



Narrative resistance in the works of Ismail Kadare: Defying totalitarianism through storytelling

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Abstract

This study analyzes the narrative resistance in two of Ismail Kadare's most representative works, *The Palace of Dreams* and *The Siege* exploring how the author employs allegory, historical symbolism, and polyphonic narration to construct a covert critique of totalitarian regimes. In a context where censorship and the ideology of socialist realism constrained literature, Kadare develops a dual discourse: an explicit narrative that adheres to the norms of the time and a subversive subtext that invites the reader to decipher its hidden message. In *the Palace of Dreams*, through a bureaucratic dystopia, the author presents an all-encompassing surveillance system where control extends even into the unconscious mind of the individual. This symbolic structure reflects the mechanisms of state repression in communist Albania, transforming the novel into an allegory of absolute power. On the other hand, *The Siege* utilizes historical narrative to address isolation and the manipulation of history by those in power. Kadare shifts the meaning of the castle from a symbol of medieval resistance to an allegorical representation of Albania in the 1960s-70s, where the external siege of the castle parallels the country's political isolation. Through strategies such as defamiliarization, narrative fragmentation, and temporal intertwining, Kadare challenges the constraints of socialist realism and creates a unique model of resistance literature. By adopting a multidimensional approach, this study confirms that his work is not merely a testimony to historical reality but also an active form of opposition against ideological control.

Keywords: narrative resistance, allegory, symbolism, totalitarianism, censorship

1. Introduction

Narrative resistance is a literary strategy through which storytelling challenges ideological norms and power structures, creating alternative discourses. In totalitarian regimes, where censorship and state control are imposed on art and literature, narrative becomes not only an artistic tool but also a mechanism for articulating opposition to the regime. In this context, Ismail Kadare, one of the most representative authors of Albanian literature and an internationally recognized figure, uses literature as a form of intellectual resistance,

constructing narratives that challenge dominant ideology through allegory, polyphony, and narrative fragmentation.

In communist Albania, ideological control over art imposed socialist realism as the only acceptable literary method, prohibiting any interpretation that deviated from the party's prescribed framework. However, Kadare manages to construct a narrative based on double coding, a strategy that allows his works to conform to the literary norms of the time while simultaneously embedding a coded critique of the totalitarian system. This mechanism aligns with Umberto Eco's (1979) concept of open texts, according to which a work can be interpreted on multiple levels by different readers, thus creating a narrative structure that can be read both as conformist and as subversive to official discourse. This dual interpretative possibility allows the work to be read as a narrative that appears to align with the ideological and literary framework of the time while simultaneously revealing a hidden layer within the text, where allegorical and subversive messages¹ challenge censorship and authority.

In totalitarian regimes, literary censorship does not operate solely through the direct prohibition of works but also through self-censorship, a mechanism that compels authors to create narratives that, on the surface, conform to ideological norms while concealing oppositional messages beneath the text (Shentalinsky, 1993). This phenomenon was particularly prevalent in the literature of Eastern Bloc countries, where writers employed metaphorical and allegorical language to evade punishment, a strategy that Kadare masterfully develops in his works.

This narrative strategy corresponds with James C. Scott's (1990) concept of hidden transcripts, which suggests that opposition in authoritarian regimes is expressed through encoded narratives that readers can interpret as challenges to ideological hegemony. One of the most powerful techniques Kadare employs to construct this dual-layered narrative is allegory, which enables the creation of a text that can be read on both a surface and a hidden level. According to Christopher Warnes (2014), allegory is a fundamental tool in resistance literature, as it establishes a coded language comprehensible only to initiated readers, thereby challenging the authority of censorship without confronting it directly. In Kadare's work, this mechanism is particularly evident in how he employs history and myth to convey a concealed critique of the communist regime.

