

Challenging Nostalgia and Rewriting History in Tariq Ali's *Shadows of the Pomegranate Tree*

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Abstract

In contrast to most Arab and Muslim writers whose works indulge nostalgia and the yearning for the returning back of the lost paradise (al-Andalous), Tariq Ali's *Shadows of the Pomegranate Tree* (1999) is out of nostalgia for the lost past. Instead of regret and lamentation over the loss of al- Andalus, Ali uses his novel as a powerful tool of rewriting the history of that period from the perspective of the marginalized Muslims. This research aims to explain how Ali rewrites one of the major historical events that is- the fall of the last Moorish kingdom in Spain Granada in 1492 in an attempt to challenge the Eurocentric notions of history. In order to achieve his purpose of rewriting history, Ali focuses on the memories of those who have been marginalized, persecuted, and excluded. Making use of the new historicist approach, this research shows how *Shadows of the Pomegranate Tree* presents a counter history of that period by challenging the received fixed vision of

history. New historicism's refusal of universal truth and grand narratives become the main focus in the application. Hence, subversion of power structures and the unattainability of having an absolute truth are among the main issues that the research attempts to investigate.

Key Words: Fall of Granada, Reconquista, Nostalgia, Eurocentricism, New Historicism

The current research aims to analyze Tariq Ali's method in rewriting the history of the fall of Granada from the perspective of New Historicism theory. It investigates how Ali challenges the fixed one dimensional narrative of history in an effort to deconstruct the Eurocentric notions of history. The research also sheds the light on the narrative technique used by the writer in order to achieve his purpose in offering a decentralized and alternative vision of the history of Granada.

New Historicism is a recent critical approach based on the corresponding reading of literary and non-literary texts, usually of the same historical period. In his book, *Beginning Theory*, Peter Barry defines new historicism:

A method based on the parallel reading of the literary and non-literary texts, ... instead of a literary 'foreground' and a historical 'background' it envisages and practices a mode of study in which literary and non-literary texts are given equal weight and constantly inform or interrogate each other (116).

It claims that literary texts must be studied and interpreted within the context of history in order to evaluate how the text was influenced by the time in which it was produced.

Michel Foucault, one of the main influential critics of the new historicist theory, brought the concept of “episteme” to new historicism. According to Foucault, knowledge is defined and organized in various societies and at various times in different ways; therefore, a discourse is a product of a particular time. In his book, *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, Foucault defines "discourse" as "the general domain of all statements, sometimes as an individualizable group of statements and sometimes as a regulated practice that accounts for a certain number of statements" (80). Discourse, for Foucault, is a ‘language practice’; that is, language as it is used by various constituencies such as law or medicine for purposes to do with power relationships among people. He illustrates that discourses are not innocent “groups of signs signifying elements referring to contents or representations but practices that systematically form the objects of which they speak” (*The Archaeology of Knowledge* 49). Thus, these discourses are “historical constructions and thus encourage us to look at how the discursive practices of a period, including literature, may have shaped things, we take for granted” (Culler 9). This means that truth and power are formed through discourses as he sees all knowledge as power.

Foucault's definition of power has an extraordinary impact on New Historicism. Power, according to Foucault, is a network of forces which shape individuals, institutions and discourses. As Foucault asserts:

Discourse can be both an instrument and an effect of power, but also a hindrance, a stumbling block, a point of resistance and a starting point for an opposing strategy. Discourse transmits and produces power; it reinforces it, but also undermines it and exposes it, renders it fragile and makes it possible to thwart it. (*History of Sexuality* 101)

According to Foucault, every society has a mechanism to form its truth from creative discourses formed by society as true.

In other words, every society has a certain truth which is produced and transmitted under the control of the dominant and powerful group. Thus, in the “The Order of Discourse,” Foucault believes that truth should always be taken in relation to power because “in every society, the production of discourse is controlled, organized, redistributed by a certain number of procedures whose role is to ward off its power and dangers, to gain mastery over its chance events, to evade its materiality” (52). According to Tom Dixon, the "official" version of history practices its power and authority to suppress and stereotype the other "voices" that try to make themselves heard (130). Therefore, power is taken into consideration during a new historical analysis of a text as new historicists believe that all the texts, including history and literature, are simply the discourses which are entangled in the power relations of their time. Therefore, new historicists present the historical narrative of marginalized groups such as women, the poor, gays and lesbians, prisoners, and working class.

