



# Radwa Ashour's *Granada* Trilogy as a deconstructive text

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## Abstract

This study aims at displaying how Radwa Ashour links both past and present and makes use of memories and the lost glory of regaining Andalusia to deconstruct the Arabs' loss in releasing Palestine and restoring Jerusalem. It displays Derrida's deconstruction as a way to make a deeper reading of Ashour's masterpiece entitled *Granada* trilogy as a deconstructive text. To achieve this, the researcher will highlight the sentimental history of the Arabs' relationship with Andalusia and that of Palestine. Then, it will be shown how both Andalusia and Palestine are lost and the great pain the Arabs feel because of their utmost recognition of both nations. The researcher will also observe how deconstruction gives hope for all Arabs to start all over again by making an implied comparison between the similar conditions of both occupied nations after their glorious conquest. Furthermore, the research will emphasize the effect of the author as an Arab feminist in portraying her female characters in *the Granada* trilogy which consists of three novels entitled *Granada* (2003), *Maryama* (1995), and *w-al-Rahīl* (1995).

Radwa Ashour (1946-2014) is a feminist, writer, translator, literary critic, and university professor. She was born to a family with a literary background. Her Political standpoints are a fundamental part of her academic career. She wrote *Sirraj*, *Granada* trilogy, *Heavier Than Radwa*, and *The woman from Tantoura*. She also wrote two short story collections and five criticism books. *Granada* was chosen as one of the best Arabic novels of the 20th century. Ashour sustained her teacher Latifa Al-Zayyat (1993) who said that the liberation of women came after that the liberation of the country (Al-Zayyat, 1993).

**Keywords:** - Deconstruction, lost hope, memories, Radwa Ashour, Granada Trilogy.

## Introduction

The research will tackle how Ashour deconstructs memories and lost glory to give hope to all Arabs. It will apply Derrida's deconstruction of Radwa's Ashour's *Granada* trilogy by denoting how the trilogy will be best fitted to represent the paradoxical flow of meanings resulting from the authorial portrayal of Granada's occupation by the Castilians and the suffering people endure as a result of being conquered. In this way, the researcher will display how *Granada* trilogy can be handled from a different point of view beyond the common themes of the inability to regain Granada, the acceptance of loss, and longing for memories of Granada's glory. By using Derrida's deconstruction, the researcher will exemplify some of the contradictions that will underestimate the major themes of lost hope and memories in the trilogy and replace them with another orientation of enhancing hope to regain both Andalusia and Palestine.

In this way, the essence of the appraised item in the binary pairs of the novel understudy will be reversed. Thus, by applying deconstruction, *Granada* trilogy will reveal the traditional binary opposition of fact and fiction that obscures the ability to distinguish clearly between textual representations of the external world and the world represented in texts. It will also emphasize the other binary oppositions of defeat/triumph, occupation/freedom, implicitness/explicitness, and forced Christianization / secret Islam.

## 2. RESEARCH METHOD

The research investigates Ashour's novel as a deconstructive text by applying Derrida's theory of deconstruction which is a philosophical approach to criticizing texts. Deconstruction appears in the late 1960's aiming to show how texts deconstruct or contradict themselves instead of showing how they are represented in a hierarchical structure. It seeks to expose and subvert the various binary oppositions of nature/culture, white /black, god/man, faith/reason, presence/absence, speech/writing, and so forth. It is a poststructuralist theory that is directed toward reading philosophical writings. Its impact on literature depends on two facts. First, writing is seen as a complex historical and cultural relation. Second, human knowledge is not either controllable or convincing and language operates in contradictory ways. It is largely based but not exclusively on the work of the French philosopher Jacques Derrida.

Derrida (1930-2004) is a French philosopher who is generally considered the founder of deconstruction in the mid-1960s as a critique of the Western philosophical tradition. He is one of the most influential and prolific twentieth-century philosophers. He observes his deconstructive strategies in literary criticism in his book, *Of Grammatology* (1967). He wrote an essay entitled *Structure, Sign, and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences* upon which the widely known theory of deconstruction is initiated. The term 'deconstruction' is derived from the German

philosopher Martin Heidegger's concept of destruction, which means the releasing of the old tradition of Ontology which is the study of ultimate reality through the exposure of its interior paradoxes. Derrida wrote many books including *Of Grammatology*, *Speech and Phenomena*, and *Writing Difference*. In an interview with Richard Kearney, Derrida expresses that deconstruction always focuses on the 'other' of language"(Kearney, 1984).