In this study, two of the most representative works of this narrative resistance will be analyzed: *The Palace of Dreams* (1981), a dystopian novel² that explores extreme state surveillance and control over human unconsciousness, and *The Siege* (1970), a historical

¹ In postmodern and resistance literature, the term subversive refers to narratives that challenge and undermine ideological norms through irony, polyphony, and allegorical strategies. According to Hutcheon (1989), such texts create a form of encoded discourse in which the reader must decipher hidden messages that oppose authority. In the context of censored literature, a subversive narrative is not merely an open act of defiance but an intelligent use of literary forms to evade state control. For a more detailed analysis of this concept, see Hutcheon, L. (1989). *The Politics of Postmodernism*. Routledge.

² A dystopia is an imagined world built upon repression, totalitarian control, and the restriction of individual freedom. Dystopian literature serves as a veiled critique of authoritarian regimes (e.g., 1984 by George Orwell and *Brave New World* by Aldous Huxley). For a more in-depth analysis of this narrative form and its function as a critical tool, see Booker, M. K. (1994). *Dystopian Literature: A Theory and Research Guide*. Greenwood Press.

novel that problematizes the manipulation of history and the ideological control of collective memory. Drawing on concepts of hegemony, polyphony, and the hidden mechanisms of dissent, this paper will examine how Kadare constructs a narrative form that undermines official discourse and challenges the constraints of socialist realism. This analysis aims to demonstrate that Kadare's literature is not merely an artistic creation but also a powerful act of resistance against totalitarianism.

2. Methodology

This study is based on the analysis of narrative discourse and literary techniques to examine the strategies of resistance in the works of Ismail Kadare. The primary objective is to uncover how his narratives function as forms of resistance against ideological control, employing allegories, polyphony, and fragmented structures to challenge state censorship and propaganda. For this reason, the study combines text-oriented literary criticism with a theoretical approach influenced by research on resistance literature and censorship under totalitarian regimes.

The main method used is narrative discourse analysis, which examines how the text constructs and deconstructs state authority. This study is grounded in the following theoretical concepts:

- Antonio Gramsci's (1971) theory of hegemony, which helps analyze how Kadare challenges ideological hegemony through storytelling and the hidden structures of the text.
- Mikhail Bakhtin's (1981) concept of polyphony, which is crucial for examining how dialogism is created within the text and how different narrative voices confront and undermine the monologic discourse of power.
- Czesław Miłosz's (1953) notion of *Ketman*³, which describes masking and ambiguity as strategies for expressing dissenting thoughts, a key mechanism in Kadare's work.
- James C. Scott's (1990) theory of hidden transcripts, which provides insight into how Kadare's literature conveys messages of resistance concealed beneath the surface of the text.

The analysis focuses on two of Kadare's key works, which present different forms of state control and narrative resistance strategies:

- *The Palace of Dreams* (1981), a dystopian novel where control over consciousness and narrative is essential for maintaining totalitarian power.
- *The Siege* (1970), a historical novel that explores mechanisms of power and resistance through a polyphonic narrative that challenges unilateral interpretations of history.

By integrating textual analysis with theoretical perspectives, this study examines how Kadare's narratives function as alternative discursive spaces that undermine official discourse and the constraints of socialist realism. This approach not only aids in the interpretation of

³ *Ketman* is a concept described by Czesław Miłosz in *The Captive Mind* (1953), referring to the dual practice of behavior and thought in totalitarian regimes. Writers and intellectuals often maintain a public facade of loyalty to the regime while simultaneously preserving a hidden opposition in their thoughts and works. This strategy allows them to survive within a repressive system without completely abandoning their intellectual identity.

Kadare's texts but also situates this study within a broader tradition of analyzing censored and subversive literature.

3. Results and Discussion

3.1 Allegory as a Narrative Strategy in *The Palace of Dreams* and *The Siege*

In Albanian literature, Ismail Kadare's novels *The Palace of Dreams* and *The Siege* represent two of the most striking examples of narrative resistance, where allegory serves as a strategy to encode political criticism against power. In the tradition of literature from oppressed nations, allegory⁴ has been used "as a mechanism to challenge censorship and construct a hidden oppositional discourse" (Morgan, 2009, pp. 87-90). These two novels offer a multi-layered narrative, where historical events and characters are transformed into symbolic figures that, beyond their surface meaning, directly reference the contemporary reality of the author. Through this approach, Kadare challenges the rigid frameworks of socialist realism and creates a narrative that can be interpreted on two levels: a conformist reading on the surface and a concealed critique of the regime.