Following Foucault’s concept of power, new historicists begin to focus on the marginalized in society. According to Foucault, power is a mean through which the marginalized or “the other” is controlled, and the thing that the marginalized seeks to gain. Therefore, new historicists become interested in the stories about women, the colonized or the insane. In short, they are concerned with the marginalized and the oppressed; “they often look for ways in which populations are marginalized through a literary work” (Brannigan 23). The revisionist history written by the novelist attempts to restore those suppressed voices that are “subaltern, marginalized and minorities and impart them a legitimate narrative space” (Dixon 130).

According to Foucault, it is essential to develop a resistant discourse that deconstructs the discourses that a certain society creates; for instance, the discourse of “Eurocentrism” which served Western superiority and the establishment of the West as the center of the world. Dipesh Chakrabarty defines Eurocentrism as:

The academic discourse of history—that is, “history” as a discourse produced at the institutional site of the university—is concerned, “Europe” remains the sovereign, theoretical subject of all histories, including the ones we call “Indian,” “Chinese,” “Kenyan,” and so on. There is no peculiar way in which all these other histories tend to become variations on a master narrative that could be called “the history of Europe.” In this sense, “Indian” history itself is in a position of subalternity; one can only articulate subaltern subject positions in the name of this history. (4)

This means that Eurocentric History gives Europe biased categories of race, culture, religion, and ethnicity and othered the non-Western regions of the world. Hence, the notion of power becomes a central assumption in new historicist thought. They also “traverse traditional disciplinary boundaries, collapsing distinctions between the literary and the non-literary”, between the foreground and the background and “they are deeply suspicious of any appeals to universal truths or natural behaviour” (Keesey 421).

Therefore, new historicism seeks to question, reevaluate and reinterpret the historical truth in texts. It is this quality of new historicism that distinguishes it from New Criticism. New historicism comes as a reaction to the text-based theories which denied the importance of anything except the text in determining the meaning of the work and relied completely on close reading of the literary work itself for its interpretation. Unlike new criticism which ignores the historical context of a literary work considering history as a unitary past, a background, new historicism refuses to distinguish the literary text from the history in which it was written (Abrams 179).

Hence, one of the writers' main purposes of using new historicism is to empower the oppressed social minorities. For example, feminist histories attempt to expose a male-dominated society for the purpose of empowering women. Likewise, homosexual histories are put forward in response to homophobic repressions to provide equality for homosexuals. Black histories are also exposed to emphasize the horrors of slavery to get rid of and survive the past mistreatments of African Americans. Every repressed and marginalized group—minorities of all colors, ethnicities, nationalities, and sexualities—suffer an injustice that must be discovered in order to correct the abuses and inequality of the past (Dixon 128).

The Fall of Granada in Western and Non-Western Writings

To show how far *Shadows of The Pomegranate Tree* (1999) is connected to history and is suitable for a new historicist approach, one should be aware of the historical background against which Ali wrote his text.

Muslims had ruled the Iberian Peninsula between 711 and 1492 (for almost 800 years). Having been asked for help against Roderick, the tyrannical Visigoth ruler of Spain, Muslim forces under the leadership of Tariq Ibn Ziyad crossed the straits between Morocco and Spain. Within seven years, most of the Iberian Peninsula (modern Spain and Portugal) was under Muslim control. Parts of this land would remain Muslim for over 700 years. By the mid-900s, the Iberian Peninsula was a Muslim land with Muslim rulers and a Muslim population (Harvey, *Islamic Spain* 325).

By the early 13th century the Catholic monarchs (Isabella I of Castile and Ferdinand II of Aragon) had succeeded in defeating most Islamic kingdoms of the peninsula. This is called 'Reconquista' or the Reconquest of Spain by Catholic monarchs. On January 2, 1492, Muhammad Ibn Abu-Abdulla XII king of Granada, known to the Castilians as Boabdil, surrendered the Emirate of Granada and the Alhambra palace to the Castilian

forces. After King Boabdil's surrender and Granada's fall, many Muslims left home and went to North Africa, whereas some others preferred to stay and converted to Christianity or had to fight. The remaining Muslims who stayed in Granada were given three choices: conversion, expulsion, or death (Harvey, *Islamic Spain* 215). Thus, the fall of Granada in 1492 was the end of all Muslim rule on the Iberian Peninsula.

In *Imperial Spain (1469-1716)*, J. H. Elliot discusses the historical adjustments in Spain before and after 1492; he shows the life and calamity of the Muslim population after the fall of Granada in 1492 and how writers and historians from the Middle Ages to the twentieth century have perceived them. He concludes that the Moriscos¹ have traditionally been perceived as peripheral because writers have not created a formal space for their representation and when they do appear, they are portrayed in negative characteristics (22).

