

Reclaiming the Lost Hero in Girish Karnad's *The Dreams of Tipu Sultan***Imad M. Khawaldeh**English Department, Hashemite University
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Zarqa-Jordan**Abstract:**

This article examines how theatre functions as an effective means for exploring an occluded pre-colonial period by constructing an alternative history that refracts the official accounts of colonialist history. Here we study Girish Karnad's *The Dreams of Tipu Sultan* (2004), which re-writes the tragic decline of Tipu Sultan who governed the Kingdom of Mysore in the southern parts of India during the last two decades of the eighteenth century. The article concludes that what Karnad wishes to achieve, through this counter-historical theatrical project, is to dismantle the image of the ruthless and unprincipled 'Other' propagated by British historians, dramatists, and performers by creating or even recreating an alternative humane and noble character of Tipu Sultan.

Keywords: counter-discourse, counter-history, *The Dreams of Tipu Sultan*, Indian drama, Karnad, Orientalism, the Other, postcolonial studies

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Reclaiming the Lost Hero in Girish Karnad's *The Dreams of Tipu Sultan*

This article explores how theatre can function as an effective means for restoring an occluded pre-colonial period by constructing an alternative history that undermines the official accounts of colonialist history. Girish Karnad's *The Dreams of Tipu Sultan* (2004), we argue, re-writes the tragic decline of Tipu Sultan, who governed the Kingdom of Mysore in the southern parts of India during the last two decades of the eighteenth century, to offer a counter-historical theatrical project dismantling the image of the ruthless and unprincipled 'Other' propagated by British historians, dramatists, and performers and thus recreating an alternative humane and noble character of Tipu Sultan. The first version of *The Dreams of Tipu Sultan* (hereafter abbreviated as *The Dreams*) was written for the British audience. Karnad writes in the Preface to his 2004 version of the play in 1996, that BBC commissioned him to write a radio play to celebrate the Fiftieth Anniversary of Indian Independence. And as the plot obviously had to deal with some aspect of Indo-British relations, Karnad immediately thought of Tipu Sultan, "one of the most politically perceptive and tragic figures in modern Indian history" (2005, p. 3), to offer a counter-discourse against dominant colonialistic ones.

The playwright constructs *The Dreams* as a form of counter-history by bringing together two elements: using colonial and native historians as characters, and rewriting imperial performance history. Karnad's mission in writing this play is to remind his contemporary audience and readers that the Sultan's relatively progressive attempts to undermine the emerging colonial project, by building an advanced and self-sustained country, were the factors that led to his controversial and demonized image throughout history.

The play begins where it ends: the tragic downfall of Tipu Sultan with an interesting interaction between two historians—one belonging to the side of the colonizers, the other to the side of the colonized. Karnad skillfully subverts official colonial history by creating the characters of Mir Hassan Ali Khan Kirmani, the court historian and Colonel Colin Mackenzie, the British Orientalist. Mackenzie's historical remarks about the Sultan are incorporated within the larger narrative frame created by Kirmani, and thus become subordinate to the prevailing re-written history of the colonized in the play. Through Kirmani's act of remembering and narration of a sequence of historically documented dreams alongside the colonizer's narration of the historical events, Karnad succeeds in humanizing Tipu Sultan and giving him his due as a major pre-colonial figure in Indian history.

In Foucault's terminology, the play, especially the figure of Kirmani, represents a kind of an "insurrection of a subjugated knowledge" (Medina, 2011, p.12). It is some sort of remembering that resists oblivion – a counter-memory. What Foucault calls "subjugated knowledges" are forms of experiences and remembering that are pushed to the margins and rendered unqualified and unworthy of epistemic respect by prevailing and hegemonic discourses (p.12). Foucault suggests that critical genealogies contribute "to desubjugate historical knowledges, to set them free" (2003, p.10). Critical genealogies facilitate the production of counter-histories, which narrate those experiences and memories that have not been heard and integrated in official history. As Foucault (2003) postulates:

Counter History...breaks the continuity of glory... It reveals that the light – the famous dazzling effect of power – is not something that petrifies, solidifies, and immobilizes the entire social body, and thus keeps it in order; it is in fact a divisive light that illuminates one side of the social body but leaves the other side in shadow or casts it into darkness. (p.70)

A counter-history is the dark side of those people who have been forced to remain in the shadows, a history that outcries “from within the shadows”, “the discourse of those who have no glory, or of those who have lost it and who now find themselves, perhaps for a time-but probably for long time – in darkness and silence” (Foucault, 2003, p.70). According to Foucault, a counter history is linked to those “epic, religious, or mythical forms which ... formulate the misfortunes of ancestors, exiles, and servitude” (p.71). This notion is obvious in remembering the history of Tipu Sulta in *The Dream* in which Tipu’s military defeat at the hands of the British and their allies is revisited. In “What is an Author?”, Foucault proposes some useful observations to effectively resist the “omissions” and active oblivion sanctioned by discursive practices, i.e. how to listen to the lost, silenced voices. Foucault is concerned with those forms of silencing produced by a discursive practice which are foundational and constitutive (Medina, 2011, pp. 15-16).

As Foucault puts it, in counter-history, the fight against the discursive omissions and exclusions necessitates a “return to the origin”:

If we return, it is because of basic and constructive omission that is not the result of accident or incomprehension... This non-accidental omission must be regulated by precise operations that can be situated, analyzed, and reduced in a return to the act of initiation. (1977, p. 135)

Foucault distinguishes this critical “return to the origin” from two other similar concepts, namely “rediscovery” and “reactivation” – all of which are essential features of the plays discussed. A “rediscovery,” writes Foucault, promotes “the perception of forgotten or obscured figures”, while a “reactivation” is achieved through “the insertion of discourse into totally new domains of generalizations, practices, and transformations” (p.134). Thus, any attempt to transform a discursive practice by resisting its silences and omissions needs a “return to the origin”. This return entails revisiting the texts that are considered foundational for the practice and developing a new way of rendering them. So, to train one’s eyes and ears to new meanings and voices: “particular attention [is paid] to those things registered in the interstices of the text, its gaps and absences” one must “return to those empty spaces that have been masked by omission or concealed in false and misleading plenitude” (Medina, p.16). *The Dreams* is a vibrant example that illustrates this critical “return to the origins.” It shows how a postcolonial counter-memory dramatic text engages the task of exposing and eroding the dominant discourse about the history of one of India's earliest anti-colonial leaders. Interestingly, Karnad's play was inspired by the 18th century Sultan's personal diary which was first discovered after he had been killed by the British. The diary was translated

into English by Mahmud Husain in the early 1920s as *The Dreams of Tipu Sultan*. Hussain's translation is the embodiment of the critical moment of "rediscovery". Tipu's diary was also rescued from oblivion when Karnad "reactivated" it in his play. Thus, what was once a material archive is now restored and preserved through Karnad's imaginative return to the sultan's original text.