In *the Palace of Dreams*, total state surveillance is realized through the control of dreams, a form of oversight that goes beyond classical censorship, seeking to intervene in both the consciousness and subconscious of the individual. This mechanism reflects Michel Foucault's concept of disciplinary power, which is not limited to regulating external behavior but extends into thought and individual consciousness as well (Foucault, 1975, pp. 202-204). In this context, the *Tabir Saray* is not merely a bureaucratic institution but a complex surveillance system where citizens' dreams are analyzed and used to identify enemies of the state.

One of the most significant allegorical elements in the novel is the symbolism of the *dossier*, which, in totalitarian regimes, does not merely represent an administrative archive but a mechanism for constructing an individual's political identity. In *the Palace of Dreams*, the dream dossier is not just a standard record of dreams collected from individuals across the vast empire but rather "an instrument through which the state determines the fate of its citizens, using information as a tool of control and punishment" (Kyçyku, 2011, p. 25). This idea reflects how 20th-century regimes created a constructed reality, where the collection and processing of data served to control and intimidate the population. For this reason, the novel can also be read as a *dossier novel*, drawing parallels to how totalitarian regimes have used administrative documentation to exercise absolute control over their citizens.

The structure of the novel reinforces this atmosphere of control and absurdity: bureaucratic rituals, the repetition of actions, and the passivity of the protagonist, Mark-Alem, create a sense of isolation and an impenetrable repressive mechanism. Kadare's approach is similar to

⁴ Allegory is a narrative strategy that employs multiple symbols to construct a secondary level of meaning. The term *allegoresis* refers to the act of interpreting a text as allegorical, whereas allegory itself is a narrative construct in which characters, events, and story elements represent broader political, social, or philosophical structures (Cuddon, Dictionary of Literary Terms and Literary Theory, 1991, p. 22). In this article, the term *allegorical narrative* is used to describe how Kadare employs storytelling to create a second layer of meaning, where historical and mythical plots carry an encoded critique of totalitarian power.

the dystopias of Orwell and Huxley, “where power not only controls individuals' behavior but also their thoughts and dreams” (Claeys, 2017, pp. 245-250). Through allegory, Kadare presents state control over dreams as a metaphor for totalitarian extremism, where the individual cannot escape surveillance, not even in their subconscious.

The *Tabir Saray*, the central institution in the novel, is not a historically accurate entity but an allegorical construction embodying the mechanisms of surveillance and totalitarian control. Through it, the state does not merely collect and analyze citizens' dreams but uses them as a tool to identify and eliminate individuals deemed dangerous to the regime. This surveillance system extends beyond classical censorship, punishing not only the open expression of dissenting thoughts but also subconscious thought processes, which the state interprets as potential signs of rebellion. In this context, *The Palace of Dreams* emerges as an extended allegory of totalitarianism, illustrating how authoritarian regimes not only control reality but also reshape and manipulate it according to their needs. As in the dictatorships of the twentieth century, the state creates a parallel reality where fear and paranoia are not merely consequences of repression but essential instruments of governance. Thus, the boundary between real life and the machinery of state violence becomes blurred, making the regime's control absolute and omnipresent.

In contrast to *The Palace of Dreams*, which focuses on censorship and control over thought, in *The Siege*, Kadare examines the manipulation of history and the myth of national resistance. In this novel, the narrative is constructed through a continuous dialogue between two perspectives, where the voice of an Albanian soldier inside the castle and the perspective of the Ottoman camp create a constant tension regarding how history is written and interpreted. This polyphonic narrative not only challenges the one-sided discourses of power on history but also relativizes the strength of the conquerors, portraying them as a fragile and internally divided structure.