According to Elliot, the images of the Moriscos are defamed in the Spanish literary writings and in historical texts with derogatory stereotypes, such as being disloyal, unfaithful and treacherous. He illustrates that the official authority has used this categorization to justify their expulsion for "the benefit and the grandeur of a homogeneous Spain" (17). According to Maria Rose Menocal, the reasons behind Moriscos' expulsions are that the Spanish authorities seek to establish a pure Spanish identity. Menocal also criticizes Eurocentrism for that discourse that ignores the Arab heritage of medieval Europe. She states: "In a number of crucial ways Al-Andalus and its progeny ... has presented a virtually insurmountable challenge to the narration of European culture and its history" (484).

The year 1492 is considered a major turning point in the Islamic world. After the fall of Granada, the Iberian Peninsula

¹ Moriscos : the former Muslims- who remained in Granada and were forced to convert to Catholicism by the Catholic Church and the Spanish Crown (Harvey 156).

witnessed serious fragmentation and decline of Muslim power and development of Spaniards forces simultaneously. In other words, As the Spaniards forces grew stronger and stronger, Muslims' hegemony in the Iberian Peninsula had been completely lost. As Carr writes: "the Reconquista caused the reversal of dynamics as Muslims found themselves living as permanent minorities under Spaniard rule." (28)

The year 1492 is an important major historical event as it symbolizes the end of the independent Muslim rule in Iberia and the Reconquista of Spain by Catholic monarchs. This year refers to two different reactions towards the fall of Granada for Spaniards and Muslims. While Spain celebrated the acquisition of a new world, Muslims throughout the country lamented the loss of an old one. According to Spanish historiography, the end of the Muslim rule in Spain opened the way for the creation of a great nation; whereas Muslims consider the fall of Granada in 1492 or the end of the Muslim rule as the final destruction of a great civilization. In *Islamic Spain*, Harvey notes that there is a radical transformation in the history of Spain after the fall of Granada in 1492 and the end of the political rule of Muslims in the Peninsula. In his recent book *Rivers of Gold: The Rise of the Spanish Empire, From Columbus to Magellan*, Hugh Thomas asserts that the discourse of empire begins with the Spanish conquest of the "new world" and their consolidation of power after the fall of Granada (160). He illustrates that after the Reconquista of Granada the perceived division of East versus West and Arab versus European began to appear in Andalusia.

According to Harvey, the standard Spanish and European historical narratives that have been written about the fall of Granada consider the conquest of Spain by the Castilian forces and the end of Muslim rule as a glorious achievement (Islamic Spain 108). In dominant Spanish historiography, Spain was seen as a victim of almost 800 years of Muslim occupation and aggression. For example, David Shefferman writes: "The West did not attack Islam; it was they who attacked us ... I have never heard a Muslim

say sorry for having conquered Spain and occupying it for eight centuries” (136).

Hence, the Reconquista is viewed by Spaniards as a restoration of the Spanish identity and independence from Islamic rule. Alejandro García-Sanjuán remarks that, on the Spanish part, “the medieval Iberian past was understood as a struggle of national liberation against invading Muslims, culminating in a final Christian victory in 1492” (2). On the other hand, according to Arab historiography, the Reconquista represents a moment of lost greatness. In *Discovering Islam: Making Sense of Muslim History and Society*, Akbar S. Ahmed describes the mournful desire to bring back the glory that was there at al-Andalus. He writes: “The Andalus syndrome creates a neurosis, a perplexity, in society. It is a yearning for a past that is dead but will not be buried, a fear of an unreliable future which is still to be born” (160).

In this regard, most of Muslim writers mourn the loss of al-Andalus in their writings. Their works bear nostalgia for the lost Islamic past as the fall of al- Andalus is depicted in their accounts as if it were a non-expected event. Atef Louayene remarks that most Muslim writers who write about al-Andalus are “constantly evoked with elegiac nostalgia as the site of an ideal past against which the violent failures of modern Arab polities are measured” (36). According to Richard Fletcher, Muslim writers have historically mourned the fall of al-Andalus, always uttering the prayer, “May Allah return it to Islam.” (Fletcher 171).

Apart from the grief over the ruins of a grand civilization of knowledge and sublimity, this nostalgia for al- Andalus is criticized as a fixed site of memory; it is “the enemy of historical understanding” that may lead the reader to inaccurate perception of the past (Fletcher 171). As Justin Stearns states that: “nostalgia, which in some way seeks to recoup a specific past and represent it in the present, is notoriously treacherous and in an awkward relationship with history’s ostensible aim of providing an accurate representation of the past.” (356)In his article “Nostalgia, Arab

Nationalism, and the Andalusian Chronotope in the Evolution of the Modern Arabic Novel”, William Granara criticizes nostalgia in Arabic narratives, saying: “the process of writing Al-Andalus involves a dynamic of memory, sight, and expectation that determines the form and conveys the seminal messages of the text”(Granara 60).