Furthermore, by beginning with the death of the Sultan—one of the last major independent rulers in pre-colonial India—the play forces us to contend with a primal scene that is often obscured in the standard genealogies of colonial power. Being aware of the many British performances which were put on during the Sultan's life and immediately after his death, Karnad recalls the life and death of Tipu Sultan as a counter-history narrative to subvert the imperial Orientalist discourse about this controversial historical figure. Since the Sultan was a source of "fascination" especially during the 1790s, his image was conceived in a skewed way by European readership and audiences. Karnad's Tipu states: "Today I am the only one in India who won't bow and scrape before them. So they want to crush me. I'm told England is buzzing with stories of what a monster I am and how I need to be chastised... Shall I allow myself to be chastised?" (2005, p. 60). In fact, many military-based historical accounts and captivity narratives contributed to the "fascinating" Orientalist lore about Tipu who was referred to as Tippu Suldaun (or Tippoo Sultan). In the early phases of the Anglo-Mysore conflict, both Haider Ali and his son Tipu Sultan were predictably depicted as cruel tyrants and proponents of religious intolerance in various military accounts - a typical process of demonization in the nineteenth century.

When applying Foucault's theory of counter-history, one should also keep in mind that Gayatri Spivak's criticism in her seminal essay "Can the Subaltern Speak" (1981) succeeds in exposing varied Western attempts to create historical texts about the "Other" that maintain Western hegemony over the colonized peoples. Spivak's principal claim and opening statement in this essay is that Western academic knowledge is primarily produced with the purpose of supporting western economic interests. In fact, the historical accounts and performances created by British writers about Tipu reflect the purposeful project of recreating the image of Tipu as an antagonistic "Other." Like Edward Said in *Orientalism*, Spivak argues that Western knowledge is never innocent and that it expresses the interests of its producers. She even maintains that knowledge is like any other commodity that is exported from the west to the Third World for financial and other types of gain. Spivak's remarks about the manipulation of knowledge produced by Western writers about the "Other" are applicable to the many Western (chiefly British) texts written about Tipu Sultan and Anglo-Mysore wars in India during the late 18th century. As Spivak puts it, the Third World subject cannot be studied by western writers without cooperation with the colonial project. The task of the Third World writer is to counter these cooperative colonial narratives and define the "Other" and "over there" subject as the object of a new kind of study and as something from which new knowledge should be extracted and brought back "here." Karnad's work is a postcolonial attempt to bring Tipu back from the domain of Western knowledge and resurrect it in the domain of the "subjugated knowledge".

In the same context, Helen Tiffin (1995) describes in her essay “Post-colonial Literatures and Counter-discourse” how postcolonial literary counter-discursive rewriting becomes a pressing demand and an urgent need for postcolonial writers:

Processes of artistic and literary decolonisation have involved a radical dis/mantling of European codes and a post-colonial subversion and appropriation of the dominant European discourses. This has frequently been accompanied by the demand for an entirely new or wholly recovered ‘reality’, free of all colonial taint. Given the nature of the relationship between coloniser and colonised, with its pandemic brutalities and its cultural denigration, such a demand is desirable and inevitable. (p.95)

Tiffin's description corresponds with *The Dreams*, which appears to be a conscious attempt to re-create an “entirely new” and “wholly recovered reality” of Tipu Sultan, whose history was phantasmically reconstructed in the imperial historiography. Interestingly, the initial broadcast of the play by BBC in 1997 came within the flow of a considerable body of postcolonial scholarship dealing with the re-presentation of Tipu Sultan. According to Narasingha Sil, active postcolonial revisionism of Tipu’s representation in colonial texts started in 1999 (2013, p.5). This postcolonial-postmodernist revisionist movement has produced a new mythology to replace what it considers imperialist-colonialist demonology in which Tipu is always portrayed as an “oriental despot with a diabolical design of oppressing his people and subverting the Company’s prospect in India” (p.5).

Expressing their distrust of the grand narratives or hegemonic discourses, many postcolonial scholars –such as Kate Teltscher (1995), Amal Chatterjee (1998), and Ruchira Banerjee (2001) – have contributed to the counter hegemonic discourse meant to replace the imperialist ideology. They disparaged all reports testifying to Tipu’s inhumane treatment and forcible conversion of war prisoners by the EIC’s military officers as downright propaganda by a bunch of “fighters as writers” (Colley, 2000, p. 277). In these revisionist accounts as well as in *The Dreams*, Tipu Sultan appears as "a fallen nationalist leader whose vision of a modern industrialist and enlightened free India failed to materialize because of the grand alliance forged by the East India Company (EIC) with Mysore’s inimical neighbors, the Nizam of Hyderabad and the Maratha Confederacy of west central Mughal India” (Sil, 2013, p.5). Teltscher, for instance, argues that the British paranoia about Tipu Sultan was mainly due to their fear of an exceptional adversary who challenged the West by mastering the secrets of Western science and technology, thus meeting the Western power on its own terms (1995, p.238). This is expressed in *The Dreams* by Earl of Mornington, the Governor General of India:

In fact, Tipu should have been got rid of after the last Mysore war by Cornwallis. But he didn't. And since then Tipu has grown in power and prestige... It's my duty as the new Governor General of India to set things right... Tipu is building a trading empire on the European model and succeeding eminently. We have driven the French and Dutch out of

India, contained the Portuguese. Is there any reason why we should tolerate an upstart native? The longer the peace, the stronger will Tipu become. (Karnad, 2005, p.56)

Karnad suggests through Mornington's statements that the success of Tipu as an "enlightened" leader who built a trading empire that competed with the developed European models of trading could be one of the most conspicuous reasons behind the systemized defamation of the man and his rule. The play as a whole exposes how the British, who could not tolerate a prominent economic-minded Indian leader, worked systemically to tarnish his image among the natives of the Indian subcontinent to prevent any similar nascent attempts by other leaders of Indian pre-colonial states. Hence, the mission of the playwright is to remind his contemporary audience and readers that the Sultan's modernizing attempts to undermine the emerging colonial project, by building a relatively modern and autonomous state, were the factors that led to his controversial and demonized image throughout history.