According to Lois Tyson, deconstruction improves our ability to think critically and helps the critic get out of different meanings from texts. In this way, the work of art will be objective as it depends on meanings beyond the author's viewpoint. Derrida observes that deconstruction aims to "exceed the boundaries" of the things it displays (Derrida, 1997).

Deconstruction comes as a reaction to a wide range of theoretical and philosophical movements such as phenomenology, structuralism, Russian Formalism, Marxism, Feminism, and psychoanalysis to explore the essence of how the privileged item in a text's binary pair can be reversed and subverted. Barbara Johnson emphasizes that deconstruction means 'analysis', which etymologically means 'to undo' (Johnson, 1982).

From a semantic viewpoint, deconstruction may have resulted from the boundless series of generating meanings such as its archaic meanings, its modern connotations and denotations, and its variable implications in different contexts. Binary oppositions mean that one term is central and the other is marginal. Thus, as Norris (1987) observes, the deconstructive process will differentiate between what the text means to say and what it is constrained to mean.

Deconstruction has certain procedures upon which it depends. First, it stresses the binary opposition and breaks the link between two opposite pairs. In his book, *Positions*, Derrida (1982) says that to deconstruct the opposition, first of all, is to overturn the hierarchy at a given moment. Second, it shows how these oppositions are either central or marginalized. Eventually, the opposition deconstructs the hierarchy to show what the text means. Finally, both the hierarchical elements and the binary oppositions are intertwined in an endless cycle of meanings. For deconstructionists, the text is far from the tranquility of any definite meaning. However, it consists of random signs leading to a relative meaning that is based on a systematic difference from other signs. This relation is what Derrida (1976) calls trace.

There are certain principles upon which deconstruction is based. First, the text does not have any singular meaning; however, it can be understood in various ways depending on three levels of analysis which are verbal, textual, and linguistic. As for the verbal level, deconstructionists shed light on the contradictions, paradoxes, and confusions of any given text. On the textual level, they emphasize the different breaks in the narrative such as time, point of view, idea, words' meaning, and

grammatical choices. Linguistically, deconstructionists try to find out the instances in which the author is unsure about the medium being used. Second, deconstructionists look for detached ideas to prove that text is not a single unit. On the contrary, it is made of different units of different kinds. Third, they recognize texts in terms of their undecidability as there cannot be any permanent meaning. Fourth, they see texts as heterogeneous meaning to consist of dissimilar elements.

### 3. DESCRIPTION

The researcher will apply deconstructive tactics to Ashour's novel to emphasize how the novel contradicts itself since a text cannot have a single totalitarian meaning. Whenever a signified arises, it resolves into another signified as there is no central thing expressing those opposites. In this way, the researcher will explore the subversion of oppositions in Ashour's *Granada* trilogy by showing the different meanings resulting from applying deconstruction's approach to *Granada* trilogy. This is in parallel with Ashour (2010) who proclaims that the world we live in has a disturbing anxious culture that has no self-trust. Thus, there are many challenges represented in Ashour's *Granada* trilogy through which the colonization of Andalusia will not kick out what remained of the small margin of freedom (Al-Assal, 2008). Consequently, the research will tackle the following novels under the title *Granada* trilogy which includes *Granada* (2003), *Maryama* (1995), and *w-al-Rahīl* (1995). It surveys how deconstruction will contradict the loss of Andalusia. Thus, in parallel with what John Caputo says in illustrating deconstruction, the research will crack the idea of deconstructing the lost hope in *the Granada* trilogy to open it and disturb its serenity.

