely a study in political science.

METHODOLOGY AND RESEARCH PROCEDURE

Rooted in literary hermeneutics and political analysis, the methodology for this study employs a qualitative, text-oriented analytical code. This aligns with the chosen research theoretical base – Post-colonial Theory along with Political Psychology, with peculiar leaning on the notions of political paranoia and dictatorial manners - to examine how power structures deform human consciousness and societal governance in Fantouré’s *Tropical Circle*. The text is subjected to close textual analysis, involving narrative components such as characterisation, plot and structure, symbolism, along with cyclical motifs of captivity to show how despotic regimes methodically promote a culture of insanity. The analytical procedure exposes the thematic burdens of political disenchantment, state-sponsored horror and neo-colonial dictatorship by viewing the narrative “Tropical Circle” concurrently as a geographical setting and a mental allegory for an inevitable cycle of madness.

Therefore, the study procedure takes a four-fold structure designed to ensure an accurate and broad literary examination. The first stage involves a careful, close reading of the text to isolate precise textual proofs, discourse and narrative signals exposing political paranoia and mental disintegration. Next is the data collection stage involving an orderly literature review of secondary sources, including post-colonial literary accounts, historical reports of post-independence African tyrannical regimes as well as psychological theories on paranoia and power. The third phase is the analytical stage involving a synthesis of these theoretical structures with the principal text, classifying discoveries into thematic segments like the nightmare of the exploited, the oppressor’s psychopathology, and the structural irrationality of the state. The last stage is the synthesis phase, which entails compiling the perceptions to reach conclusions on how the artist focuses the literary aesthetics to assess the real-world of political decadence.

ANALYSIS OF DATA

Analysis of the politics of paranoia in *Tropical Circle*, the state as a circle of madness

Alioum Fantoure is the pseudonym of the Guinean-born writer of the novel, *Tropical Circle*. Not much is revealed about his personal life or his literary activities. We only know that he lives and works in Europe. One could guess that he might belong to the new generation of writers who have not yet attracted the attention of the African critic and

reviewer. A possible reason for this could be the fact that he is based outside; yet, another could stem from the language of his work; the novel appeared originally in French in 1972, with the title: *Les cercles des tropiques*. Only in 1981, nearly a decade later, did the English-speaking audience receive the work through the translation by Dorothy Blair. This analysis of the politics of paranoia in this text would highlight the state as a circle of madness, under two sub-headings, namely: The cabals of neo-colonialism and the fall of a heartless despot.

The cabals of neo-colonialism

The novel is an X-ray of the recurrent yet ever-relevant theme of corrupt political transition from colonialism to self-rule in Africa. There is much evidence from the work to support the thesis that the colonial administrators had willfully planted and nourished seeds of political instability, economic misery and social upheaval before leaving their ex-colonies. The work relates the story of a fictional world colonised by France. It is set in this country, South Majiland, with Port Equator as the capital. The tropical region of Africa as its setting captures the novelist's intention for satire. It was the eve of independence when an ultimate collapse of the colonial fabric was desired, and when that miracle of freedom, together with many of its lofty dreams, was about to happen. However, this struggle for independence and desire for an indigenous form of development could only survive as a dream. This is unfortunate not only for South Majiland, but also for other countries in Africa. The stark reality of the struggle is simple: they got rid of the white imperialists only to entrench the tyranny of black neo-colonists and military coups. In other words, the essence of the struggle was to legalise the issue of political instability in the continent. South Majiland is a fictional setting, yet it mirrors most countries in tropical Africa - nations engulfed by a vicious circle of madness resulting from political succession struggles, with its bloodshed, violence, confusion, et cetera.