From this concept, Tariq Ali avoids nostalgia and yearning for the lost al-Andalus, aiming to rewrite the history of that period with a new and alternative perspective. Hence, this paper investigates how Ali challenges nostalgia with more positive way of rewriting and revising the history of that period.

Tariq Ali is a British-Pakistani historian, political activist and novelist. Most of his novels revolve around the encounter between the west and the world of Islam in different times of history. He is rewarded the prize of Granadillo Prize for his great work *Islam Quintet. Shadows of the Pomegranate Tree* is the first novel of the *Islam Quintet*. (Stierstorfer 157)

Tariq Ali’s *Shadows of the Pomegranate Tree* (1993) is the first novel in Ali’s *Islam Quintet*; a series of historical novels that focus on the clash between Islam and the West. Set in the aftermath of Granada's fall, the novel tells the story of a Moorish aristocratic family called the Banu Hudayl, who decides to stay in Granada facing the devastating effects of the Reconquista.

The novel shows the lives of the people who are oppressed under the hardships of the inquisition²'s choices: to fight, convert, or leave. Ali presents the different attitudes of his characters towards the hard choices of the inquisition. Some characters decide

² Spanish Inquisition is one of the means of torture in Medieval Spain. It was an official institution established by the Catholic Monarchs Isabella and Fernando in an attempt to “rid Spain of any heretics or non-Catholics. The greatest impact of the inquisition was the banishment of Islam from Spain.”

not to leave, insisting to fight till death. They are represented in the figures of Umar bin Abdallah, the leader of Banu Hudayl and his son Zuhayr. Others choose to convert to Christianity to ensure their safety, estates and properties. They are exemplified in the characters of Ibn Hashim, Umar's cousin and Miguel, Umar's uncle. Miguel chooses to convert as he becomes a bishop. His decision to convert is for politics, not religion. As Miguel says to Umar: "Do you think I converted and became a Bishop because I saw a vision? The only vision I saw was of the destruction of our family. My decision was determined by politics, not religion." (Ali 85) Umar's daughter Hind emigrates to Morocco and his eldest son Zuhayr joins a terrorist band in the mountains to fight Castilians. The novel displays the brutal actions done by the Archbishop Ximenes de Ciserno who orders the burning of all Arabic books and manuscripts to eliminate their culture. It also presents the cruel acts and restrictions done by the inquisition such as banning the use of Arabic language and Arab dress as well as the close of all public baths. The novel ends with a dramatic horrified massacre to all the inhabitants of the village of Al-Hudayl for its refusal to surrender. The only survivor is a cook named Dwarf.

By applying new historicism to the selected novel, it is apparent that the major characters are from the wronged and repressed Moriscos who challenge the fixed negative image attributed to them from official history. In this way, the novel becomes an important tool for the contemporary attempts to resist and subvert power.

Muslims' Sufferings under Castilian Power

Ali rewrites history by putting the Marginalized Muslims into the center instead of the position of the other that is used to be in European discourse. Therefore, he sheds the light on the sufferings and worries of the Muslims under the pressure of the Castilian force. These sufferings are exemplified in the Al-Hudayl family. Umar Ibn Abdallah mourns the fall, saying:

In the distance we can hear the solemn bells of their churches begin to ring with a tone so ominous that the noise eats my insides. They have already prepared our shrouds and it is for that reason that my heart is heavy, my spirit is oppressed and my mind is permanently troubled. It is only eight years since they conquered Gharnata, but so many Muslims already feel dead and dumb. Has the end of our world arrived? All the talk of our past glories is true, but what use are they to us now? How is it that we who held this peninsula in the palm of our hand have let it slip away? (Ali 117)

Umar also disgraces Spanish Reconquista and its oppression to Muslims. Ali leads the reader inside Umar's monologue about how the Muslims get deceived by Castilian rulers who violate the treaty of Capitulation signed on the submission of Granada. As Umar was thinking:

It was stated on paper and in the presence of witnesses that Gharnata's Muslims would not be persecuted or prevented from practising their religion, speaking and teaching Arabic or celebrating their festivals. Yes, Umar thought, that is what Isabella's prelates had pledged in order to avoid a civil war. And we believed them. How blind we were. Our brains must have been poisoned by alcohol. How could we have believed their fine words and promises? (Ali 16)