Kadare employs allegory and multiple perspectives to construct a text that allows for dual interpretations, giving the reader the opportunity to decipher a hidden critique of power. In *the Palace of Dreams*, the state, represented by the *Tabir Saray*, does not limit itself to overseeing public life but intervenes in individuals' subconscious, turning dreams into an instrument of control. Meanwhile, in, *The Siege* history is not presented as an unchangeable truth but as a discourse shaped by power, aiming to legitimize violence and authority. Through this strategy, Kadare creates a narrative that challenges the ideological constraints of the time, confronting the reader with a text that can be read on multiple levels.

3.2. Dystopia and Surveillance Mechanisms in *The Palace of Dreams*

The Palace of Dreams is one of the most powerful works of Albanian literature, where Ismail Kadare intertwines elements of totalitarianism, censorship, and thought control within a narrative structure rich in symbolism and allegory. The novel is built upon a dystopian concept in which the state no longer limits itself to controlling behavior but extends its power into the subconscious of individuals, achieving a form of surveillance that surpasses classical censorship.

First published in 1981, *The Palace of Dreams* was immediately banned following a plenary session of the Writers' League, where it was criticized for its allegorical nature and its perceived parallels with the reality of the Albanian totalitarian regime. In an attempt to evade censorship, Kadare initially introduced the story as a short piece titled *The Clerk of the*

Palace of Dreams in the collection *The Ancient Emblem* (1977), later expanding it into a full-length novel.

In his book *Invitation to a Studio* (1990), Kadare himself described this work as one of the most dangerous to be published in Albania, referring to it as a "test of the limits of censorship" (Kadare, 1990, pp. 220-225). Although ostensibly a narrative about the Ottoman Empire, the novel was widely perceived by contemporary readers as a direct critique of the Albanian communist regime. The structures of the Party of Labour condemned the novel, accusing it of "ideological deviation" because it did not conform to the idealism of socialist realism. Its prohibition was both a political and ideological act, reflecting the regime's concerns over alternative interpretations and the novel's hidden messages. The book's republication after 1990 reaffirmed its status as a coded denunciation of totalitarianism, proving that its content had been highly problematic for the regime.

Kadare uses the metaphorical space of the Ottoman Empire to create a mirror of communist Albania, concealing his critiques within a historical narrative. This framing allowed the author to disguise his criticism of the communist system, "constructing a narrative that, on the surface, appeared disconnected from contemporary reality" (Morgan, 2009, pp. 45-50). This approach makes the novel one of the most sophisticated examples of "coded literature" in the Balkans, where censorship and fear necessitated the use of allegory as a means of expressing opposition to the regime (Kuçuku, *The Hidden Masterpiece*, 2012, pp. 35-40).

Thus, the novel's publishing history becomes part of its own narrative: a text that defies censorship and state control by employing the very same mechanisms of surveillance and selection that it describes. This makes *The Palace of Dreams* not only a literary work but also a testament to how literature can survive and challenge power under repressive regimes.

At the center of the narrative in *The Palace of Dreams* is the institution of the *Tabir Saray*, a space where citizens' dreams are processed, selected, and interpreted to enable the state to detect any potential threat to its order, particularly to the life and power of the Sovereign. This institution functions as a mechanism of total surveillance, extending beyond the control of behavior into the subconscious of individuals. This form of control transforms *The Palace of Dreams* into a uniquely radical dystopia, where the state seeks to penetrate the deepest recesses of the human mind.

According to analyses of state mechanisms for thought control, the totalitarian state does not act solely on bodies and behaviors but establishes a surveillance system that influences both the consciousness and subconscious of its citizens. This form of control parallels theories on propaganda and censorship developed by Hannah Arendt (*The Origins of Totalitarianism*, 1951), particularly in how state ideologies shape collective consciousness through fear and repression. In this context, *Tabir Saray* functions not only as a surveillance apparatus but also as an instrument for transforming citizens' psychology, making surveillance both invisible and omnipresent.

