

**Behind Historical Writing Scenes:
The Concept of Historical Writing in
Radwa Ashour's *Thulathyat Ghernata* and
Tariq Ali's *Shadows of the Pomegranate
Tree***

ما وراء الكتابة التاريخية: مفهوم الكتابة التاريخية في روايتي
"قلوب غرناطة" لرضوي عاشور و"ظلال شجرة الرمان" لطارق علي

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Abstract:

History, with its broad scope of events, serves as a rich repertoire for literature to which many writers have turned to add more value and a new dimension to their works, as well as to history itself. The present study compares the nature of historical writing in Radwa Ashour's *Thulathyat Ghernata* (1995) and Tariq Ali's *Shadows of the Pomegranate Tree* (1992). It examines the purpose behind employing history in the selected novels of both novelists. Both novels applied historical contexts as material, employing real historical events and figures. The study has concluded that Ashour aims at employing history as a tool of resistance as well as an expression of the marginalized conquered voice. She aims at introducing another version of history that is different from the official one, written by the conqueror. Similarly, Ali employs history in order to address the Western reader and to present another version of history of Islam differently from the official version written by the western dominant conqueror. Moreover, Ali intends to trace the root of the clashes between Islam and Europe. Hence, both Ashour and Ali try to reconstruct history to introduce another version of it written by the conquered to defy the Western official biased one.

Keywords: Radwa Ashour, Tariq Ali, *Thulathyat Ghernata*, *Shadows of the Pomegranate Tree*, historical novel.

المستخلص

تعالج هذه الدراسة مفهوم توظيف التاريخ في روايتي "ثلاثية غرناطة" (١٩٩٥) لرضوى عاشور و "ظلال شجرة الرمان" (١٩٩٢) لطارق عليّ ، حيث تتناول الدراسة استكشاف لطبيعة توظيف التاريخ للروايات التاريخية المختارة لكلا الكاتبين، حيث قام كلا الكاتبين بتوظيف أحداث و شخصيات تاريخية ممزوجة بأخرى متخيلة. المشترك بين عاشور و عليّ هو الفترة التاريخية في الروايتين حيث تناولا فترة سقوط غرناطة عام ١٤٩٢ و الأحداث التي تلتها . و خلصت الدراسة إلى أن رضوى عاشور قد وظفت التاريخ في روايتها " ثلاثية غرناطة" كأداة للمقاومة، و لتقديم تاريخ مواز يكتبه المهزوم لمواجهة التاريخ الرسمي المكتوب بواسطة المنتصر. و بذلك أتاحت للمهمشين كتابة تاريخهم الذي تم تجاهله في الروايات الرسمية للفترة التاريخية، وبالمثل قام طارق عليّ بتوظيف التاريخ في روايته " ظلال شجرة الرمان" لتقديم تاريخ مواز للتاريخ الرسمي إلى القارئ الغربي ليتعرف على الرأي الآخر بدلاً من الصورة الذهنية التي صورتها كتب التاريخ الغربية. و أيضاً فقد تعمد التركيز على الصراع بين العالم العربي الإسلامي و العالم الغربي للوصول إلى الأسباب الحقيقية لهذا الصراع. فكلّاً من رضوى عاشور و طارق عليّ قد قاما بإعادة كتابة التاريخ لفترة سقوط غرناطة وما بعدها بشكل مختلف عن كتب التاريخ الغربية ليصبح صوت الآخر المهزوم مسموعاً.