#### 3.1 *Granada* Trilogy

*Granada* trilogy was first published in 1994 in Arabic and translated into English in 2003 by William Granara. It includes three novels entitled *Granada* (2003), *Maryama* (1995), and *w-al-Rahīl* (1995). It tells the story of five generations of an Andalusian family living in Granada after its submission to King Ferdinand of Aragon and Queen Isabella of Castile in 1492. Conquered by the Castilians, they suffered from the new oppressive law of Castilian rule, and ethnic and religious bonds. Thus, Radwa Ashour displays the misfortunes of Abu-Jaafar's family and the miserable fates of the people of Granada. The lives of Abu-Jaafar's family are always foreshadowed by misery. Sa'd married Salima and they lost their child. Salima was unable to understand defeat and destruction. However, she studied medicine and learnt secretly the great tradition of Arab learning. Furthermore, she tried to understand death by exploring the human body via books and manuscripts. By the end of the first part of the novel *Granada*, Salima is convicted of witchcraft and she was sentenced to public execution. Ashour (2003) displayed how humiliated she was by being put in a "basket!" like a rabbit. Moreover, Na'eem lost both his wife and his son after a terrible attack by the Castilian armies. Maryama resumes her life in the new era hoping to adapt to the

new circumstances. Hassan is Abu Ja'far's grandson and Salima's brother. He married Maryama, the heroine of the trilogy's second part. He is a conventional man who subjugates himself to satisfy the authorities. Maryama is banished from Granada and died during her journey to exile. After Maryama's death, Ali, Maryama's grandson, decided to escape from the expulsion convoy. Thus, he enters Granada again and regains his grandmother's house. However, he was humiliated and jailed for three and a half years realizing his inability to stay in Granada anymore for his nostalgia for his former acquaintances.

*The Departure* is the last part of the trilogy describing Ali's life after he departed from Granada. He traveled to a small village where Muslims were treated unfairly via the illegal punishments, unfair taxation system, and feudality adopted by the Castilians. Ali got a place among them because of his knowledge of the Arabic language which enabled him to read their old manuscripts. Thus, the trilogy ends where the trip to the other shore begins.

The history of Granada's occupation and the misfortunes its people endure is similar to that of the Palestinians in the twentieth century. Like the Castilians, the Israelis subjugate the Palestinians and prohibit them from their fundamental demands of both equality and freedom in their state. Ashour succeeded in making an implied comparison between the past which stands for Granada and the present which stands for Palestine. She manipulated the past of Granada's fall and all the suffering people feel as a result of their occupation to foreshadow the current state of Palestine that is torn between its past glory under Islamic rule and its current fate as being occupied by the Israelis. Thus, by drawing Jerusalem, the novel seems to observe that Palestine will exist along with Granada despite all the misfortunes they experience suffering.

The sentimental relation of the Arabs with the history of Al-Andalus reflects the agony they suffer from as a result of its loss. Moreover, it also reflects the current misery of losing Palestine. Granara describes Andalusia as the glorious and golden era of Islam in which tolerance spreads everywhere leading to peace, stability, and progress in different fields in the social, political, religious, and cultural life of Andalusia's people. Granara depicts Andalusia as "a chronology of exploration and discovery" (Ashour, 2003).

The researcher will apply the theory of Derrida's deconstruction to break down the literal meaning of the novel as being a symbol of depression over the historical inability of regaining Andalusia. To emphasize the above-mentioned aim, the researcher will demonstrate the following binary oppositions of defeat/triumph, occupation/freedom, implicitness/explicitness, and forced Christianization / secret Islam.

#### 4. ANALYSIS

First, deconstruction can be applied to *Granada* trilogy through the first opposition pair of fact/fiction. The novel is a fictional narrative of the real history of Granada's occupation. Historically, Granada is occupied by the Castilians after the submission of Granada to King Ferdinand of Aragon and Queen Isabella of Castile in 1492 during the era of Abu-'Abdullah Ibn Muhammad. In contrast, Ashour's *Granada* trilogy retells fictionally the story of the consequences of Granada's fall through the misfortunes of five generations of Abu-Jaafar's family. Then, the novel expresses how the characters either resort to their memories trying to escape from the current state of colonialization or adapt to the new system of power. However, the novel shows the failure of both perspectives and as a result, the characters lose hope in escaping their misfortunes and restoring their past glory. From the perspective of deconstruction, this is the central theme of the novel that should be broken down. Thus, the researcher displays how fiction as a third-hand copy of reality cannot represent reality in its real depiction; however, fiction represents it in an exaggerated way to strengthen the crisis. In this way, what the characters fail in fiction which is an exaggerated description can be achieved in reality through resistance and revolution.