Ali also sheds the light on the Spaniards' power which is represented in the form of the inquisition and the historical character Ximenes de Cisneros. The novel opens with the mournful infamous scene of the Arabic book burning. Cisneros - a cardinal in

the Catholic Church- is the one who orders the burning of the all Arabic books in an attempt to annihilate their culture. Ali presents the two opposite reactions of Muslims and Spaniards during witnessing the bonfire of books. From the side of Muslims, they mourn the destruction of the greatest rich culture of knowledge, tolerance and multiculturalism. They felt the death of their heritage at that moment when the Castilians “set their culture on fire. The record of eight centuries was annihilated in a single day.”(Ali 19)

On witnessing the bonfire of their books, “Some onlookers were sorrowful, others tempestuous, eyes flashing, faces full of anger and defiance. Others still, their bodies swaying gently from side to side, wore vacant expressions. One of them, an old man, kept repeating the only sentence he could utter in the face of the calamity. ‘We are being drowned in a sea of helplessness.’”(Ali xi) On the other hand, Cisneros and the most favoured sentinel express the feeling of satisfaction and victory. Cisneros with “a crooked smile” declared, “We have won. Tonight was our real victory” (Ali, prologue xiii)

Cisneros is represented in the novel as a symbol of the Castilian power; he is “the instrument of the Almighty”. Ali shows how the church is used as a tool of power and authority rather than its concern of religious matters. It uses Cisneros as “an instrument of Queen Isabella. He wielded a power that was not exclusively spiritual.”(Ali, prologue n.p) Cisneros aims to destroy Islamic culture and heritage completely as he believes that:

The heathen could only be eliminated as a force if their culture was completely erased. This meant the systematic destruction of all their books. Oral traditions would survive for a while, till the inquisition plucked away the offending tongues. If not himself, then someone else would have had to organize this necessary bonfire— somebody who understood that the future had to be secured

through firmness and discipline and not through love and education, as those imbecile Dominicans endlessly proclaimed. What had they ever achieved?” (Ali xii)

The Spaniard’s power is also seen in the form of the inquisition. The inquisition creates harsh restrictions for Muslims who choose to stay; exemplified in the banning the use of the Arabic language, the prohibition of wearing the traditional dress, and the close of all public bath. Here, Ali shows how the inquisition uses its force to subdue Muslims and persecuted them. The inquisition sends spies on Muslims to show whether their conversions were genuine or not. As Ali explains:

There had been inquiries as to whether the conversions which were taking place were genuine or not. Spies had been posted outside the homes of conversos to see whether they went to work on Friday says, how often they bathed, whether new-born boys were being circumcised and so on. There had been several incidents of soldiers insulting and even molesting Muslim women. (179)

Ali also shows how Spaniards themselves criticize the violence of the inquisition. This appears in the character of the Spanish carpenter Juan who seeks to get revenge from the inquisition that tortured his father till death.

The carpenter’s father had been charged with apostasy by the Inquisition some six years ago while visiting relatives in Tulaytula. He had later died in prison from the deep wounds sustained by his pride during torture by the monks. As a finale, fingers had been snapped off each hand. The old

carpenter had lost the urge to live. Young Juan was bent on revenge. (Ali 3)

Juan gets his revenge from the inquisition through creating a “dangerous weapon” in the form of chess-set. The pieces of the chess-set are carved with the heads of the inquisitors to represent them as monsters and cannibals.

The black Queen’s eyes shone with evil, in brutal contrast with the miniature madonna hanging round her neck. Her lips were painted the colour of blood. A ring on her finger displayed a painted skull. The King had been carved with a portable crown that could be easily lifted, and as if this symbolism was not sufficient, the iconoclastic carpenter had provided the monarch with a tiny pair of horns. This unique vision of Ferdinand and Isabella was surrounded by equally grotesque figures. The knights raised blood-stained hands. The two bishops were sculpted in the shape of Satan; both were clutching daggers, while whip-like tails protruded from behind. Juan had never set eyes on Ximenes de Cisneros, otherwise there can be little doubt that the Archbishop’s burning eyes and hooked nose would have provided an ideal caricature. The pawns had all been rendered as monks, complete with cowls, hungry looks and pot-bellies; creatures of the Inquisition in search of prey. (Ali 3)

Ali makes use of this chess-set to refer to the clash between Spaniards and Muslims as “a counter-attack which true Believers would launch against the new state under construction. Against the she-devil Isabella and the lecherous Ferdinand. Against the evil Ximenes. Against them all.”(178)

This unique chess-set is presented as a birthday present to Yasid, the youngest son in al-Hudayl family. Although the existence of this strange chess-set exposes Juan to the hardships of the inquisition, “Juan was adamant: the child must be given the present.”