الكلمات المفتاحية: رضوى عاشور – طارق عليّ- الرواية التاريخية- ثلاثية غرناطة- ظلال شجرة الرمان

History is a discipline that is concerned with describing and interpreting past actions according to firm criteria, and these events are framed by time and place. The last few decades have witnessed a turn to history, and this tendency has become a very common and defining feature of the current literary scene in many different parts of the world. Therefore, many historical events have been tackled in many fictional works, aiming at making use of this rich multi-faceted field. The present paper is to discuss the purpose of employing history in selected novels by two novelists from different cultural backgrounds. The first one is the Egyptian novelist, academic, and critic Radwa Ashour (1946-2014). Ashour wrote seven novels, two short story collections, and five books on criticism. She won "the 1994 Book of the Year Award" from the Cairo International Book Fair for her novel *Thulathyat Ghernata*. Her novels have been translated into English, French, Italian, German and Spanish. She was awarded the 2007 Constantine Cavafy Prize for Literature. She died in 2014. The second novelist, he is Tariq Ali (1943), the British-Pakistani, journalist and political activist. His fame as a novelist lay on *The Islam Quintet* that includes five historical novels: *Shadows of the Pomegranate Tree* (1992), *The Book of Saladin* (1998), *The Stone Woman* (2000), *A Sultan in Palermo* (2005), and *Night of the Golden Butterfly* (2010). *Shadows of the Pomegranate Tree* was awarded "The Archbishop San Clemente del Instituto Rosalia de Castro" prize for the best foreign language fiction published in Spain in 1994. In 2010, Ali's *Quintet* was awarded The Granadillo Prize, a prestigious literary prize in Spain.

The research's aim is to deal with Ashour's *Thulathyat Ghernata* and Ali's *Shadows of the Pomegranate Tree*. The selection of these novels is based on their adoption of real historical events and figures more than the other novels of both novelists. Ashour's two selected novels are based on real historical events; *Thulathyat Ghernata* is based on the fall of Granada and the aftermath events; *Shadows of the Pomegranate*

Tree resembles Ashour's *Thulathyat Ghernata*. That's why, both novelists share the treatment of the fall of Granada which could constitute a basis for comparison.

Both history and fiction are “fluid, heterogeneous areas where diverse practices and techniques are mixed, a fact that makes it difficult to construct a unified theory or methodology in either case” (Mehrez 2). These two different fields are subject to analysis and understanding as narrative forms and discourses that respond to “a problem of a general human concern, namely, the problem of how to translate knowing into telling” (White, “The Value of Narrativity in the Representation of Reality” 1). Both history and fiction aim at constructing a self-contained world. However, history focuses on resurrecting the life of individuals through retelling it; whereas fiction makes us relive it through making individuals act as characters whom the readers interact with.

Tessa Morris Suzuki, in her book *The Past within US Media, Memory, History*, sums up the distinction between the work of a historian and that of a novelist stating: “In a history text, the historian's reading of the past is at the foreground of the narrative and therefore more readily open to scrutiny and questioning” (42). Nevertheless, a novelist may make a composition of both history and fiction in order to convey his message in a creative way. He may employ history and choose historical events, rubbing them up, then he resurrects them adding a present flavour to be appealed to the reader. A novel is an imaginative work, but it may employ real historical events as narrative material without being confined to them.

The juxtaposition between history and novel is made according to certain conditions in which history is “employed differently according to the novel itself. In the amusing novels, history is concentrated containing what makes it readable”. In the realistic novel, history is a powerful tool to change the present. In the experimental novel, history mirrors the present” (Al-Qadi 82).

Hence, history is interwoven in the novel mirroring each one another, and criticism focuses on both understanding the past and the present, not on history itself.

Historical fiction is a hybrid genre that combines both real and fictional aspects. A historical novel is one of the most common kinds of fiction whose main source is human history. Moreover, historical novel is the abstract of the previous human experience, it revives the past and creates it anew to instruct those who are interested to know what happened in the past.

The relationship between a historical novel and its material differs from one novel to another. There are novels that focus on representing the figures and events of a certain age in a way that seems to be a pure documentation. On the other hand, there are novels that choose a certain historical period but with unreal unhistorical characters aiming at reintroducing the past or 'pancaking' it on a national basis. A novelist may also employ past events as a mask by establishing a merely general frame of events, inventing new details and figures in order to avoid any clash with a society or a regime. In this sense, a historical novel is not bound to historical events as they really happened, rather, it may employ history "to express what history didn't say" (Al-Hajmary 63); it presents events from the viewpoint of the novelist.