Second, deconstruction can also be represented by the second binary opposition of defeat/triumph. The novel tackles the major theme of Granada's fall as a defeat of the social and political life of its people who suffer from the injustice of the Castilians who deceive them in implementing the agreement that guarantees freedom and equality to all people. They not only subjugate them but also assault their women and kill their youth. This is the dominating theme that should be reversed by deconstruction by emphasizing the resistance of people by killing the assailants and their call for carrying out what the Castilians promise to achieve. The capacity of struggling against tyranny is another sort of hope that paves the way to a better dream of a future devoid of occupation. Furthermore, at the end of the trilogy, Ali's drawing of Jerusalem with its Al-Aqsa Mosque and Alqiyama Church is further evidence of the triumph that the colonists cannot damage in the psychology of their victims.

Third, deconstruction can also be manifested through the third binary opposition of occupation/freedom. The novel stresses the occupation of Granada by the Castilians who damage the people's heritage by burning their books and manuscripts. The Castilians hope to ruin the culture by destructing the knowledge of its people which is a culmination of the entire nation's experience in a variety of fields. This is the underlying theme of the novel understudy, and it needs to be subverted by deconstruction. Thus, this major theme will not be valid anymore. According to deconstruction, the occupation's attempt to devastate the cultural and social life of Granada's people reflects the occupied's awareness of the assailants' plan of

downgrading them. Thus, they hide the books and manuscripts in the mosques and Maryama picks as many books as she can and she puts them in her private box which dates back to her youth. Moreover, Salima not only hides the books, but she also reads them and makes use of them by curing the patients. When she is sentenced to death, she accepts her death as God's wish. As Ashour (2003) says that she refuses to add to her humiliation.

At the end of the trilogy, when Ali decides to leave Granada, he digs a hole in which he puts his grandmother's box of tremendous books. Thus, despite all the attempts of the Castilians to underestimate people socially and politically because of their occupation of Granada, people will always be aware of their awkward plans of making them slaves and thus they will be forcibly free even if the freedom will be only in their thought.

Fourth, deconstruction can be exemplified in the *Granada* trilogy through the next binary opposition of both implicitness and explicitness. After Granada's fall, the Castilians impose a lot of restrictions upon the people of Granada replacing their native language with that of the assailants' language. Thus, the dominant theme of imposing the enemy's language is another aim that will, in the long run, change the Arabian identity to that of its enemy. However, as deconstructs previously demonstrate, there is no singular idea of a text and any idea can be approached from different points of view. Thus, the above-mentioned theme can be handled differently as follows: Despite the colonialists' attempts to humiliate their occupied people by using their language explicitly, Granada's people keep using their native language implicitly inside their homes. Thus, the homes of Granada's people become their real nation in which they use their native language in talking with each other and in teaching their kids. Thus, the native language of Andalusia is never forgotten despite the enemies' continuous attempts to damage it. In other terms, the Arabian identity of Granada's people will always exist and this identity is another form of hope to regain Andalusia and in a broader way Palestine.

Finally, deconstruction can be reflected through the last binary opposition of forced Christianization and secret Islam. Another form of injustice directed toward Andalusia's people is the colonialist's order of shifting their religion from Islam to that Christianity. This is the idea that can be deconstructed from the perspective of deconstruction. Religion is holy for Andalusia's people not only because it is inspired by God, but also because it shapes their identity. Changing religion is not easy for Andalusia's people to perform. Thus, they pretend explicitly to be Christians to escape from dictatorship and the cruelty of their enemies. On the other hand, they practice implicitly the Islamic rituals inside their homes. Thus, changing religion by force is not a defeat in itself; however, it is another manifestation that clarifies the internal resistance of Andalusia's people in the face of oppression.

In this way, Derrida's deconstruction gives the researcher another perspective from which Ashour's novel *Granada* trilogy can be viewed. It observes that the novel is no longer about defeat, loss, Granada's fall, and memories of glory. However, by applying Derrida's deconstruction, the researcher displays how *Granada* trilogy can be portrayed as a story of resisting power and occupation that tells implicitly the story of Andalusia's people restoring their nation by keeping their Arabian identity free despite all the attempts of the colonizers to destruct it.