The mission of Karnad's narrative as a counter-historical postcolonial work is obvious from its outset. The play opens with a fictional dialogue between two real historical figures, Mir Hussain Ali Khan Kirmani (active 1781-1802), and Colonel Colin Mackenzie (1754-1821), the first Surveyor – General of India. The first act begins where the play ends, as the subsequent acts are being recalled in the manner of chronologically organized flashbacks by both Kirmani and Mackenzie who appear as characters, and then as chorus/commentators. Karnad begins the first act with a description of the setting of the scene where the process of "counter-historical" recalling starts:

1803. The house of the historian, Mir Hussain Ali Khan Kirmani, in the city of Mysore. Colonel Colin Mackenzie, the Oriental scholar, is taking off his shoes, as though he has just arrived. He looks around at the notes, books, and manuscripts littering the floor. Kirmani enters with a jug of water and a tumbler, and places them next to Mackenzie. (2005, p.7)

The setting of the opening scene is of crucial importance as it locates Kirmani's counter-discursive re-writing of imperial history in his house and in the onset of the Nineteenth century, just few years after the emergence of several British historical accounts and performances about the defeat of Tipu Sultan. Kirmani is the court historian who is being encouraged by the colonial orientalist to remember and "speak objectively" and to write an impartial history of the deceased Sultan – one that is based on "bits of evidence" (p.8). The first dialogue between the two historians is very significant as it describes Kirmani's (and of course Karnad's) difficult mission in recalling the history of Tipu: "MACKENZIE. How's the work progressing? KIRMANI. Not at all well. MACKENZIE. Why not? KIRMANI. It's not easy. It hurts." (p.7) Karnad, through Kirmani, draws his audience's attention to the difficulty of re-writing the early part of the colonial history in India and the disputed figure of the Sultan. Indeed, it is not an easy task to resurrect a history that has generated a current of unprecedented controversy around the character, deeds, and misdeeds of the

Sultan of Mysore. The difficulty of this counter-historical mode of recalling becomes more sensible once we realize that a large number of imperial narratives about Tipu Sultan and his encounter with the British were written by the Sultan's contemporaneous imperial historians and writers. Kirmani wonders why Mackenzie insists on hiring him to write *his* version of history while tens of historical accounts about this encounter were going viral in Britain and India:

KIRMANI. ... You have your version of history, all worked out. Why do you want my side? Why do you care?

MACKENZIE. I am interested in the other side. You could say that's how we Europeans are brought up ... to be interested in the other side as well. That I suppose is our strength. (p.8)

Mackenzie's rationale reflects his desires as an Orientalist to gather "objective" information about the "Other" and his views about the struggle between the anti-colonial leader and the colonizers. It is an embodiment of what Spivak calls the "colonialist theory of most efficient information retrieval" (1981, p.390). Does Colonel Mackenzie's request mean that he will accept Kirmani's version of history according to the non-Western methodology of historical and biographical writing? The answer to this question is simply "No." Mackenzie reminds Kirmani that "Our loyalty is to history" and that he (Kirmani) must "keep emotion out [and] stick to the facts" (Karnad, 2005, p.8). According to Colonel Mackenzie, writing history should be based upon the reality of documentary evidences. But, how can the court historian keep a "dispassionate distance" from the object of his narrative? If memory is truth, then it is unique as it "selects, eliminates, alters, exaggerates, minimises, glorifies and vilifies also; but in the end it creates its own reality, its heterogeneous but usually coherent version of events; and no sane human being ever trusts someone else's version more than his own" (Rushdie, 1981, p.211). Thus Kirmani's "truthful" and "passionate" memory counteracts the "dispassionate" imperial historical "fact" and renders it a fabricated lie. By selecting and reactivating certain moments of the Sultan's last days, the playwright, through Kirmani's act of remembering, eliminates the imperial written narrative and alters it by substituting it with another one – a counter-memorial narrative that both glorifies the "Other" and vilifies the "Self".

Kirmani cannot but feel loyal to the memory of his Sultan. His conscience is tortured at the start of the play as he thinks that he has betrayed the memory of Tipu by attempting to aid the colonizer in their Orientalist project: "I spent my life serving him and his father. And now I work for you, his enemies. What does that make me? A traitor? Am I trustworthy anymore? Doesn't that worry you? It worries me" (Karnad, p.8). Kirmani admits that he could not remember what Tipu looked like on his last day, and he equates forgetting such an important detail with betraying. Yet, this bad feeling soon disappears when he remembers Tipu Sultan's last recorded dream, with which his "history ends" and "[Mackenzie's] begins"; on this note, Karnad ends his play (p.9).

Kirmani's counter-hegemonic version of history starts with remembering Tipu's last dream. Remembering the night when Tipu was buried, Kirmani, the "Other" historian, declares that his

version of history will depend mainly on remembering rather than on recorded facts: “[The thunderstorm] destroyed all my papers. Wiped away every word written in ink. Within a night, all my recorded facts became memory” (p.17). Kirmani’s personal remembering as opposed to Mackenzie’s insistence on following the principles of objective history writing reflects the clash between “objective,” scientific history and other ways of recalling history. Remembering through postcolonial performance subverts the supposedly objective and scientific history of the documented grand narrative of the Empire. As performance theorist Diana Taylor (2003) remarks in *The Archive and the Repertoire: Performing Cultural Memory in the Americas*, oral performance rather than written texts are more often than not the dominant ways of representation in postcolonial locales. Karnad’s performance, which celebrates the power of remembering, interrogates the authenticity of scientific historical texts.