Radwa Ashour's *Thulathyat Ghernata*

Radwa Ashour (1946-2014) is one of the Arab novelists who employed history in many of her novels as a part of her literary project to interweave history in her novels differently from the official history books. She aimed at foregrounding the voice of the conquered and marginalized through rewriting history from their viewpoint. Ashour got her Ph.D. degree from the University of Massachusetts in 1978, writing her thesis on African-American literature, which was entitled *The Search for a Black Poetics: A Study of Afro-American Critical Writing*. Since that time, she declared herself as "a spokesperson for marginalized

voices...giving voice to those who have been silenced” (Doré3). She aimed at rewriting history from the viewpoint of the marginalized who had been ignored in official history.

Throughout her literary career, Ashour tried to record the present-time problems by reflecting them on similar historical events, looking at the events as an objective correlative to the current ones. Faisal Dorag thinks that this technique has two main dimensions: “a resentment and opposition against the present, and a cognitive resource that is able to enlighten and interpret the present” (12). In this sense, Ashour was pushed forward by the present to write about the past; she adopted the past to face the frustrating present as well as highlighting the forgotten past. While writing, she was “obsessed with an intellectual, psychological or aesthetic issue to be expressed” (Abu Nedal 147). For Ashour, employing history into her novels was an expression of suppressed viewpoints that couldn’t be expressed in a traditional way.

Ashour has chosen history as a container for her viewpoint to show the effect of the tackled events and to convey her view to more readers as possible as she could. Ashour made history the material of most of her novels; five out of seven novels are of historical context (except *Hajar Dafea’* and *Khadija wa Sawsan*). Ashour believed that our present is inseparable from our past and that “our present was lived as history, an oppressive and haunting historical reality with which we wrestled, and which laboured to grasp” (“Eyewitness: Scribe and Storyteller: My Experience as a Novelist” 88). Ashour was aware of the powerful effect of employing history in her novels. For her, the setting doesn’t matter; “whether the setting is 20th century Cairo, 16th century Spain or 19th century island off the coast of East Africa, history is always there—a pervading presence” (“Eyewitness: Scribe and Storyteller: My Experience as a Novelist” 90). Consequently, history in her novels is a tool of investigating the present time

through instructing the reader instead of merely glorifying the past as in the 19th century historical novels.

Ashour's *Thulathyat Ghernata* is a historical novel published between 1994 and 1995 in three parts: *Ghernata*, *Maryama* and *al-Raheel*. It tackles the last days of al-Andalus as seen by the people of Albaicin in 1491, right before the surrender of Granada after the declaration of the agreement between Boabdil, the last king of Granada, and Ferdinand and Isabella, the kings of Aragon and Castile. The novel extends to cover the period of the mass exodus of the Arabs in 1609 providing great deal of information about the age, generations, social classes and habits of inhabitants there. The novel also describes meticulously the measurements imposed by the Christian rulers on the inhabitants of Granada to eradicate their Arab and Islamic identity forcing them to adopt a new language and religion.

Ashour stated that writing about Granada was not new: “there are many texts about only one original Granada. The writer holds his pen to write about it, but his own tale delves from Granada's one mirroring his age in its image” (*Thulathyat Ghernata* 507). Ashour mentioned that *Thulathyat Ghernata* was the product of the prevailing events that the Arab world was going through. She admitted: “I wasn't concerned with al-Andalus; it was far and blurred. When I wrote about it, it wasn't a preoccupied choice nor a dream or obsession with the topic....” (*Thulathyat Ghernata* 508). Badr noticed that the Andalus-themed novels have increased after the Second Gulf War, the deserted past has raised with its historical details (www.addustour.com). Ashour's *Thulathyat Ghernata* was an outcome of the American invasion of Iraq in 2003. She recorded:

I think that *Ghernata* was born at this very moment. I didn't think I got a novel within me, but I had a burning present question about the end resulted by helplessness, fear and awareness of a threatened

history. In my viewpoint, writing *Thulathyat Ghernata* with its three parts—*Ghernata*, *Maryama and al-Raheel*—was a kind of self-defense that creatures tend to by intuition in case of danger. Writing here began as a mere psychological need not a commitment nor an ambition to fulfill a cultural project based on reproducing an Arab historical stage in a fictional form.
(*Thulathyat Ghernata* 509)

For Ashour, Granada was a symbol of defeat, “chances of survival through resistance” and failure in all ages and times; it acts as “a correlative of [her] experience of bombing of Baghdad, a bombing which brought with it the 1967 bombing of Sinai, the 1982 bombing of Beirut and Southern Lebanon.” (“Eyewitness: Scribe and Storyteller: My Experience as a Novelist” 91). Ashour went back to the past seeking for a similar period, as she states: “I found myself going to the past which, however painful, was not as painful as the present. It was an attempt to encompass my own experience: what I have witnessed and lived through” (“Eyewitness: Scribe and Storyteller: My Experience as a Novelist” 91). That’s why Ashour sought an objective correlative for the state of defeat and failure of the present time as well as her own experience, and she found it in Granada.

From Ashour's point of view, she chose Granada as a setting for her novel because “all the historical accounts talk of Andalusia as a civilization of the senses but without mind, without intellect. How could that be? Clearly something was wrong in that presentation....” (Fernea 31). So, she tried to reinvestigate al-Andalus away from the historical books that provide no single truth, but many truths. She believed that “history is not only to be found in books and records of the past but is a living experience” (Guzman 129). In this sense, Ashour’s *Thulathyat Ghernata* is an attempt to introduce another version of al-Andalus history away from that was written mainly from a European viewpoint.

Ashour's concept of history is exceptional; she reads history in search for a parallel period of the present. She illustrates her passion with history: "I read for reading not writing. I was searching for something that I didn't recognize, as if I wanted to understand, or as if I was preoccupied, from my own concern, with an old one that answers what is within my heart. It alleviates all what it can't bear" (*Thulathyat Ghernata* 510). In an interview, she asserts her special relationship with history by saying: "It is not a mere past, but it represents active and interactive elements that form our daily present" (Interview by A'agag, 27). She tries to use history as a bridge that connects the past and the present.

Unlike conventional historical novels that used to glorify the past, Ashour believes that a novel is "a kind of cultural resistance which partly implies the protection of collective memory" aiming at giving history "visibility and coherence to conjure up unaccounted, marginalized and silenced areas of the past and the present" ("Eyewitness: Scribe and Storyteller: My Experience as a Novelist" 89). She writes about the past that is a part and parcel of the present. For her, the past is "too much of the present, and the present is too imbued with the past to make any sense without it" ("Eyewitness: Scribe and Storyteller: My Experience as a Novelist" 90). She believes that the reader can't understand his present well unless he knows the past. As a result, Ashour tries to choose similar periods from the past that parallel the present to help the reader understand his present-time events.

Ashour attempts to rediscover the history of al-Andalus that has been either marginalized or written from a European biased point of view. Her novel is a challenge of the official history from the viewpoint of the silenced marginalized Other, instead of the European one-sided version, or in Hutcheon's words "the excentric and the marginal" (*The Politics of Postmodernism* 82). In other words, for Ashour, writing about history is a "reappropriation of a threatened geography and a threatening history" (Ashour, "Eyewitness: Scribe and Storyteller: My

Experience as a Novelist” 88). She illustrates: “As I read, a suppressed, marginalized history is formed in front of me... There is a parallel history in this period. In its elements, there are many questions about the present concerning defeat and endings, identity and the relations with the Other, and marginalization, suppression and the right of being different” (*Thulathyat Ghernata* 510). In this sense, Ashour reversed the roles of both a novelist and a historian in order to “fill in the gaps left by traditional totalitarian history” (Onega 16).