Don Inigo-the Captain-General- is another Spaniard character who defends Muslims against the atrocities of the inquisition. He appears dressed in a Moorish dress, talking to Cisneros who came to persuade him of the necessity of the forced conversion to the Muslims to wipe out Islamic religion forever. He criticizes Cisneros’ violence against Muslims and blames the Monarchs of Spain for violating the capitulation treaty signed in Granada. As he says to Cisneros:

Your Grace appears to be ignorant of the agreements we signed with the Sultan at the time of his surrender. This is not the first occasion when I have had to remind you of the solemn pledges that were given to the Moors. They were to be permitted the right to worship their God and believe in their Prophet without any hindrance. They could speak their own language, marry each other and bury their dead as they had done for centuries. It is you, my dear Archbishop, who have provoked this uprising. You have reduced them to a miserable condition, and you only feign surprise when they resist. They are not animals, man! They are flesh of our flesh and blood of our blood. (Ali 220)

Muslims’ Resistance to the Castilian Power

Ali also shows how Muslims pass through the phase of resistance against the Castilian power. The novel shows how

Muslims are keen to preserve their Islamic identities under the pressure of the inquisition. This is evident when all the villagers of al- Hdayal reject Umar's suggestion to accept conversion in order to survive, saying in one voice: "there is no Allah but Allah and Muhammad is his prophet" (120)

Ali shows the power of Muslims in enduring the hardships of the Inquisition instead of conversion to Christianity. Umar and his greatest son are good examples of this kind of Muslims who are not driven by material interests like other characters in the novel, but their religion does matter for them. As Umar says to his wife: "something in me rebels against the act of conversion. I begin to feel agitated, even violent, when I think about it. I would rather die than cross myself." (Ali 21) Even if he is obliged to convert, he would still a Muslim at heart: "I will communicate with the Maker just as I have always done. It is simply a question of appearances. (21)

Zuhayar's power also appears in his insistence to resist Castilian force till death. He joins a volunteer army in the mountains to fight Castilians. As he says: "They are barbarians and barbarians have to be resisted. Better to die than become slaves of their Church" (231). However, after a long series of rebels against Spaniards, his enthusiasm decreases gradually when he comes to terms that it is too late to fight to return back Granada. Ali drives the reader to Zuhayar's monologue:

How brutally the Count had deflated their hopes. The Archbishop had won. Cunning, tenacious Cisneros. The city now belonged to him and he would destroy it from within. Kill the spirit of the Gharnatinos. Make them feel ugly and mediocre. That would be the end of Gharnata. Far better to raze it to the ground, leaving only that which existed at the beginning: a lovely plain, furrowed by streams and clothed in trees. It was the beauty

which had attracted his ancestors. And it was here that they had built this city. (232)

Ali asserts the impossibility of religious tolerance and coexistence under the fanaticism of the Castilian force. This appears when Cortes, a young captain in the Castilian army orders the massacre of al- Hudayl; he orders his soldier to wipe al-Hudayl off the map.

Our objective is simple. You will erase this village and everything that it contains. Those are my instructions. There are no more than six or perhaps seven hundred able-bodied men in the village. They are unlikely to put up even a token resistance. It is not a pleasant task, but soldiers are not trained to be kind and gentle. His Grace's orders were very clear. Tomorrow morning he wishes to instruct the cartographers to obliterate al-Hudayl from the new maps which they are preparing. Is that clear? (Ali 257)

Through the massacre of al-Hdayal, Ali aims to deliver a message to the reader of the impossibility of tolerance and coexistence under the violence of the Castilian rulers. He mourns the death of all the inhabitants of al-Hdayal, saying:

After two hours of fierce fighting, the killing was done. All of the defenders lay dead. Weavers and rhetoricians, true believers and false prophets, men and women, they had fought together and died in view of each other. Juan the carpenter, Ibn Hasd and the old sceptic al-Zindiq had refused Umar's offer to hide in the granary. They too, for the first time

in their lives, had wielded swords and perished
in the massacre. (Ali 264)

Rewriting history and the Reversal of Otherness

Throughout the novel, Ali tries to provide a counter discourse against what previously perceived as a fact. In other words, Ali's main aim is to reconstruct the history of Muslims and Islam to provide a new history of that period opposite to that previously presented in European accounts. He believes that literature has a great power to challenge and reverse the notions of the Eurocentric discourse. He uses his novel as a powerful tool of resistance against the Castilian force as well as a method of rewriting the history of that period from the perspective of the marginalized. As Klaus Stiersdorfer claims, "What characterizes both Ali's and Rushdie's approaches... is their belief in the power of literature as a social and cultural force." (157). Hence, Ali makes use of his novel to deconstruct the myth of the superiority of the Western civilization in an attempt to challenge the Eurocentric notions of history.