The spate of disillusionment (*désenchantement*) that followed the post-independence epoch, hinted at by scholars such as Soyinka (1968, pp. 14-21) (particularly his theories on the writer and the modern African state) and Lazarus (1990, pp. 1-26) were enough to edge many more scholars to invoke and theorise on the lost dream of freedom. The novel can, thus, be read as a satire on the struggle for political power between two rival political parties, the People's Workers' Association (P.W.A.) and the Socialist Regeneration Party (S.R.P.) led by Bari Kouli. A notorious criminal, police informer, heartless smuggler, social misfit, and bankrupt deceiver, the S.R.P. chief, Kouli, suddenly becomes a transport and business magnate as well as the presidential aspirant of the powerful and wealthy class. Multinationals and financial monopolies sponsor him. The choice of men of Kouli's

status must be viewed as the source of political disarray and conflict within the society. As an election strategy, he floats a private police force, the Suicide Squad on Mount Koulouma, into which he conscripts people. His men cause many social disturbances in the major cities. Described as 'market madness', the widespread disturbances cause panic among the populace. The squad was able to release hundreds of snakes hidden in the false bottoms of fruit baskets at the peak of market activities. Kouli employs this in an attempt to implicate the leadership of the P.W.A., intimidate its supporters, and thus gain greater popularity.

Bari Kouli gradually eliminates his rival P.W.A. leader, Monchon, who is more articulate and consistent in his demands for equal rights, probity and social justice for all classes of workers in the country. Monchon's defeat is to be traced to the overt support which colonial administrative officials gave to Kouli. In the long run, the latter employs his deadly squads as well as the state security to disrupt every electoral campaign strategy of P.W.A. He thus emerges as the sole presidential candidate for what may only be seen as a parody of an election. As soon as the election was over, he lets his true colours - an impostor, a neo-colonist and a veritable instrument of destruction - out in the open. He turns political freedom sour for his countrymen. According to the narrator: "We were not getting independence; we being made a present of an infernal machine. But that machine, I thought, could blow up in the face of many more folk than it was intended for" (p. 111).

When the Kouli machine rolls for a year, South Majiland saw herself burning with fire. Kouli makes a frantic effort to entrench a despotic regime. His secret squad takes a new name: the State Protection Patrol (S.P.P.). With Halouma, a notorious murderer and unrepentant vandal, as its Commander-in-Chief, the S.P.P. sweeps an entire nation into misery. Its members worked hand-in-hand with the central committee of the ruling party to break the people in body and in spirit. A reign of terror it is, as countless real or imagined opponents of the inhuman regime are jailed, sacked, disfigured, denied every means of survival, mocked at and left in dejection. Most of them suffer public execution and humiliation. Moreover, no age is spared. A sixteen-year-old schoolboy is killed for copying out and circulating a poem of Bertolt Brecht. The innocent, helpless youngster is convicted for attempting to lead an insurrection against the regime. In fact, life and existence become meaningless and tasteless. Death becomes more appealing to the citizens of South Majiland: "We gradually came to prefer death to the suffering that our 'saviours' subjected us to. Silence was our refuge" (p. 181).

The word 'saviours' is emphatic of the sad contradictions in the novel. The dubious Kouli transforms himself into the legendary redeemer, taking the title of the Messiah-Kouli. They began to think of him as that

redeemer whom the whole country had long been waiting for. "We have so many divinities in our world of down-and-outs that any stupid legend is enough to make any impostor into a god" (p. 62).

A comparative analysis of the novel with other post-colonial narratives shows strong parallels linking the examination of *Tropical Circle* with studies of many other contemporary texts, such as Labou Tansi (2016) *The Shameful State* or Thiong'o (2006) *Wizard of the Crow*. Many scholars agree that the African writer depicts the post-colonial nation most often as a monstrous, degrading entity ruled by structures of absurdity. Like many African heads of government, Kouli uses every means: words, money, actions, his squad, to impress his overwhelming greatness, power and terror on the populace. Yet, to those less ignorant and impartial people like Bohi Di, he

seemed quite insignificant ... his well-cut seemed rather out of place in our forest surroundings. His eyes were hidden behind huge dark glasses ... his speech gave me goose flesh ... he gave us no choice: 'all those who are here today will follow my orders or die! ... (pp. 62-63)

Thus, the ubiquitous party of Bari Kouli harasses and haunts the populace. It becomes a kind of religion that serves not the cause of redemption, but one of oppression, slavery, and desolation of South Majiland. Messiah-koism, as it was properly called, becomes the creed of the new religion, and now "replaces god and wears the face of suffering death." Bohi Di notes that it, simply, becomes: "A new form of intolerance which did not have the justification of the Bible, the Korean and the Lord, but a trinity of despair: me, the messiah-koi, my power, my eternity" (p. 127).