Ashour answers the question if *Thulathyat Ghernata* is a historical novel or not, stating:

I personally do not care whether it should be classified as a historical novel or not. But the novel is not an allegory. The setting is not a wrapping, I do not use the past as an allegorical substitution for the present. I also do not write about history for history's sake... *Thulathyat Ghernata* attempts to connect past and present by means of metaphorical image of loss and resistance. (“Eyewitness: Scribe and Storyteller: My Experience as a Novelist” 91)

For Ashour, a historical novel is nearer to be “a mask of a present reality more than a restoration of a golden moment in history”, so that if we change the names of people and places, “we will have a novel about our present time” (Naser, www.arabnew.com). In this sense, Ashour goes back to Granada to refer to a historically similar present; she aims at paying our attention to the idea that there is another Granada about to fall and another al-Andalus about to be lost. Ashour does not write history, but she uses history as a literary tool. However, she persisted on

documenting real historical events in her novel. She justifies this documentation stating:

Historical documentation was a basic element because the novel tackles a part of the nation's history that I don't relish loitering with it nor in it. Moreover, the text I write about belongs to the context of realistic novels. In spite of the importance of this documentation, it was merely a tool that I apply for the sake of my creative project: my overall view, the destinies of fictional characters, and indications I have for situations.

(*Thulathyat Ghernata* 511-12)

In *Thulathyat Ghernata*. Ashour didn't focus mainly on real events, but on establishing a historical base where real historical events have a persuasive role through creating a historical background to illustrate the characters' situations and behaviour.

For Ashour, recording historical events in fiction is a process of "self-defense" and a tool of resistance, aiming at shedding light on the marginalized and the forgotten" (Ashour, "My Experience with Writing" 170). She aims at preserving history from being distorted or forgotten, she tries to make her novels a kind of a collective memory that protect itself from being altered or falsified. She shifts the boundaries of the reader's perception to exceed the time of the novel to make him link the novel's time to the present one. Ashour's passion for history encouraged her to bring forward spots in history from the dim light to the front to instruct the present generations not to repeat what had happened before.

Tariq Ali's *Shadows of the Pomegranate Tree*

The British-Pakistani novelist Tariq Ali is one of the prolific writers whose works in literature, prose and films have tackled politics, history and the relation between the East and the West. His *Islam Quintet* are five novels that tackle different historical events in Islamic history, introducing the clashes

between the East and Islam, and the West. He aimed at tracing the Muslim world and the West in key historical eras. In an interview with Maniza Naqvi, Ali recorded that after reading the first novel of *The Quintet*, Edward Said told him: “Don’t stop now. Tell the whole bloody story” (Interview by Maniza Naqvi). Ali commented on Said’s statement saying that by bloody story, Said meant the clash between the Western Christendom and Arab Islamic Civilization. The idea of writing *The Quintet* came into Ali’s mind in 1991 after the Gulf war, he stated:

I wanted to excavate the history of European Islam and went naturally, to Spain. Here I saw the Great Mosque in Cordoba, went to Granada, wandered round Seville and imagined the ruins whispering to me...stories of their past and those who had built them. So, I imbibed the atmosphere and wrote the first novel of *The Quintet*.

(Interview by Maniza Naqvi)

Ali’s approach to history is an attempt to challenge the stereotypes and misconceptions about Islam as perceived by the West. In an interview with Talaat Ahmed, Ali criticizes the demonized stereotype of Muslims and Islam arguing: “The politicians and media have created a dominant image of Islam that is one of bearded terrorists”, and Islamic culture is described as backward and its politics despotic”. Ali continued that this view is adopted by many liberals and some on the left who used the language of “Islamic fascism”. In the same interview, when Ali was asked about the reason behind writing *The Quintet*, he replied: “In 1991 during the first Gulf War, I heard some professors on TV say something that is now so common that nobody talks about. He said, ‘The Arabs are a people without political culture.’ This really angered me as I knew instinctively that this was not true”. This statement reveals the real reason behind writing *The Quintet*; it was a response to the Western dominant discourse about Islam and the East.