In his process of rewriting history, Ali criticizes the grand fixed narratives of the Spaniard purity of blood. As Shamsie notes: "Ali challenges Spanish/European narratives of racial and cultural purity, including the dividing line between Muslim and Christian, Moor and European" (65). This is evident when Ali leads the reader inside Ximenes monologue who wants to ensure to himself and announce to all the people that his blood is pure. He gets distressed from the ones who doubt that he has a Jewish blood.

My skin is perhaps too dark, my eyes are not blue
but dark brown, my nose is hooked and long, and
yet I am sure, yes sure, that my blood is without
taint. My forefathers were here when the Romans
came and my family is much older than the
Visigoth ancestors of the noble Count, our brave

Captain-General. Why do they whisper I have Jewish blood in me? Is it a cruel joke? Or are some disaffected Dominicans spreading this poison to discredit me inside the Church so that they can once again stray into the land of deceit and confuse the distinctions between ourselves and the followers of Moses and the false prophet Mahomet? Whatever their reasoning, it is not true. Do you hear me? It is not true. My blood is pure! Pure as we shall make this kingdom one day... There is no Jewish blood in me. Not even one tiny drop. No. On this I have no doubts. (Ali 207)

Ali challenges this Eurocentric thought through the method of the reversal of otherness. In other words, Ali provides an alternative account of history opposite to the one that is used to be in the mainstream accounts. In the sense Muslims in the novel become more civilized, tolerant and high cultured than the ignorant, barbarous Castilians. This juxtaposition between both cultures is deliberately implied by Ali in an attempt to empower the marginalized Muslims.

The novel presents a model of a cultured intellectual family exemplified in the family of al-Hudayl who lives a typical aristocratic life contrary to the “barbarians” Castilians who are “crazed dogs” and “eaters of pigs,” (Ali 12); “people who had been never taught to read or write.” (prologue xi) Ali also portrays Castilians as cannibals who eat human flesh. This appears in Umar’s words when he rejects to convert, saying that he would rather die than pretend that he is “eating human flesh and drinking human blood. The cannibalism in their ritual repels me. It goes very deep. Remember the shock of the Saracens when the Crusaders began to roast prisoners alive and eat their flesh. It makes me ill to even think of it, but it flows from their faith.” (Ali 21)

In his method of rewriting history, Ali develops a resistant discourse against Eurocentrism by proving the superiority of Muslim culture. In the novel, the Spaniard characters themselves acknowledge the role of Muslims in the development of all Europe. This appears in different incidents in the novel. In witnessing the bonfire of large amounts of Arabic books and manuscripts, the Spanish soldiers who help in the bonfire of books doubt the old stories about the Moors' cruelty: "Their role troubled them. Sons of peasants, they recalled the stories they used to hear from their grandparents, whose tales of Moorish cruelty contrasted with accounts of their culture and learning." (Ali xii)

Inigo is a noble Christian man who laments the fall of the Islamic rule in al-Andalus, saying: "My entourage consists of Jews and Moors. For me, a Granada without them is like a desert without an oasis" (Ali 68). Through Inigo, Ali puts a comparison between the reign of Muslims before Reconquista and the Castilians after Reconquista. Inigo yearns for the peaceful and tolerance period of Muslims' reign as well as the peaceful coexistence between Muslims and Christians without violence. As he says to Cisneros:

Most of the people we call Moors are our own people. Just like you and me. They have ruled over a very large portion of our peninsula. They did so without burning too many bibles or tearing down all our churches or setting synagogues alight in order to build their mesquitas. They are not a rootless phenomenon. They cannot be wiped out with the lash of the whip. They will resist. More blood will be spilled. Theirs and ours. (Ali 67)

Juan also creates a comparison between the two rules when he warns Umar that the Castilian soldiers in their way to destroy the village of al-Hudayal. "The Prince of Darkness has sent his

devils to harass and destroy us.” He narrates to Umar the dialogue between him and the soldier, saying:

I have just returned from their camp. They knew I was a Christian and sent for me. They asked me all sorts of questions... “Are you a Christian?” I replied that my family had never converted and that we had lived in al-Hudayl from the day it was built, but that nobody had ever suggested to us that we should embrace the faith of the Prophet Mohammed. We had lived in peace.
(Ali 253)

Hence, Ali’s comparison between the two rules, also asserts Muslims’ superiority over the Castilians. As he presents Islamic rule as more tolerant and peaceful remarkable for its values of tolerance and coexistence than that of the Castilian reign.