One of the most significant aspects of *The Palace of Dreams* is how the state employs bureaucracy as an imperceptible yet unavoidable tool of power. This mechanism does not rely solely on direct violence but operates through ideological and psychological control, turning individuals into instruments of the regime, often without their full awareness.

Mark-Alem, the novel's protagonist, undergoes a gradual transformation, evolving from a neutral figure into an active participant in the state's surveillance apparatus. Recruited into *Tabir Saray* due to his family ties with the powerful Vizier Köprülü, he initially works in the Selection sector before advancing to the Interpretation sector, becoming deeply entrenched in the system of control. Throughout this process, he neither directly challenges the regime nor fully embraces it; instead, he adopts a silent strategy of adaptation, simulating loyalty to the state without fully identifying with it. This transformation aligns with Czesław Miłosz's concept of *Ketman*, which describes how individuals under totalitarian regimes adopt conformist behaviors while internally maintaining a suppressed zone of autonomy (Miłosz, 1953, pp. 89-96). Mark-Alem is neither an active dissident nor a devoted bureaucrat—he is a figure who submits to the repressive mechanism, not out of ideological commitment, but due to a form of passive and unconscious adaptation.

Inside *Tabir Saray*, Mark-Alem faces a surreal reality, where bureaucratic logic and an undefined sense of fear render every decision uncertain. The process of selecting and interpreting dreams follows no clear rules but instead serves as an arbitrary mechanism to justify punishment. In this system, every individual is merely a component of a machinery that operates without rational explanation, fostering a continuous atmosphere of insecurity. Kadare expresses this absurdity through the concept of the *Great Dream* (*bashëndrra* or *kryëndrra*), which the state views as a means of identifying its potential enemies. This is reflected in Mark-Alem's experience with the selection of dreams. The following passage illustrates how the selection mechanism itself becomes a form of psychological violence, where interpretation turns into a labyrinth with no exit:

"The dossier was full. He had read about sixty dreams and set aside about twenty, which at first seemed somewhat decipherable. However, upon revisiting them, he found them, on the contrary, to be the most difficult. Then, from the group of sixty, he selected a few others, which also initially seemed clear but after an hour or two became blurred before his eyes, darkened, blackened, until they turned into real enigmas." (Kadare, p. 106).

This system does not aim to uncover "truth" but to create a continuous justification for surveillance and punishment. By the end of the novel, Mark-Alem realizes that his rise within the system has come at the expense of his own family, particularly his uncle, Kurt Köprülü. The dream he selects by accident becomes the pretext for Kurt's persecution, turning him into a victim of the very repressive mechanism he serves. The arrest of Kurt and the brutal killing of the rhapsodists at the Köprülü household highlight the cyclical and inevitable nature of repression in a totalitarian system. The individual who initially believes they can adapt and benefit from power ultimately becomes its victim. This reflects the structure of dictatorships, where loyalty to the system does not guarantee security but merely delays the inevitable fate of repression. Through this dynamic, *The Palace of Dreams* presents an eternal conflict between the individual and the state. In this world, power does not need to resort to open violence; rather, it pushes the individual toward internal submission, making them unconsciously complicit in the repressive system.

One of the most distinctive features of the dystopia in *The Palace of Dreams* is how state control extends beyond the public sphere, infiltrating not only individuals' behavior but also their subconscious. In this context, dreams no longer function as a free space of the mind but are transformed into a powerful surveillance tool. Rather than remaining an untouched private realm, they become instruments for keeping society in a perpetual state of fear and paranoia.

According to Carl Gustav Jung (*The Archetypes and the Collective Unconscious*, 1959), dreams contain archetypal symbols of fear, oppression, and the desire for freedom, making them an unconscious space of resistance. Precisely for this reason, the state in the novel does not seek merely to control individuals' behavior and consciousness but also to penetrate the collective unconscious, turning the very act of dreaming into an internal surveillance mechanism. This makes the surveillance system in *The Palace of Dreams* more sophisticated than classical forms of totalitarianism, as censorship here does not act solely on speech and action but also on unconscious thought. Kadare presents an advanced form of repression, where self-censorship is not only a result of external fear but also an internal psychological transformation, in which individuals learn to fear even their own thoughts.