Kouli's new religion alienates men from God and from each other. Betrayal of trust, suspicion, fear, hunger, et cetera, cripple life. In the face of the regime's injustice, corruption and dehumanising laws, people become oblivious to human feelings. Simply put, they have lost all that makes them human:

We no longer knew that a human being had the right to cry out, 'I am hungry, I am ill, in pains,' or simply to say, 'this is not just'. There was nothing human left in us; there was only the messiah-koic creature who, from morning to night, listened to the party orders, obeyed the party, prayed to the Messiah-koi, lived for the Messiah-kouli, died in silence. A human, tolerant, fraternal, disinterested sentiment, or even a feeling of simple goodwill, astonished the messiah-kouli subjects (p. 237).

Certainly, through this novel, the author has revisited the issue of the betrayed dreams in the fight for independence in many a black nation. A sense of widespread disappointment, sorrow and resignation to fate runs throughout the pages of the work. The narrator tells his story with a deep sense of biting irony, sad humour, protest, and deep insight.

As noted by one intelligent character, in a discussion with Di, independence, which each fellow thought would bring about freedom, food, wealth, work, clothes, and a bit of everything that is good, left the people in poverty, and in a more terrible circumstance that could not be associated with the worst form of colonial rule. In other words, the promises associated with the struggle for independence have failed to materialise:

We are inventing nothing. Bari Kouli and his supporters told us that independence would bring wealth to South Majiland. When the Socialist Regeneration Party comes to power, we shall pay no taxes. Independence will give every family a house, fertilise the soil, make us a gift of hidden treasures. Such is the will of God and of Bari Kouli. (p. 108).

This passage reveals without any reservation the fact that the people are totally disappointed. Certainly, this novel is concerned, to a large extent, with the difficult task of building a nation out of the ruins of colonialism. A host of African writers, like AyiKwei Armah in *Fragments*, Thiong'o (2006) in *A Grain of Wheat*, Gabriel Okara in *The Voice*, and Chinua Achebe in *No Longer at Ease*, have explored this theme from different perspectives. Almost all these writers have lamented the case of the betrayal of the people's dreams. This confirms the conclusions of many scholars like Jatoo-Kaleo and Koffi (2016, pp. 11-26), whose work on Fantouré's novel centres on an interpretation which hinges on the transition from one form of systemic nightmare to another, thus justifying the notion that colonial suppression was merely replaced by indigenous tyranny. In the novel, the desire of the people for a nation where their sufferings would one day come to an end is foiled by the activities of a corrupt political hegemony. It is obvious from the metaphor of the farmers' almost useless efforts at wrestling a living out of the soil: the saddling opposition of sinister natural forces and the incubus of bad or unfavourable market forces could best be taken for a foreshadowing of the nationwide crisis triggered off by Bari Kouli's reign of terror.

Thus, the poor peasants toil and waste away under harsh environmental conditions. The hot sun blisters their bodies; the rainfall equally devastates the planting and reaping seasons; the birds and animals add to the farmers' sorrow. Then, one-third part of the harvest vanishes through gifts as soon as the reaping takes place. Next, the local merchants in the markets declare the rice not white

enough and pay on their own terms. Finally, the local tax collectors, the village chiefs, like insatiable weevils, take all that is left of the sale in order to satisfy their masters in the capital city. The farmers go home empty, hungry, weak, frustrated and dying. This is what political freedom meant for the teeming populace of this unfortunate fictional African country.

"Hell" is the words ... we in the villages wonder what's the meaning of independence. Our lives haven't changed, our harvests are still bad, we work as hard as before, and then the Party representatives come round several times a year, too, sucking us dry ... if that's what independence is, it'd have been better to put up with the white man ... it isn't just that we are poor, we are living worse than convicts. The Messiah-Koi talks to us about dignity while he is robbing us and threatening us with death if we don't comply. The whole thing's a disgrace... is that what you call revolution? That is the Messiah-Koi's way of keeping his subjects down and liquidating those who dare oppose him." (p. 133).