To use Pierre Nora’s terminology, Tipu’s remembered last dream becomes a *lieu de mémoire*, or “a site of memory” where the figure of the Sultan is being recalled in a new light. Talking about the impact of objective history on the sites of memory, Nora writes:

[Objective history] would no doubt preserve some museums, some medallions and monuments – that is to say, the materials necessary for its work – but it would empty them of what, to us, would make them *lieux de mémoire*. In the end, a society living wholly under the sign of history could not, any more than could a traditional society, conceive such sites for anchoring its memory. (1989, p.9)

Nora contends that the concept of *lieux de mémoire* has three aspects: material, symbolic, and functional. The material site, like an archive, becomes a *lieu de mémoire* only if the imagination invests it with a symbolic aura. (p.19). Karnad's play was inspired by the Eighteenth-century Sultan's personal diary which was first discovered after he had been killed by the British. The diary was translated into English by Mahmud Husain in the early 1920s as *The Dreams of Tipu Sultan* as it primarily consisted of a number of the Sultan’s personal dreams together with his own interpretations and comments on these dreams. The original text of the sultan’s diary was rescued from oblivion when Karnad rediscovered it in his play. Thus, what was once a material archive now enters, through Karnad’s imagination, into symbolic and functional circuits.

As a site of memory, Kirmani’s act of personal remembering is activated in the play to defend Tipu from the distorting power of British official History. According to Nora, the defense, by certain minorities, of a privileged memory that has retreated to jealously protected enclaves “intensely illuminates the truth of *lieux de mémoire*—that without commemorative vigilance, history would soon sweep them away” (p.12). He further contends that “we buttress our identities upon such bastions, but if what they defended were not threatened [by history], there would be no need to build them” (p.12). Kirmani takes upon his shoulder what Nora calls the “obligation of personal remembering”, a private individual act of remembering categorized under “duty memory” (p.16). From that epiphanic moment (when the thunderstorm destroyed Kirmani’s papers), in spite

of Mackenzie's participation in narrating the story of the Sultan's last years of struggle with the British; the act of remembering is mainly conveyed by the native historian's personal attempt to subvert the "scientific" history based on the so called reality of documentary evidences.

Kirmani's private act of remembering can be looked upon as an effort to reiterate his allegiance to the memory of "the real Tipu who is lost somewhere within the layers of history" (Sharma, 2012, p.54). As a form of "representation" of the Sultan's life, Kirmani's recalling of specific memories "proceeds by strategic highlighting, selecting samples and multiplying examples" (Nora, 1989, p.17). As Sharma puts it, Kirmani's act of remembering "appears to be a case of 'selective memory' where he tries to save his Sultan from being further vandalized on basis of evidence against him by the English historian" becoming the voice of the silenced colonized Indians (p.54). Kirmani, as a native historian, "creates a place for the subaltern in history there by going against the norm of traditional history writing" (Kaushik, 2010).

The first remembered scene in the play dramatizes the long search for the body of the defeated Sultan. Colonel Mackenzie enters the scene with Qilledar Nadeem Khan to look for Tipu's body. Khan finds the body and confirms that the Sultan is dead. And before moving the body to a nearby palace, a soldier chops off one of Tipu's moustaches with Colonel Mackenzie's penknife to take it as a present to his friend Dr Cruso (Karnad, p.15). Back to Kirmani's house, Mackenzie recalls the act of chopping "the tiger's own whiskers" and describes it as an "act of vandalism that will not be forgotten" (p.15). Kirmani agrees and calls it a "perfect prelude to a night of unprecedented rapacity" (p.16). He recalls how "every house was looted; every available woman was raped; and soldiers were throwing away precious jewelry because they could not carry any more" (p.16). Karnad's imperial choric character shows indifference towards these inhumane acts and seems more concerned with cutting off the dead Sultan's mustache than with the rapacity of the British army upon entering the defeated city of Seringapatam. His only comment on these acts was "Wellesley had to hang three soldiers before the pillage was over" (p.16). Ironically, the colonel tries to evade the discussion about these dreadful imperial acts of vandalism by stating that he needs to get back to reading the classic Sanskrit book *The Arthasastra* (The Science of Governance). He asks Kirmani to "get over [his] despondency... and get on with [his] writing" (p.16). But what sort of writing does the representative of the colonial Company want from Tipu's court historian? Kirmani says he will try to write but he does not know what to put down on paper. The colonel's response is "For the hundredth time, Kirmaniji, I wish you would write about Tipu's embassy to Mauritius – the Malarctic adventure. It proved to be his undoing and yet we don't have enough data" (p.16). The shocked native historian who is being asked to forget the grievances of his people after the defeat of Tipu Sultan denies that the Malarctic deal has ever happened. In fact, although we do not know whether Kirmani is deliberately lying or is unaware about this historical incident, a few scenes later we come to know more details about Tipu's plans to forge an alliance with the French in Mauritius. Indeed, such a revelation complicates Kirmani's conflict between history and loyalty as loyalty might lead the court historian to exaggerate or even refuse to believe

certain universally-approved historical events so to remain loyal to the refined memory of the remembered lost hero.