Hence, Ali's *Islam Quintet* aims at deconstructing the passive stereotype set by extremists in the West. It seems to be "a simple response to an offensive statement against the Arabs that shaped itself in a form of a novel" (Shamim 5). Ali was born and raised by communist parents, and he was educated at a Catholic school. Yet, "It did nothing to shake his long-life atheism" (bbc.com/tariq_ali). Ali declared that he didn't defend Islam as a member of the Muslim community, rather, he declared his atheism saying: "It is well-known that I am not a religious person, I grew up and remain an atheist, but this question revived my interest in Islamic culture and Islamic history" (Interview by Talaat Ahmed). He tries to explore the roots of this clash and attack by going to history. He believes that the answer to his question about the reason of this attack is in Europe not in the Arab world, that's why the first four novels of *The Quintet* set in Europe, and they present an Islamic world characterized by plurality, tolerance and knowledge.

Ali's *Shadows of the Pomegranate Tree* (1993) is a postmodern historical novel and the first novel of *The Quintet*. As Ashour's *Thulathyat Ghernata*, Ali's *Shadows of the Pomegranate Tree* sets in al-Andalus or Muslim Spain in 1499, seven years after the fall of Granada by Ferdinand and Isabella. The novel traces the calamities and measurements that the Andalusian people and civilization were afflicted with, and the attempts to eradicate the Islamic culture and identity in al-Andalus by Queen Isabella and her confessor Ximenes de Cisneros. The novel traces the effect of the fall of Granada on a family in a small village near Granada. The novel traces the political, social and religious changes in this family.

The main setting of the novel is al-Hudayl village near Granada, where the aristocratic family Banu al-Hudayl lived and continued living worryingly after the fall of Granada. The founder of this family was ibn Farid who was a great warrior. The novel doesn't introduce the history of the village and al-Andalus directly, rather, "the novel registers the struggle of a family to

survive in difficult times, and hence the novelist/narrator writes history from the inside” (Ghani 279). The family and its members are fictional characters, but Ali chose the name of Banu Hudayl as one of the most common Arab tribes in the Arabia. Ali traces the suffering of Muslims in al-Andalus from the viewpoint of this family, making this family as a representative of the whole Andalusian people, and al-Hudayl village as a miniature of al-Andalus as a whole.

After the fall of Granada, al-Hudayl family and the people of the village were worried about the approaching threat of the Castilian troops and the inquisition. Moreover, the novel records the resistant activities of the inhabitants, as well as the submission and conversion of many others to Christianity to avoid being killed or confiscated. The novel aims at highlighting the voice of the oppressed to introduce a counter narrative that differs from the superior Western version.

The novel goes to and fro between the village of Banu Hudayl and Granada. Granada was under Castilian control since the novel begins in 1499, seven years after its fall, whereas Banu Hudayl village was ruled by al-Hudayl family’s heir Omar ibn Abdullah, ibn Farid’s grandson. Unlike Ashour’s *Thulathyat Ghernata*, that is introduced by one of the people of al-Andalus, Ali’s *Shadows of the Pomegranate Tree* is introduced by the meeting of five Christian knights with Ximenes De Cisneros, the Archbishop and confessor of Queen Isabella in al-Hambra, Granada. De Cisneros ordered the knights to burn the Arabic books and manuscripts, confirming that he is speaking “with the authority of both the church and the crown” and that “the cowl was in command of the sword” (x). De Cisneros is a common character between Ashour’s *Thulathyat Ghernata* and Ali’s *Shadows of the Pomegranate Tree*.

The novel goes through many real places in al-Andalus where many historical events take place. One of the most notable places in the novel is Bab al-Ramla (The Plaza de Bib-Rambla) in

Granada where book-burning accident was committed by the order of De Cisneros in 1499. Ali recorded this accident: “On the first day of December in the year 1499, Christian soldiers under the command of five knight-commanders entered the one hundred and ninety-five libraries of the city and a dozen mansions where some of the better-known private collections were housed. Everything written in Arabic was confiscated” (x). Therefore, it is very clear that there were great number of both public and private libraries in al-Andalus.