He shows how Jews, Christians and Muslims lived together in harmony and peace. “Jews have been tormented elsewhere, but never here. Christians have bathed in the same baths as Jews and Muslims.”(Ali 123)

The scene of the bonfire of all Arabic books also proves Muslims’ superiority. This appears when Ali remarks how the Islamic culture had paved the way for the Renaissance in modern Spain and Europe. He clarifies that Arabic books were taken to other parts of Europe to help in the Renaissance. “Here was much of the material which had travelled from the peninsula of al-Andalus as well as Sicily to the rest of Europe paved the way for the Renaissance... the compositions they contained had been the envy of scholars throughout Europe.” (Ali, prologue x,xi)

Muslims’ supremacy appears in all fields of knowledge, especially in the field of medicine. This is evident when Cisneros ordered the burning of all Arabic books except three hundred Arabic manuals of medicine and astronomy because “Their own

doctors pleaded with them to spare three hundred manuscripts, mainly concerned with medicine. To this Cisneros agreed, because even he knew that our knowledge of medicine was much more advanced than everything they knew in Christendom.” (Ali19) Ali also shows the disability of Castilians to build a strong civilization without Muslims. This is evident when Umar says to Don:

Your Church put the axe to a tree that afforded free shade for all. You think it will benefit your side. Perhaps, but for how long? A hundred years? Two hundred? It is possible, but in the long run this stunted civilization is doomed. It will be overtaken by the rest of Europe. Surely you understand that it is the future of this peninsula which has been destroyed. The men who set fire to books, torture their opponents and burn heretics at the stake will not be able to build a house with stable foundations. The Church’s curse will damn this peninsula. (Ali 73)

Muslims’ superiority appears in Zuhayar’s pride of his origin when he delivers a message to his enemy through a messenger who threatens him and his people to surrender, saying: “Tell your master that we are a people without a history... We are Moorish knights defending what once belonged to us. Tell him that I, Zuhayr ibn Umar, great- grandson of the knight Ibn Farid, will fight Don Alonso in a duel to death. Whosoever wins today will determine the fate of the other.” (Ali 242)

Another method followed by Ali to subvert the Castilian power is his revival of Islamic heritage and Arabic language. In his attempt to resist the ban of the using Arabic language, Ali deliberately puts the names of famous scholars, places, and cities in their Arabic denotations instead of their Castillian names. For example, the name of Islamic cities and places mentioned as Gharnata, al-Hamra, al-Qahira, Ishbiliya ,Qurtuba and Hammam

instead of Granada, the Ahambra, Cairo, Seville, Cordoba, and the public bath. Also the names of Muslim scientists cited in their Arabic names such as; Ibn Rushd and Ibn Sina instead of Averroes and Avicenna. As a Muslim writer, Ali's method of rewriting is done intentionally to revive the Arabic language and to deliver a message to the reader that Muslims have their own unique history and identity. Besides, the text is enriched with excerpt and proverbs of great Arab poets and scholars in an attempt to revive Islamic heritage as a way to subvert power structure. Thus, it can be said that the novel itself is used as a powerful tool of resistance against the Castilians.

As a Muslim writer, Ali also aims to clarify that Muslims are the natives of the land (al- Andalous); as they lived in it over eight centuries. This is evident when Zuhayr persuades his friends of fighting, saying:

We have cultivated this land for centuries. We produced the food that fed Qurtuba, Ishbiliya and Gharnata. This enriched the soil in the towns. A culture grew which the Christians can burn, but will never match. We opened the doors and the light which shone from our cities illuminated this whole continent. Now they want to take it all away from us. We are not even considered worthy to be permitted a few small enclaves where we can live in peace. It is this fact which has brought us together. Town and country will die the same death. Your traders and all your professions, our weavers and peasants—all are faced with extinction. (Ali 180- 181)

In Conclusion, by applying the theory of New Historicism, it is found that Ali managed to deconstruct the grand narratives of history "Eurocentrism". As he develops a resistant discourse that

deconstructs the discourses that European accounts create to Moriscos. This rewriting of the past and the refusal of the universal truth has its main purpose in this research. The novel chosen defies the official discourse, offering a decentralized, and alternative vision of the past events. Ali refutes the assumed power and the historical stability of the past. He can no longer see the past as simple reflections of a unique homogeneous discourse

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