The people's disillusionment is beyond what one could use words to describe. Before an evil jinn called Messiah-Koism disintegrates into nothingness. Bari Kouli feeds his subjects on words. This entails empty programs. And without choice, they had to listen in abject silence like "inherent robots in the presence of their mindless master. They listened because they had no choice "out of obligation, out of oppressive duty inhabited by humility and despair..." (p. 221).

Kouli seeks, through speech and action, to perpetuate his regime in South Majiland. Mindlessly, he executes his worthless referendum. In the same manner, he launches his ridiculous census, counting even unborn children. There is much to be desired as regards the absurdity of his leadership. A mere possession of his party card becomes a guarantee to life under his rule. Education was deliberately denied his subjects.

The fall of a heartless despot

Nevertheless, the forces of opposition do not relent in their demand for justice, equity, liberty and other essentials of a good society. Although many were imprisoned, killed, exiled, or maimed, others like Dr. Maleke persisted in the struggle under the harassing system. He is recognised as the only 'mad man' who refused to register his vote for the Messiah-Koi at the referendum. Together with Benn Na, Meli Hour, Salimatou, an anaesthetist and woman activist,

Atan-the-Mammoth, and a few other members of the P.W.A., he launches out the most formidable resistance to tyranny. Like Monchon, his father, Dr. Maleke demands the mass eradication of evil laws. He protests the mass exploitation of workers and the people by the multinationals and agents of the Bari Kouli regime.

He leads the workers in several industrial actions against the regime. One such protest movement led to the death of Atan-the-Mammoth and Port Equator's Police Commissioner. Kouli's dragnet soon claims the life of Benn Na. Dr. Maleke and Salimatou are targeted. Opposition is met with all the weapons at its disposal. Nevertheless, a despot digs his own grave with his own weapons. The people flaunt the order of the Messiah-Koi, banning them from the burial of Benn Na. This begins a chain of dramatic events that ends the life-span of the regime:

Thousands of people made their way to the cathedral to pay their last respects to Benn Na, shouting with one voice their revolt against despotism, informers, and the exploitation of the native population by the new coloniser. (p. 177)

The P.W.A. employs the services of the army, thereby incriminating Halouma, the notorious, heartless Koi in charge of the Party police. He is arrested and shortly executed without trial. Halouma's execution sets in motion another chair of madness in the machine of the regime. Fear, suspicion and death now haunt members of the S.R.P. The "evil jinn" catches up with them, unleashing to the full the weight of its instruments of terrorism. And it engulfs everybody like the tropical harmattan fire:

They say that the harmattan comes, in South Majiland, when insanity reigns supreme, insanity that waits its opportunity to spread and engulf everybody like a tidal wave; and so sure, in the tropical circle, madness is also the curse that heaven brings down on men to punish them. The rumor spread that only an access of madness could have incited the messiah-Koi to arrest his most faithful lieutenant, Halouma, and that the evil jinn of messiah-koism were one by one being brought to judgement by the local divinities. (p. 236).

The rumour that Koism is synonymous with mental derangement soon spreads among the populace who now fight to prevent being infected by it. The P.P. men are, thus, identified as the malevolent forces within the South Majiland society:

I see demons. They are in our midst, they are invading us, they are taking possession of our souls, and breathing them into themselves,

leaving us with empty bodies, I see demons who are burning in their graves and poisoning our lives ... yes, yes, they are everywhere, with the faces of men and the heads of demons. They are everywhere, they are in this group, dressed like P.P. men. If these demons do not disappear our native land will be consumed in the fire of celestial damnation!. (p. 245)

With such prophetic utterances from many a possessed 'virgin', the hunt for the demons, or members of the Protection Patrol (P.P.), begins and spreads throughout the country. At last, the Messiah-Koi, Bari Kouli, is captured. The fire of terrorism, which he kindled, consumes him and his men. The heartless depot is:

caught like a wild beast in the trap of his own arena, under the glare of the spotlights. The platform seemed to be transformed into a cage in which the people could observe the dangerous beast as a prisoner of his own maleficent universe. (p. 255)

The overthrow of Kouli's tyrannical regime is as eventful as its beginning. It is like the panoptic paranoia and self-imprisoning world. As Colonel Fof announces the end of Messiah-Koism, it is like an unclear dream to the tyrant himself. Colonel Fof pronounced the following words:

'Mr. Bari Kouli, in the name of human rights, the population of South Majiland deprives you of your title of head of state. The people demand that justice be done.'