Throughout the two-act play, both Kirmani and Mackenzie appear as choric characters in some of the intervals between the unnumbered scenes to comment on the historical events occurring in them. Although Mackenzie reminds Kirmani that he is “interested in the people who spoke to Tipu and the ones he spoke to” and to “keep the dreams to [himself]”, the play seems to be composed of a sequence of Tipu’s dreams which are intermingled with the actions (p.17). At times, a few choric sections interconnect the dreams with the rest of the dramatic actions. In these pieces of the narrative, Mackenzie acts like an automaton as he briefly narrates the events which took place during the Sultan’s life. It is worth noticing that Mackenzie’s objective factual narratives are never left without parallel narration or comment by Kirmani. These mechanical pieces of factual narration are interrupted and disrupted by long dramatic ruptures that reflect how the Sultan really feels about these events. These scenes of the Sultan's life are Kirmani's remembered history. In this sense, Kirmani’s prolonged remembered version of history surrounds Mackenzie’s short factual pieces and ultimately deprives them of their agency. In fact, Mackenzie’s version of a monumental history is interrupted by a discourse that “humanizes” Tipu and depicts him as a caring father— an image that is rarely present in the imperial accounts about the Sultan of Mysore. Depicting Tipu in such a humanizing way seems to be the uniting thread of the whole drama.

In addition to Colin Mackenzie, Karnad chooses to deploy other imperial historians such as Captain Mark Wilks and Colonel William Kirkpatrick as active characters in *The Dreams*. Through these historians, Karnad brings our attention to the fact that an imperial fighter can only function as a writer who peddles in propaganda. The second scene of the first act involves the character of Captain Wilks who wrote a book about India. When one reads Wilks’s book, the only image of Tipu that the reader can conjure up is that of a barbarian and treacherous Sultan. For example, Wilks describes Tipu as a ruler who had “little compunction in using severity, and sometimes direct force, to procure the services of gunners and artificers. But here terminated the sum of his barbarity; it was reserved for Tippoo Sultaun to destroy his prisoners by poison and assassination” (p.95). Wilks’ portrayal of Tipu as a fearful and unprincipled enemy is brought into question in the first remembered scene of Karnad's play which is set in the “[r]ampart of the Seringapatam – or Srirangapatna fort– ... there has been savage fighting and the ground is thick with the bodies of the dead and the dying” (Karnad, p.9). Here, it is seen Captain Wilks leading the British soldiers in their feverish search “through the piles of bodies for Tipu’s corpse” with the aid of Tipu’s servants (p.9). Wilks appears too eager to confirm the death of the warrior who was the worst nightmare for his military officials in India:

CAPT. WILKS. Corpulent with big twirly moustaches, round face....

SOLDIER 2. Yes, sir. We know that by heart now. But the description seems to fit most of these bastards.

CAPT WILKS. Ask the black there.

SOLDIER 2. These swine have already identified a dozen corpses as the Sultan's – they're making fools of us.(pp. 9-10)

This interlocution between Captain Wilks and his soldiers demonstrates the language of haughty imperialism. It presents a racist, imperial, and privileged “Grand Narrative” in which the “Other” is that inferior and insignificant “black [over]there”, or the fearful leader of bandits whose death puts an end to an epoch of barbarism and unprincipled acts of violence. Such images of the fearful and repulsive “Other” are what Karnad wishes to dismantle by creating or recreating a humane and noble character to substitute the established imperial archive about Tipu and his men.

Karnad's humanizing approach toward Tipu can be detected in several places. For instance, the Mysorean delegate to the British, Ghulam Khan, addresses Tipu and the crowd of senior citizens, generals, and courtiers who are attending to hear the terms of peace with the English:

Discussions of this condition [namely the release of English prisoners] were accompanied by much vituperation by the English. They said that we had ill-treated our English prisoners of war. We pointed out that we had treated them as we treat our own prisoners – despite much provocation. And then we pointed out that the English who had surrendered to us were at least alive as prisoners of war while our men who surrendered to the enemy – where were they? What happened to them? There was no answer. (p.39)

This speech rebuts Wilks's historical allegations that the Sultan poisoned and assassinated his prisoners. To Helen Tiffin, since it is not possible to create or recreate national or regional formations wholly independent of their historical implication in the European colonial enterprise, it has been the task of post-colonial writers to “interrogate European discourses and discursive strategies from a privileged position within(and between) two worlds” (1995, p.99). In fact, Karnad, through the Ghulam Khan's speech, interrogates not only Wilks's accounts but also all other discursive imperial narratives about Tipu Sultan.

In order to assert that imperial writers had a considerable role in the process of producing a false history, Karnad also relies on Colonel William Kirkpatrick whose comments on Tipu's correspondences reflect the British systemic demonization of the Sultan. For instance, Kirkpatrick writes that once the Sultan ordered his brother-in-law Burhanuddin Khan to launch a fatal attack on a region including “every living creature in it, whether man or woman, old or young, child, dog, cat, or any living thing else” (p.114). As Kate Teltscher points out, Kirkpatrick's translation of the Sultan's letters is unreliable, especially because “he describes Tipu's epistolary self-portrait in terms drawn largely from the vocabulary of despotism: the cruel enemy, intolerant, fanatic, oppressive ruler, harsh master, the sanguinary and perfidious tyrant” (1995, p.235).

In *The Dreams*, Colonel Kirkpatrick is implicated in the imperial scheme led by the newly-appointed Governor General of India, Lord Mornington (Richard Wellesley) to liquidate Tipu

Sultan. Karnad shows Kirkpatrick as an officer who is submissively loyal to the British imperial system. He is dramatized as being fully capable of inventing false correspondences between the Sultan and the French to make it easy for the British to find a sufficient reason to end the period of seven years of peace which followed the peace treaty signed by Cornwallis and Tipu Sultan in 1792:

MORNINGTON. Quite! (*French pronunciation*) Malarctic asking for dispatch of ten thousand French and twenty thousand African troops. And Malarctic puts up a proclamation asking for volunteers... Let's take the shortest route. One of our newspapers in Calcutta gets hold of a copy and publishes it.

KIRK. I shall contact a local editor, Your Lordship. (Karnad, p.57)

Regardless of whether the Tipu-Malarctic deal has ever occurred in history, Karnad's historical play casts doubts on the imperial version of Tipu's life story by representing British historians as untrustworthy. Thus, while the British "fighters as writers" paint a picture of a treacherous Sultan, Karnad's play presents treacherous British generals and officers whose Machiavellian mindset justifies accusing the Sultan with their invented conspiracies. In his discussion of the plans of liquidating Tipu Sultan with his brother Arthur Wellesley and Colonel William Kirkpatrick, in spite of the peace treaty which was signed in 1792, the British Governor General proves to be a no match to the Sultan. Furthermore, the cowed British historian cannot but comply with the orders of the Governor and ultimately to be involved in his unscrupulous schemes.