##### 5. CONCLUSION

The researcher has come up with a demonstration of how Derrida's deconstruction observes that any text does not have any central idea upon which the whole work of art depends. However, it means that there is always a perspective of any text that can be handled differently by the reader or the critic behind any authorized meaning of the text. In this way, the traditional viewpoint of the autonomous meaning of the text is destructed. In contrast, there are a lot of ideas that can challenge the major theme of the novel and reverse it in a way to get the opposite of its common meaning.

Traditionally, Ashour's trilogy is considered to be a representative of the lost hope of retaining Andalusia and the memories of the Arab's glory in Granada. Similarly, it also reflects Palestine and the Arab's inability to restore it. That is because both Andalusia and Palestine are occupied. While the former is conquered by the Castilians, the latter is occupied by the Israelis. Both Andalusia's people and the Palestinians experience the misfortunes and sufferings resulting from their occupation. Ashour extends her identification of the Moriscos of Andalusia to include that of the Arabs of Palestine, Egypt, and Iraq to increase the community of the oppressed.

However, this traditional view is reversed by the application of Derrida's deconstruction of the trilogy under study which consists of three volumes named *Granada* (2003), *Maryama* (1995), and *w-al-Raḥīl* (1995). In this study, the researcher emphasizes a new perspective of reading the text as not just a masterpiece about Granada's fall and the suffering of its people in the personal, social, and political aspects of life. Likewise, it is not a novel that sheds light on the similarity of occupation between both Andalusia and Palestine. Furthermore; it is not a novel that portrays how both assistants impose restrictions on both Andalusia's people and the Palestinians.

Thus, deconstruction will not analyze the past for traces of a future that are never realized. In contrast, it will recognize the novel as a manifestation of hope in restoring both Andalusia and Palestine through deconstructing the traditional view of the novel as a portrayal of lost hope and memories. In sum, there is not a single sign that can produce meaning by itself without depending on the binary oppositions with other signs.



In this way, the researcher makes use of the different binary oppositions of fact/fiction, defeat/triumph, occupation/freedom, implicitness/explicitness, and forced Christianization/secret Islam to perpetuate his argumentation of the novel as a representation of hope. First, the researcher shows how the fictional representation of *Granada* trilogy is an exaggerated form of reality, and thus what the characters conclude is just a fictional view that cannot be generalized. Moreover, the work of art, as Aristotle says, is a third-hand copy of reality which means that it is quite far from the factual and historical events of Granada's fall. Second, the researcher illustrates how defeat is falsely detected as a representation of loss and failure. In contrast, external defeat is an internal triumph. Although the Castilians exert all their efforts to make Granada's people deprived of their rights of equality and freedom, the people of Granada depend on their resistance to fight against the injustice the Castilians. In this way, resistance becomes the measure upon which defeat turns into triumph.

Third, the researcher expands his manifestation of how Ashour's novel deconstructs memories by using the binary opposition of occupation and freedom. Ashour's novel displays that Andalusia's people suffer from the tyranny of the Castilians as they burn their books. By using deconstruction, the researcher manifests how people show their awareness of this plan and hide their books. The researcher gives a lot of examples of how the characters hide these books which are representative of cumulative experience.

In the novel, as a feminist, Ashour portrays the general features of her female characters which are stubbornness, smartness, and being fully aware of their personal, social, and political crises. Salima uses the books she hides in curing the patients. Maryama puts the books in the box she has had since her youth. Ali hides the books in a hole beneath the earth that can be a symbol of hope and resistance.

The researcher also makes use of two binary oppositions which are that of explicitness/implicitness and forced Christianization/secret Islam. The research explores how the oppression exercised against the Granada's people made them explicitly submit to their colonialists. However, they are internally not changed at all and they keep all the features of either their Arabian identity or their religious rituals at heart. In this way, the research exemplifies how Derrida's deconstruction breaks down the traditional view of the novel as a political novel of Granada's fall and the suffering as a result of that. However, the novel proclaims the hope of the Arabs to restore both Granada and Palestine as long as they stick to resistance and keep their cultural and social identity.

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