Bari Kouli closed his eyes, his face contracted, he did not appear to realise that everything had just ... that he was no longer ... already soldiers and members of the civil defenses were invading the conference hall. It must be true. It was the end of everything. The joke was over, the Messiah-Koic circus was closing down. The end was painful. Troops had surrounded the People's Palace, Some soldiers mounted the platform and invited the man who had been 'Messiah-Koi' to follow them. The suffocating silence persisted ... the dethroned master tried in vain to stand upright... (pp. 256-257)

The Messiah-Koism, with its myths, its legends, its terror, its macabre politics, its economic exploitation, its social injustice, its chain of inhuman laws, comes to utter destruction. A set of military officers, led by General Babasanessi and Colonel Fof and influenced by the P.W.A., topples the regime. This climactic observation depicts the final, self-destructive stage of totalitarian

paranoia. It illustrates that ideological exploitation is not a one-way passage; hence, the dictator's artificial web of horrifying conspiracies, secret police, deadly bands and continuous surveillance would in the end ensnare and destroy the dictator himself.

The Messi-koi like a beast found himself trapped in his own arena swept by the spotlights. It seemed to me that the gallery had been transformed into a cage where the people watched the dangerous animal, prisoner of his own evil universe (p. 256).

The extract is anchored on animalistic imagery like the "dangerous animal" and spatial metaphors like "arena", "cage" and "prisoner". Also, terms like "sunlights" serve as spotlights or projectors, creating optimal panoptic inversions. The diverse apparatus of public spectacle and propaganda, originally designed by the dictator to monitor and manoeuvre the masses, is turned back upon him, transforming his seat of control into a factual cage.

However, one still wonders why the spirit of tropical madness will refuse to be at rest. The new regime begins its own style of plunder, harassment, exploitation, and injustice. South Majiland once more returns to another phase of its problems: "A few months later, Dr. Maleke, Meli Hour - who had returned from exile - Colonel Fof, Lieutenant Fair Weather and Salimatou were mysteriously assassinated" (p. 259). This spirit of tropical madness, one of the consistent eliminations of well-meaning leaders and people-oriented development projects, gives some justification to the people's loss of hope, despair, and frustration. At the end, the true concept of independence is lost on the populace. The novel, thus, entones the vicious cycle of political blindness, with its apprehensive tool of desolation. Moreover, the novelist assesses to some extent, however unwittingly, how the despot can bring about its own destruction.

Conclusion

The study concludes that Alioum Fantouré's *Tropical Circle* is not a sheer critique of political corruption, but an intense mental diagnosis of post-colonial tyranny. Using the hybrid framework of post-colonial trauma and political paranoia, it is revealed that the "circle of madness" is an inevitable trap fabricated by the psychotic blemish of colonialism and the unlimited corruptibility of neo-colonial supremacy. The close reading and analysis of Fantouré's prose narrative implies that true liberty is unfeasible as a peripheral exchange of political battles, which was manifested as the essence of political independence. The artist's true notion of freedom in the text lies in a drastic psychic decolonisation that is able to fracture the recurring nature of political paranoia and shatter a sovereign nation's grip on the colonised minds, which is the cyclic

hub of institutionalised madness. In the long run, the ruler's ideological exploitation generates a limitless toxic reality in the society. This is so meticulously characterised by schemes, implementations and fantasies that the tyrant himself becomes the ultimate casualty of his own system. This confirms that when madness becomes absolute contrivance, both the ruler or oppressor and the ruled or oppressed are naturally ensnared in the same lethal, claustrophobic, paranoid ring. In the long run, Fantouré's novel cannot be viewed as a mere political metaphor. Instead, it turns into an accurate "circle of madness", exposing the state's total reliance on the systematic generation of dread and illusion. Frantz Fanon (1963, p. 249) and Achille Mbembe (1992, pp. 3-37) have long confirmed that the postcolonial nation frequently reflects the psychological ruptures of its leaders, turning authority into an exercise of unlimited control and paranoia that would consume both the oppressed and the oppressor.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The author declares no conflict of interest.

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