In addition to rewriting part of Tipu's history as a postcolonial theatrical revision that subverts British historical accounts by including British historians as characters, *The Dreams* operates as a counter-discursive drama that subverts the imperial performative discourse enacted around the history of Tipu. In the preface to his play Karnad states that: "Tipu has always fascinated playwrights. *Tipu Saib* or *British Valour in In India* was put on at Covent Garden, London, as early as 1791 and was followed by a series of spectaculars" (2005, p.3). Yet, none of those who studied *The Dream* have referred to any of these performances (or spectaculars) about the encounter between Tipu and the British which were performed in England (and even in India) during the 1790s until the dawn of the nineteenth century. An exception here is Daniel O'Quinn who in his (2005) book examines some of the reviews about the imperial performances dealing with Tipu Sultan during the last decade of the eighteenth century.

A look at British imperial history tells us that unlike the 1770s and 1780s, the 1790s was a period of immense consolidation in the empire. This entailed tremendous growth of the body of Orientalism. According to Said,

Under the general heading of knowledge of the Orient, and within the umbrella of Western hegemony over the Orient during the period from the end of the eighteenth century, there emerged a complex Orient suitable for study in the academy, for display in the museum, for reconstruction in the colonial office, for theoretical illustration in anthropological, biological, linguistic, racial, and historical theses about mankind and the universe. (1995, p.26)

As O'Quinn puts it, during that era “military victories over Tipu and the establishment of the Permanent Settlement not only confirmed actual British domination in the Asian subcontinent but also provided an occasion for *phantasmatic constructions* of supremacy” (2005, p.313; emphasis added). Specifically, Astley's Royal Amphitheatre and the Sadler's Wells Theatre were competing to offer spectacular versions of Cornwallis's (and later Harris's) campaigns against Tipu Sultan as quickly as the news from India arrived in England. A number of theatrical and non-theatrical performances [such as Astley's plays *Tippoo Saib or British Valour* (1791), *The Siege of Bangalore* (1792), and *The Siege and Storming of Seringapatam* (1800); Sadler's Wells' plays *Tippoo Saib; or, East India Campaigning* (1792), and *Tippoo Saib's Two Sons* (1792); and James Gobb's *Rammah Droog* (1798)] promoted a new form of what O'Quinn (2005) calls “theatrical imperialism.” Like his father Haider Ali, Tipu Sultan was demonized in these performances as was the case with many military historical accounts about him. Thus, a great deal of Karnad's dramaturgical project is devoted to refining the image of Tipu by emphasizing the positive aspects of his character.

Karnad's play projects the other side of the Sultan which belies much of what had been included in these imperial performances about this anti-colonial adversary in early colonial India. Here, Tipu emerges as a loving and caring father and husband, and as a kind and enlightened ruler who believes that God is not confined to a specific sect or religion, and that all religions therefore require equal respect. The first appearance of Karnad's Tipu (in the form of a dream) works to assert this very idea of respecting others' religions.

While the late Eighteenth-century performances literally dramatized the incoming news from the British campaigns against Tipu Sultan in India, they primarily attempted to build fantasies of British valor and paternalism following Cornwallis's and Harris's victories over Tipu in 1792 and 1799 (O'Quinn, 2005, p.314). For instance, Astley's *The Siege of Bangalore* was first staged on 9 April 1792 at Astley's Amphitheatre, about one year after the events leading to treaty of Bangalore and its aftermath had actually occurred. O'Quinn mentions advertisements that referred to the play as “A Compiled, Wimsical, Oriental Tragic. Comic, Pantomical Sketch, in Three Parts” (p.320). In its opening scene, Astley's *Tippoo Sultan*, stages two intertwined forms of tactical resistance.

The exhibition of military drill figure for European modernity was meant to supplement ethnographic fantasies of racial superiority (pp.324-5). In this play (as is the case with Astley's

other plays about Tipu), the procession of Indian arms “exhibits precisely the combination of antiquity and disorder that establishes the superiority of British order, which is itself enacted for the audience in Astley's practice” (p.323). This notion of oriental disorder and antiquity was present in most performances about Tipu. For example, Astley's other performance of *The Siege and Storming of Seringapatam* which was premiered on 5 May 1800 dramatizes Tipu's defeat in his last battle with British forces under the leadership of General Harris. O'Quinn points out that the fifth scene constitutes the Clock-work regulation of human motion, and that the sixth scene stages the superiority of human-machine integration. He further argues that in this way that performance (the very staging of clock-work motion in Astley's) was meant to project British martial superiority.

Karnad's play, on the other hand, comes to denounce these imperial fantasies of racial superiority over Tipu Sultan and his subjects. Instead of this choreographed chaos which controls the movements of the automaton-like Oriental soldiers, *The Dreams* presents Tipu Sultan as a powerful and highly disciplined Oriental leader who is centrally concerned with strategic war planning against enemies. Throughout the play, Tipu is dramatized as a modernizer and an intellectual person who tirelessly works to modernize his armies and make his kingdom an advanced industrial country. Ironically, it is the British army which appears so uncivilized in the play. This is apparent through the British soldiers' plundering of the city of Seringapatam after Tipu's death which is referred to by Kirmani and Mackenzie when they recall the incident.

Interestingly, Karnad includes Tipu's dream about the white elephant to emphasize the Sultan's uniqueness as a military leader. In this dream, the envoys of the Emperor of China deliver his rare gift (the white elephant) to the Sultan. The envoys tell Tipu that “the Emperor has never sent a white elephant to anyone except the Great Alexander”(Karnad, 2005, p.20). This leads Tipu to believe that he will be “another Alexander” (p.20). This implied reference to Tipu Sultan as a “second Alexander” is suggestive of the sultan's greatness as a leader of a well-organized army. In this sense, the sultan's army becomes similar to the armies which were led by Alexander the Great and which were able to conquer several kingdoms and states throughout Asia within the span of ten years.