"In those dossiers lay the world's sleep, that ocean of horror, over whose abyss they tried to discern a few lost fragments, a few tiny signs. Poor us, he thought to himself." (Kadare, p. 113).

Unlike other works in the dystopian genre, where control is violent and direct, *The Palace of Dreams* presents a silent yet omnipresent repression that compels the individual to adapt without being fully aware of their transformation. This form of control is more sophisticated and more terrifying because it does not rely on overt violence but on self-surveillance and internalized submission. Such a strategy of control is similar to Orwell's concept of *doublethink*, in which power is not limited to enforcing specific behaviors but aims to "destroy individuals' minds and reconstruct them in its own image" (Orwell, 1984, p. 266). This is precisely what happens in *Tabir Saray*, where, through the interpretation of dreams, the state punishes individuals not only for their actions but also for their unspoken thoughts, transforming fear into an internalized mechanism of self-regulation.

3.3 History as a Tool of Power and the Polyphonic Narrative of *The Siege*

In contrast to *The Palace of Dreams*, where state control is represented through a bureaucratic dystopia and unconscious surveillance, *The Siege* offers a different treatment of power, shifting the focus toward historical manipulation and ideological domination. Kadare does not approach history as a mere reconstruction of a past episode but rather as a mechanism for reflecting on contemporary reality. As Rexhep Qosja observes, the novel does not aim to glorify the national hero, Skanderbeg, but instead "establishes an allegorical and symbolic parallel between history and contemporary reality" (Qosja, 1973, p. 155).

The story of the siege of a medieval Albanian castle by the Ottoman army is not simply a historical narrative but a metaphor for the Albanian communist regime and its mechanisms of control and isolation. This allegory is not limited to the direct confrontation between invaders and defenders but extends to how power intervenes in cultural structures and collective consciousness.

Conquest in this novel is not merely a military act but an ideological process aimed at subjugating the population. The Ottomans seek not only to physically destroy the castle but also to culturally and spiritually assimilate its defenders. Through gifts, religious propaganda, threats, and ideological manipulation, they attempt to reshape the consciousness of the conquered. This approach reflects Antonio Gramsci's concept of hegemony, which suggests that power is exercised not only through violence but also through control over how people perceive history and their own identity (Gramsci, 1971).

One of the clearest representatives of this assimilation strategy is the *sheikh*, who openly expresses the intention to alter the cultural and religious norms of the local population:

"We will take off their women's and daughters' white and shameless dresses and dress them in the noble black robe, blessed by religion. We will cover their faces and their cunning eyes with a black veil, with which they have so far freely looked at men. We will make them forget the madness of love and marry them off according to the sacred laws of sharia. (...) We will shed our blood so that the light of Islam penetrates into these wolf dens" (Kadare, *The Siege*, 1976, p. 49).

This passage is not merely a reflection of a religious conquest but a narrative illustrating how invaders seek to replace the cultural identity of the natives with a new identity controlled by their ideology. Through this depiction, *The Siege* is not simply a novel about a medieval siege but a reflection on the mechanisms of power, ideological manipulation, and the control of history.

Kadare constructs a complex narrative structure by alternating between two interwoven storytelling lines. The first line presents the defenders of the castle through a collective first-person narrator, *we*. This technique reinforces the idea of collective resistance, making the reader experience the unity of the defenders and their limitations within an enclosed space. Meanwhile, the second narrative line follows the invaders' efforts to conquer the castle, narrated in the third person by an omniscient narrator, exposing their military and ideological strategies. This alternation between the first-person and third-person perspectives creates a narrative dualism, where the clash between defenders and invaders is not only a physical battle but also a struggle to control the narrative and historical memory.