In *Shadows of the Pomegranate Tree*, Ali employed real historical events, which are considered turning-points in the Islamic history such as the Fall of Granada, book-burning at Bab al-Rambla. Ali returned to the Muslim past in order to rewrite it. Shamim, in her study *Elements of Historiographic Metafiction in Contemporary Pakistani Historical Fiction: A Critical Study of the Selective Works of Tariq Ali*, comments that this return is an ironic and critical one where Ali parodies already written versions of the past. She continues that the past Ali is ironically parodying, however, is not the real past, but a “pseudo-real, a textual past formed of the histories produced by the Western and Muslim scholarship. So, Ali parodies the past for the Western audience when he revises their notions about the Christian civilization in Europe” (68).

By textualizing real historical accidents, Ali tries to show the Western reader another version of history than the version introduced by Western historians. Thus, Ali rewrites history anew to construct the historical fact that the Western mind lacked or ignored while dealing with each other in modern times. For example, Ferdinand and Isabella are famous figures who did great deeds for their people for Western readers. Contrastingly, Ali endeavours to introduce the other side of the tale in which both figures committed massive ethnic cleansing and caused the eradication of a whole civilization in al-Andalus.

Moreover, Ali acknowledges the grace of the Islamic civilization over the Western one. In an interview, he states: “The

new mono-cultural identity in Europe was built on the ashes of Islamic civilization, literally. Books were burnt, people were burnt by the Catholic inquisition. The Jews were expelled from Spain and Portugal and sought and were given refuge in Muslim lands in Maghreb and the Ottoman Empire” (Interview by Muniza Naqvi). In *Shadows of the Pomegranate Tree*, Ali introduced an Islamic civilization in al-Andalus or Muslim Spain, that embraced other civilizations and was tolerant with other religions. One of the most common examples of this coexistence in the novel is ibn Hasd, the Jewish cobbler who praised this peaceful coexistence stating: “In this village we lived at peace for five hundred years. Jews have been tormented elsewhere, but never here. Christians have bathed in the same baths as Jews and Muslims” (123). Moreover, Jews and Christians “were allowed to attend the meeting after the Friday prayers were over” (115).

In addition, Ali seems to turn to the Moorish Spain as a model of a multicultural society. This is clear in what Shamim argues that “Ali found the histories of Spanish Reconquista and Crusades taught to Western reader as biased and partial, and his novels attempt to give an alternative perspective to those histories, i.e, the perspectives of Muslims” (28). The prevailing tolerance spirit of Muslim rulers at that time led to the flourishing of its culture. In this sense, Moorish Spain offers a historical alternative to the present time.

On the other hand, Ali introduces an intolerant Western civilization that was intolerant to other religions and was keen to eradicate the Other’s civilization, leaving no way out for them but converting, departing or dying. Tolerance and the Other’s acceptance are missing for the Castilian occupation. For instance, Miguel advised Umar not to repeat the statement of ‘there is only one Allah, He is Allah, and Mohammed is His prophet “because Queen Isabella and her confessor don’t agree with you. If you go repeating this, the Christians will tear open your hearts with straight and hard-shafted spears” (123).

Miguel's statement reveals that the Castilian occupation didn't accept many religions and cultures, but they wanted to impose their own identity and culture on the occupied people.

It is true that Ali depicted the Muslim society in al-Andalus adopting tolerance and coexistence with other religions and cultures. However, the same society was not tolerant with those whom they called 'heretics' who were silenced and deserted. Ali seems to criticize intolerance with the opponents in the Andalusian society by introducing many real Islamic figures who were persecuted by the Muslims themselves because of their views, Ali mentioned these figures on the tongue of some characters. One of the most notable examples in the novel is ibn Hazm who led "caustic attacks on the preachers of orthodox Islam" (22) He was attacked and rejected by the other doctrines and scholars of rigid doctrines so that they were "excommunicating him after Friday prayers in the great mosque" (22).