In fact, Tipu's efforts to modernize his army were proven in the historical accounts of both sides. Tipu's armies were able to defeat the English in several battles especially during the first two Anglo-Mysorean wars. Mysorean rockets were the first iron-cased rockets that were successfully deployed for military use. Both Hyder Ali and Tipu Sultan used them effectively against the British East India Company. Their conflicts with the Company exposed the British to this technology, which was, then, used to advance European rocketry with the development of the Congreve rocket (“Tipu's Missile Launch Pad in Shambles”). Karnad confirms through *The Dreams* that the reason behind the Sultan's defeat was not the lack of artillery or military organization. Rather this defeat took place due to two reasons: first, the grotesque acts of betrayal

by a number of traitors among Tipu's confidants; and secondly, the collaboration of other Indian powers, such as the Nizam and the Marathas with the British against the Sultan.

Tipu's regional campaign of modernization was not confined to advancing his military power. The exceptional growth of Mysore's economical life was consistently demonstrated in several historical accounts about the kingdom under Tipu's rule. The portrayal of Tipu as a modernizer was reiterated in the first act of *The Dreams*. Instances of advanced toy industry, prosperous silk farming and manufacturing, and Tipu's innovative ideas in taxation and statesmanship are all abundant in *The Dreams*. For example, in his first appearance (outside the dream world), we see Tipu holding a conference (with his ministers Mir Sadiq and Poornaiya) in which he enthusiastically decrees some of his agricultural and commercial reforms. When he asks his Minister of Finance to add to the list drawn up for their delegation "silkworms and eggs from the island of Jezeriah Diraz near Muscat", Tipu's Grand Vizier, Mir Sadiq wonders why the kingdom would need these eggs when the ones they got from China are doing very well (Karnad, p.22).

Tipu's answer emphasizes his eagerness to develop his kingdom economically and militarily: "Of course we need others. These may be better. I'm told they are better suited to our climatic conditions. Five or six men who know the proper mode of rearing the worms will need to be brought along with them" (p.21). Rather than featuring Tipu as a man of wars and bloodshed, *The Dreams* in its personal recalling portrays him as a business man whom the British EIC sees as a very strong rival who poses a serious threat to their commercial interests in India. Karnad dramatizes Tipu as a caring and commercially-minded leader who yearns to achieve economic welfare among his subjects (2005, pp.22-25). This dramatization is meant to be a counter-memory whose function is to substitute the imperial portrayal of the Sultan as a cruel and bigoted tyrant in the performances that appeared at the end of the eighteenth century.

Another late eighteenth century performance that Karnad's play responds to is Sadler's Wells' *Tippoo Saib; or, East-India Campaigning*[sic]. Sadler's Wells Theatre was quick to pick up on Astley's success in *Tippoo Saib or British Valour* and staged the play less than a month later. But the production's focus was more on the spectacle of captivity than on the thrill of militarized discipline (O'Quinn, 2005, p.325). Unlike Astley's production which enacted the logistical superiority of British warfare, the Sadler's Wells' production used the myth of the native loyal to the empire to do its ideological work. O'Quinn informs us that in the play, each spectacle of Tipu's strength, magnificence and cruelty is superseded by a scene of native loyalty to British rule. This is most conspicuous in the performance of "the signal bravery of a detachment of Sepoys, who released the English Prisoners, defeated a part of Tippoo's army, and brought off an Elephant" (p.325). Interestingly, the reference to the elephant (here and in the British performances to be discussed later on) can be compared to the presence of the white elephant in Tipu's dream. While the elephant in Astley's production is an epitome of the submissive natives, the white elephant in Karnad's work subvert this notion of submissiveness and transforms it into symbol of greatness

and national resistance. Indeed, the Sadler's Wells' production was rooted in racial superiority as it consolidated the imperialist Orientalist narratives of the sepoys as faithful colonial subjects. This act of unquestioned faithfulness was developed and adopted by most late eighteenth-century performances about Orientals as an emblem for the continuation of British authority. This is how the Sadler's Wells' production was operating at the time to promote this fantasy of native capitulation. This act of voluntary submissiveness of the black Other was best described in London's eighteenth-century newspaper *The Public Advertiser* as follows: "The interesting situation of several English officers when confined in the Prisons of Seringapatam, with extraordinary fidelity of a black servant, in forming and executing a plan of escape" (O'Quinn, p.325).

The presence of such a faithful "black" man was very essential for Sadler's Wells' performance to function as a systematic orientalist discourse that necessitated the projection of the difference and superiority of the British over the "black" Indian natives. As Edward Said points out, the presence of the Orient has been fundamental in defining the imperial West "as its contrasting image, idea, personality, experience" (1978, p.2). Hence the play's depiction of "British mastery as ardent desire of an Indian subject: 'The most flattering applause attended every scene of *Tippoo Saib* last night at Sadler's Wells, but most particularly in that of the prison, where the faithful black discovers himself to his master" (O'Quinn, p.325). This performance and others contributed in the larger project of Orientalism which was purposefully perpetuated in the period to enhance the British imperial aspirations in the Indian subcontinent where "there [were] Westerners. There [were] Orientals. The former dominate[d]; and the latter [had to] be dominated" (Said, 1978, p.36).

Contra these imperialist performances, there are no submissive or faithful "blacks" in Karnad's historical play. Rather, almost all of the native characters in the play (including Tipu's rivals) are represented as respectful, self-reliant, and devoted generals and statesmen who despise the English and never feel obliged to obey them. Tipu's ministers and subjects appear utterly loyal to him. And even those who (historically) betrayed the Sultan –whom we never recognize as traitors until the end of the play – are dramatized as the Sultan's faithful patriotic followers. These traitors are not even explicitly named and they are not involved in any suspicious or collaborative relations with the English. Similarly, those who help the English against the Sultan are depicted as high-status individuals who deem the English tools through whom they aspire to achieve their own states' strategic goals. For instance, when the representative of Lord Cornwallis meets Nana Phadnav in the Maratha Court at Pune, it is the Englishman who cringes and acts in a very servile manner to manipulate the Marathas and persuade them to withdraw the peace treaty which they signed with Tipu (Karnad, pp.30-33). In fact, even after the death of Tipu, the English officers and soldiers are struggling the whole night in their strenuous searching for the body of the Sultan as none of his subjects agrees to collaborate with them in identifying the Sultan's body: "These swine have already identified a dozen corpses as the Sultan's – they are making fools of us" (p.10).