The castle is not merely a strategic object but a symbol of resistance and identity, serving as a central point of reference for both opposing sides. For the defenders, it represents resilience and the preservation of identity; for the Ottomans, it is an obstacle that must be destroyed to expand their power. Within this dualism, the castle transforms into a narrative focal point where the novel's political and ideological tensions collide.

One of the most significant features of the narrative in *The Siege* is its polyphonic structure, which makes the novel more complex and open to multiple interpretations. Mikhail Bakhtin argues that a polyphonic text does not impose a single truth but "creates a space where different voices coexist and contrast with one another" (*Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, 1984, pp. 6-7). Kadare does not limit himself to a one-sided account of events but allows the reader to explore multiple perspectives through narrative polyphony. He does not portray the Ottoman invaders as monolithic figures of evil but as characters with differing views on war and power. Through this technique, the reader is confronted with a mosaic of perspectives, where no single voice is absolute:

The voice of the defenders: *"We all went up onto the battlements and watched in amazement. The sight before us, down below, was terrifying. Swarms of soldiers surged like sea waves from all directions... Below us was Asia, with all its mysticism and all its barbarism."* (Kadare, 1976, p. 51).

The voice of Tursun Pasha, representing the invaders: *"Now the entire fortress, the entire battle, had condensed into that fatal square, which flared up with fire, sometimes growing stronger, sometimes weakening."* (Kadare, 1976, p. 71).

The voice of the astrologer, who perceives war through a mystical lens: *“Do not fall, my star! Somewhere, he had read these words. They started swirling in his mind furiously from the moment the attack began.”* (Kadare, 1976, p. 81).

Through this polyphonic structure, Kadare does not offer an absolute view of events but rather a dialogue between different historical interpretations. This narrative polyphony highlights not only the conflict between the two sides but also how history can be constructed and recycled in service of power.

3.4 Allegory and the Symbolic Function of the Castle in *The Siege*

In the novel *The Siege*, Kadare does not present the past as a distant and self-contained period but rather as an allegorical construct that guides the reader toward the contemporary reality of the time in which the work was written. History is not a neutral reflection of the past but a tool for examining the mechanisms of power and how totalitarian regimes manipulate historical narratives to control the present.

In this context, the allegory of the castle is not merely a metaphor for resistance against invasion but a symbol of Albania's isolation under communism. The novel was written around the 500th anniversary of Skanderbeg's death (1968), a significant event for the regime's propaganda, as well as during the political tensions of 1967–1969, when Albania experienced a rupture with its allies and reinforced the rhetoric of the "imperialist encirclement." For this reason, Kadare shifts the meaning of the castle from a symbol of historical resistance to an allegorical figure of a closed society, where the authorities control history and narratives to justify isolation.

Kadare employs defamiliarization to portray the reality of communist Albania in an indirect manner, transposing the narrative into a distant historical period. Viktor Shklovsky defines defamiliarization as a literary technique that "forces the reader to see reality with a fresh perspective, disrupting the automatization of perception" (Shklovsky, 1917/1965, p. 16).

In this novel, defamiliarization is realized on two main levels:

1. Historical distance – The events are set in a medieval castle, concealing a direct critique of Kadare's contemporary reality beneath the historical narrative.
2. Propagandistic language – The text contains phrases that resonate with the political rhetoric of the dictatorship era, creating a dual effect: a historical account on the surface and a hidden political critique beneath it.

A clear illustration of this technique is the speech of the chronicler, who employs language that echoes the discourse of the communist regime:

“At first, they used flattery and promises, then they accused us of being renegades and ungrateful, claiming that we had sold ourselves to the Franks, that is, to Europe... You put too much faith in the walls of your castles, but even if those walls are truly impregnable, we will surround them with the iron ring of blockade.” (Kadare, 1976, pp. 6-7).

This passage is not merely a depiction of a medieval siege but a reflection of the discourse of the communist regime, which portrayed Albania as an "impregnable fortress" encircled by "imperialist and revisionist enemies." Through this technique, Kadare defamiliarizes the

historical and political reality, prompting the reader to interpret the novel on two different levels: a medieval historical account on the surface and a concealed political commentary.