Another real Muslim figure who was rejected and attacked within the Andalusian society is Ibn Rushd (Averroes). He was mentioned by Wajid al-Zindiq who represents the mainstream of free thinking. Al-Zindiq defended Averroes whose ideas and teachings were regarded as blasphemy, because his teachings were not taught properly by intention. Wajid tried to teach these teachings for young men, and he was regarded as "a sceptic who had poisoned a large number of young minds" (122). Though, al-Zindiq kept teaching Averroes's teachings believing that "even heretics had a right to speak their minds" (122). Al-Zindiq defended Averroes's teachings and ideas, and he theorized them. He escaped to a cave, and he called himself Wajid al-Zindiq as the people named him after he used to be called ibn Zaydoun.

Al-Zindiq acts as a thinker and a social reformer who prescribes the reasons for the state illness. He criticizes the kings and their way of ruling people. Moreover, he acknowledges that

Muslims “led the world in the realms of science, architecture, medicine, music, literature and astronomy. Yet [they] failed to establish political laws, which could have protected all our citizens against the whims of arbitrary rulers” (142). He seems to speak in Ali’s tongue to say that the Islamic State in al-Andalus had borne the seeds of destruction before its defeat by the Christians, and Muslims themselves were responsible for this defeat.

Thus, Ali aims at warning the Muslim community of repeating the same wrong acts that led to the fall of their state in the past. He mentioned such scholars as ibn Khaldun and Abu’l Ala’a al-Ma’ari, who had warned from the destruction of the Islamic civilization as a result of the division of the Islamic community into different striving sects. Al-Zindiq refers to ibn Khaldun’s teachings saying: “No amount of religious can succeed in changing the ways of kings unless it is based on something...which our great teacher ibn Khaldun called solidarity” (142). Moreover, he tries to criticize the past with all its mistakes as well as introducing the voice of the conquered instead of the dominant version of the conqueror. In that regard, Shamim considers that “Ali revises the history of Islam in Europe as it is conceived by the Western as well as Arab Muslim readers and makes them relevant in the present world of global politics” (27).

In that context, Ali doesn’t write *Shadows of the Pomegranate Tree* as a Muslim activist nor sympathized with it since he is an atheist. Rather, the motivation behind writing is “being a historian who belongs to the East and Eastern culture”. additionally, he wants to “rewrite the history in order to fill the gaps left by the Western historian and to remove the misconceptions of the West about Muslims by reviving their glorious past” (Malik et al., 316). Accordingly, while dealing with history, Ali adopts an objective approach, reading and writing history critically in order to correct a wrong concept.

In this sense, Ali attempted to introduce a balanced scale by condemning the barbaric acts and intolerance of the Castilian occupation who was keen to destroy the Islamic civilization and vanish their identity, as well as refusing plurality and coexistence. On the other hand, Ali introduced an example of peaceful coexistence between Muslims along with Christians and Jews. This mixture had generated one of the most flourishing civilizations throughout history where tolerance and peace prevailed for nearly eight hundred years.

In brief, both of Ashour's *Thulathyat Ghernata* and Ali's *Shadows of Pomegranate Tree* gives the reader an image of the struggle between the two times; the time of the Arab and Islamic sovereign when people lived peacefully, and the aftermath time, in which the Castilian power was keen to eradicate the Arab Islamic identity in al-Andalus, imposing the Castilian identity and Christianity. They introduce a textualized past in the form of fiction as a process of rewriting history, as well as the other side of history as seen by the conquered, instead of the Western Christian dominant version of history of Reconquista, since history is always written by people who are in power. In a word, both Ashour and Ali attempt to reshape the tackled historical period by creating another version of history written by the conquered and marginalized, inviting Arab and Western reader to question the official version of history, and reevaluate the historical actions instead of taking them for granted.

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