Another Orientalist performative fantasy that Karnad's counter-memory drama attempts to dismantle is the depiction of the EIC's military paternalism as opposed to Tipu's defective role as a good parent. Cornwallis's victory over Tipu at Seringapatam in 1792 did not entail a decisive military annihilation. Rather it involved unprecedented diplomatic transferring of money, land, and two of Tipu's sons as hostages to the British General Governor in India. Interestingly, this historical transferral was immediately reenacted in many performances in colonial India and in England. It was reported on 23 February 1792 that General Cornwallis "carefully staged a spectacles involving elephants, artillery, and soldiers in full ceremonial costumes, in which he publicly received Tipu's two sons dressed for the melancholy occasion in muslin adorned with pearls and assorted jewelry, with a gesture of paternal love" (O'Quinn, p. 326). Karnad's play comes to shed some light on how the British acted as hostage takers and colonizers. Not only does the play question of taking prominent hostages by the British colonizers, but it also subverts the colonizers' claims about their paternal role through which they manipulate their native hostages and their vanquished families.

In England, the relation between the military and parental care was repeated in Astley's extremely successful play *Tippoo Saib's Two Sons* which was performed in August 1792 (p. 330). The play consisted of three parts: The first part presented, beside the spectacular view of Tipu's capital city, "the affecting, pleasing and interesting Departure of TIPPOO'S TWO SONS from their FATHER, at the Gates of Seringapatam, previous to their being delivered up as hostages to his Magesties Forces"; the second staged "the noble reception experienced by the INDIAN PRINCES on their Delivery to the Commander in Chief"; and the third shows "an ORIENTAL MILITARY FESTIVAL, which took place on the occasion" (*Oracle*, 20 August 1792). In this scenario, O'Quinn tells us, "Corwallis becomes both the triumphant commander in chief and the father that Tipu's sons never had. The generation of affective sympathy for the hostage sons is managed such that it emphasizes Tipu's defective parental care and downplays systemic British aggression in the region" (p.330).

Karnad presents these moments in a way that projects Tipu's limitless love and parental care for his sons. After presenting the kids while leading a happy life with their father and mother Ruqayya in the first act of *The Dreams*, the second act presents Tipu, the bereaved husband and father who loses his wife and finds himself forced to part with two of his sons on the same day. The brokenhearted father is listening to the conditions demanded by the English for the release of his sons from their captivity (2005, pp.41-52). When the humiliating terms are announced before Tipu, he tries to suppress his sadness and appear more composed and resolute in front of his subjects. He assures his angry people that his sons will not be harmed by the English.

Yet his citizens feel honor-bound to protest and express their anger: "Please, please your Majesty, do not accept this humiliation. We would rather die" (p.40). Tipu tells his citizens that this is the only choice he has because he will not accept "the destruction of [their] city" (p.42). However, he does not hide his only fear: that the English will teach his sons their language: "[t]he

language in which it is possible to think of children as hostages. All I can try to do is agree to their terms and conclude the treaty in a hurry – before my children have learnt that language” (p.43). Thus, the distressed father considers the imperial “parenting care”– which comes through learning the enemy's language– as the real danger because this facilitates their colonial domination in his land.

Interestingly, the reception of the boys by Lord Cornwallis is not displayed in the play but rather described as a framed narrative by Kirmani– as an active character – whose role, now, is not to narrate the history of Tipu, but to relate a historical event to the main character of the play. Here Tipu is seen waiting desperately to hear from his court historian/diplomat and see whether his sons acted according to the way he nurtured them (chary of any kind of parenthood other than his). Kirmani's description of their arrival at Cornwallis's camp appeases him momentarily: “The English seemed stunned by our magnificence. The princes were received with a twenty-one gun salute” (p.48). But when Kirmani tells the Sultan that Ghulam Ali Khan (who accompanied the boys) said to Lord Cornwallis: “These children were this morning the sons of the Sultan, my master... Their situation is now changed and they must look up at Your Lordship as their Father”; Tipu starts to feel a deep sense of heartbreak:

TIPU. Oh God! Why didn't I die before I heard these words? Ruqayya Banu, why didn't you take me with you? How did I come to this?"

KIRMANI. Lord Cornwallis assured our Ambassador that the children would not feel the loss of a father's care –

TIPU. He must have known these words would reach me and pull out my entrails. (p.48)

Thus, Karnad's Tipu appears to be a sensitive and caring father who is aware of the game of imperial parenthood, which suggests his own deficiency as a father and as a ruler. In fact, the status of imperial paternalism enacted in the British performances is never accomplished in *The Dreams* because the boys rise above the imperial glamour of parenthood represented by General Cornwallis:

KIRMANI. ...And then he gave each prince a gold watch.

TIPU. And what did my children do with the watches?

KIRMANI. They hardly looked at them. They passed them on to the attendants with barely a glance.

TIPU. That's it! That's it! They're well brought up, my sons. (p.49)

Through the images of the caring father and the tolerant leader, *The Dreams* succeeds in foregrounding Karnad's mission as a counter-historical project that traversed a wide range of “objective” historical narratives and imperial performances.

To sum up, Karnad's play succeeds in re-writing the tragic decline of the protonational Indian historical figure Tipu Sultan who governed the Kingdom of Mysore in the southern parts of India during the last two decades of the eighteenth century. The play—a unique contemporary postcolonial drama—functions as an effective means for exploring the Sultan's occluded pre-colonial history by constructing an alternative history that subverts/revises the official accounts of colonialist history and writes back to the imperial propaganda promulgated by the British military historians, dramatists, and performers. The result is a counter-historical discourse that depicts a humane and noble image of the Tipu Sultan and simultaneously revises prejudiced colonialist history.

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