Unlike classical models of the historical novel, Kadare dismantles the concept of chronological time, creating a dual temporality. The time of the castle's siege intertwines with the time of the novel's writing, establishing a hidden connection between the medieval past and the reality of communist Albania. According to Mateo Mandalà, Kadare employs a mythical narrative structure, where history transforms into a symbolic space that is not confined to a specific epoch. The absence of Skanderbeg in the novel is not a narrative omission but rather a strategy that turns him into a mythical figure, one that is always present yet never entirely visible (Mandalà, 2009, pp. 160-173). This multidimensional effect of the castle as a symbol allows for different interpretations of the novel over time:

1. As a historical novel about the siege of a medieval castle.
2. As an allegory of communist Albania, where the siege symbolizes the country's isolation from the world.
3. As a metaphor for the "internal siege," where "ultra-communist Albania oppresses and encircles its most liberal segment, the intellectuals and writers" (Kadare, 1995, p. 85).

The multiplicity of interpretations turns the castle into a hybrid narrative space, where the past and the present intersect to reveal hidden truths beneath the layers of storytelling.

According to Walter Benjamin, allegory is not merely a stylistic device but a means of constructing a reality in which the past remains open to continuous reinterpretation (Benjamin, 1928, p. 166). Benjamin argues that allegory establishes a fragmented relationship with the past, treating it not as a fixed entity but as a series of images that can be reorganized and reprocessed according to the needs of the present. This idea aligns with Kadare's approach, in which allegory dissolves the boundaries between history and contemporary reality, turning the castle into a symbol of physical, ideological, and psychological siege. Through allegory, defamiliarization, and the manipulation of historical narratives, Kadare makes *The Siege* a dual space, where history and contemporaneity coexist in a constant state of tension. The castle is not merely a geographical location but a metaphor for isolation and ideological control, a symbol that continues to be interpreted differently over time, depending on historical and political contexts.

Conclusions

The study of Ismail Kadare's narrative in *The Palace of Dreams* and *The Siege* demonstrates that literature is not merely an artistic tool for recreating history or political reality, but a conscious strategy to challenge power and censorship. Through a complex narrative structure that interweaves allegory, polyphony, and defamiliarization, Kadare creates texts that contest official discourse and reveal the tension between the individual and the mechanisms of ideological control.

In *The Palace of Dreams*, state control escalates from physical and ideological surveillance to a more sophisticated form of repression: the control over individual consciousness. Through the bureaucratic dystopia of the Tabir Saray, Kadare portrays a power structure in which fear and censorship are embedded within the mechanisms of state administration. This novel is not only a critique of totalitarianism but also a reflection on how ideology becomes an instrument that shapes both reality and the submission of the individual.

On the other hand, *The Siege* is not merely a historical account of a medieval fortress under attack but an allegorical construction that reinterprets the past, transforming it into a mirror of the time in which the novel was written. The castle does not only represent a physical space of defense but also a space of ideological isolation, closely resembling Albania in the 1960s and 1970s. Kadare employs this structure to explore how power manipulates historical narratives, using them as a means of legitimizing the regime.

A central element in Kadare's narrative strategy is defamiliarization, which places the reader in a position of reflection and analysis. Rather than providing a direct interpretation of events, Kadare constructs a narrative where history, mythology, and contemporary reality intertwine in a coded structure. This process makes the reader an active participant in deciphering the text's hidden meanings, granting literature the role of a resistance tool.

In conclusion, Kadare succeeds in preserving artistic autonomy even within the constraints of a repressive system, creating a literature that remains open to multiple interpretations. Through the use of allegory and fragmented narrative, he positions himself within the tradition of resistance literature, where history and politics are not treated as fixed realities but as structures subject to continuous manipulation and reevaluation. The castle, as both a narrative and symbolic space, stands at the core of this approach, reminding us that power does not only control bodies and territories, but also the very way in which history is told and remembered.

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