



## Tariq Ali's *Shadows of the Pomegranate Tree* and Alternative Historiography

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**ABSTRACT:** *The aim of this paper is to locate the novel Shadows of the Pomegranate Tree in the postmodern critical discourse on historiography. The novel deals with the Muslim identity through imaginative historical sequence but it also focuses more on the way history is taught and understood. The novel is an example of both counterfactual and metafictional historiography as it establishes the link between the past and its various so-called truths. The study contends that the novel has two distinct features: on the one hand, it subverts the 'us-them' binary which accounts for the 'writing-back' it sets to achieve and on the other hand it also challenges the traditional historiography. Therefore, the area of literary study that this research reaches towards is postmodern historiography with its intersection with postcolonial literary theory. The research brings out multivocality and varying perspective on the encounter between the confronting ideologies that the text offers. The study, after a review of the postmodern historiography and analysis of the evidence from the text, concludes that with the help of the postmodern historiographic techniques the novel largely reconstructs the cultural past of the Other of the Eurocentric history.*

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**Keywords:** Alternative historiography, counter discourse, culture, multivocality

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### Introduction

*Shadows of the Pomegranate Tree* possesses some visible promises of postmodern historiographic fiction. History in this novel is problematized in the manner that rather than presenting a distant view of the history of Muslim Spain and the subsequent reconquest, the novel registers the struggle of a family to survive in difficult times and hence the novelist/narrator writes history from the inside. It also becomes the history of the culture of Muslim Spain which is narrated through representative characters. The writer's apparent focus here is to offer an alternative way of historiography which privileges individual responses to an event over the traditional mode of 'objective' historical discourse. Rather than relying on the so-called historical truth, the novelist invests his interest in fiction to disclose the other possible truths based on the imaginative recreation of individual lives. In other words,

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the historical truth avoids individual experience whereas the metafictional space promotes it. The framework of the story encourages multiple versions and responses of the same family members and those who are attached to them as alternative historical truths or truths seen from multiple perspectives that may alter their authenticity in the objective historical discourse.

On the surface, it is the history of a family representing the lost world of Muslim Spain and the destruction of their village – a Muslim Spain in microcosm. Underneath, it represents the life of vibrant individuals who observe and react to the historical moments in their own way. The only problem with this postmodern approach is the exaggerated stance or the historical prejudice with which the novel carries the main theme. It eulogizes Muslim cultural superiority and ends the tale on a note of moral victory of the Muslim population. The text attempts to undo the European historical constructs. King (2001) has written, “This is fiction with epic like subject matter and is a useful reminder of history as seen from other than European eyes” (p. 112). Moreover, to many readers, the story may appear as a classic example of traditional historical novel depicting a tussle between a hero and a villain representing two opponent forces, ideas, or classes. Hero is Muslim in this case, and the villain Ximenes de Censero, a Christian historical figure, who is portrayed with all possible ‘characteristics’ of a villain. The story ends, as is the tradition, with the moral victory of the hero and the novelist/narrator championing the just cause. The vanquished are elevated and the victors are condemned for their imperialistic oppression. The encounter between Islam and Christianity in this context is rewritten from Muslim perspective and the novelist/narrator seems to lack metafictional strategies to proclaim the fictionality of his account of the Reconquest. If read from this angle the novel projects another sort of totalizing version of the historical discourse that it intends to counter in the first place. Any such reading, however, undermines two important aspects. First, the novel as a counter historical narrative spots those troubled areas of the historical discourse which construct a dominant ‘truth’ and consequently the marginalization of dissenting versions. So as counter-writing it addresses the stereotypes and constructs of the both sides and implant a third dimension to history. Second, the characters involved in the story-telling have a personal account of history to share which challenges the idea that history can be written objectively and impersonally. The postmodern treatment of history as an artifact also *points* out the inability of historical discourse to claim neutrality/objectivity.

### **Literature Review**

The literature review has been divided in two sections which develop the relationship between the postmodern historical fiction and postmodern

historiography. It also substantiates the relativity of historiography and metafiction.

### ***Historiography and Postmodernism***

The concept of alternative historiography is a postmodern idea. The conventional or old historical fictions have been creating their own versions of history but the renewed interest in past (history) in recent years of critical and cultural thinking have made the historical fiction an altogether parallel and competing form of historiography. Since the subject matter of this research is alternative historiography, the ideas that address the problem of writing history through fiction need to be reviewed. The expansions in historiographic theory have reshaped the reading experience of historical novels. In this context, Ferguson (1999) is of the opinion that the canvass of historical fiction include what is termed as 'counterfactual' history which blurs the boundaries between fact and fiction; offering not only possible worlds but also the significance of such thought experiments of 'it might have been otherwise as well' or 'could have been avoided' or 'this is not the only reason that it had to happen the way it happened' (p. 80-85). Similarly, Ferguson (1999) also remarks, "To understand how it actually was, we therefore need to understand *how it actually wasn't* – but how, to contemporaries, it might have been" (p. 87). *Shadows of the Pomegranate Tree* contains some counterfactual elements. It highlights some of the crucial moments of history where things could have gone in some other direction, the other possible world. However, it does not signify that the novel as alternative historiography tries to overthrow the map of history by changing the facts rather it also focuses on – as alternative history or counterfactual fiction – such histories that occurred but were never recorded. This process gives a better understanding of the past by reexamining it and opening it for analysis and understanding:

The real value of the emphasis on the narrativized, textual aspects of history is not that it fatally compromises historiography, urging us to stop believing in its claims to truth, but that it 'opens up' to interpretation what would otherwise be a closed, didactic form or rhetoric. (Nicol, 2009, p. 104)

In other words, the postmodern historical fiction does not have a fatalistic or inevitable vision of the past rather it creates a past that is fully alive and shapes the present – the historical moments which did not happen the way they are known today. The assumption here is quite simple and visible: that there are histories which are always written from a certain perspective and history as form of writing produces epistemological gaps and places of silence. These gaps and silences may only be filled through imaginative recreations or inventions. However, paradoxically, in order to

compete for these gaps the novelist must use the specific historical context and place her/himself with the contemporaries for possible alternative choice of action or inaction, as Hutcheon states: "The past as referent is not bracketed or effaced [. . .] it is incorporated and modified, given new and different life and meaning" (Hutcheon, 1986, p.182). Not only this, with the help of the postmodern critique, historical fiction also draws attention to what is represented as reality and how certain discourses are perpetuated: "The pluralist, provisional, contradictory nature of the postmodern enterprise challenges not just aesthetic unities, but also homogenizing social notions of the monolithic (male, Anglo, white, Western) in our culture" (Hutcheon, 1986, pp. 183-84). *Shadows of the Pomegranate Tree* destabilizes the so called 'monolithic notions' and introduces a 'pluralistic', 'provisional', and somewhat 'contradictory' discourse of history by bringing the marginalized characters/narrators to the centre of the narratives. The novel is populated by multiple voices of those who are usually made silent in the process of writing history. The result is a unique version of history bearing heavily on the shape of things and conflicts in the present times. It is not the 'end of the history' rather it is the history that never ends.

The postmodern notion of the 'end of history' (Fukuyama, 2002) is not to be taken or misjudged at face value. The 'end of history' does not mean that history is no more valid or profitable or that it has ceased to impress. It is simply a critique of the way history had been treated as master narrative. In its attempt "to be historically aware, hybrid, and inclusive" (Hutcheon, 1986, p.193) the postmodern debunks the master narratives of history as fictive productions. This spirit is induced with the conception of changing nature of language and reality. Hutcheon (1986), for example, also recalls the Saussurian model in which "language is a social construct: everything that is presented and thus received through language is already loaded with meaning inherent in the conceptual patterns of the speaker's culture" (p.25). Consequently, language does not reveal reality rather constructs it. Therefore, an account of the past or history is not the real past or history but the constructed and the created one. This is what is meant by the 'end of history' or in the words of Himmelfarb (1999), "a denial of the fixity of the past, of the reality of the past apart from what the historian chooses to make of it, and thus of any objective truth about the past" (p.72). History as discourse communicates an event only and the event can also be reached through other discourses. Therefore, the possibility to reach perfect representation is further reduced as there is a cultural (con)text attached to each discourse. Montrose (1989) suggests that history becomes problematic when posed between "the historicity of texts" and "the textuality of history" and historical or cultural identity thus is made up of language and textuality:

By the *historicity of texts*, I mean to suggest the cultural specificity, the social embedment, of all modes of writing- also the texts in which we study them. By the *textuality of history*, I mean to suggest firstly, that we can have no access to a full and authentic past, a lived material existence, unmediated by the surviving textual traces of the society in question- traces whose survival we cannot assume to be merely contingent but must rather presume to be at least partially consequent upon complex and subtle social processes of preservation and effacement; and secondly, that those textual traces are themselves subject to subsequent textual mediations when they are construed as the “documents” upon which historians ground their own texts, called “histories”. (p. 20)

The postmodern historical novelist never ceases to reflect the arbitrary nature of truth and how it relates to particular socio-cultural life of a people. To attain this, the novelist deliberately involves marginalized groups/characters to offer a multiple or alternative narratives by suggesting that these voices are as significant as the dominant voices were, and that their version of reality should also be treated as authentic. The novelist also experiments with the generic form of representation to suit the purpose of an overlapping narrative.

### ***Historiography and Metafiction***

The postmodern literature is largely self-reflexive and self-referential. The postmodern vision of metafiction draws attention towards the process of writing itself and its relationship with the depiction of the world within and outside the text (Hutcheon, 1988). Unlike the traditional novel, it does not want its readers to believe that the world it depicts is a replica of the world that exists outside it. Through self-reflexivity of the text, the readers are always conscious of the fictiveness of the depicted world. It is a continuous rewriting of the old manuscripts. This helps them locating the text in a specific historical and social time. The postmodern historiographies are also termed as metafiction, that is, a fiction about fiction. But this is not as simple as that. According to Waugh (1984), metafiction not only provide “a critique of their own methods of construction”, but “also explore the possible fictitiousness of the world outside the literary/fictional text” (p. 2). Waugh perhaps wants to illustrate the linguistic constructs of reality or the way language represents reality or gives the impression of it by referring to the ‘fictitiousness of the world outside the literary/fictional text’. By drawing attention to its own fictionality, the text invites the reader to create meanings and participate in the act of making sense of the difference between the past experiences and the present life. The postmodern historical novel as metafiction succeeds up to a considerable level in maintaining the

postmodern stance that 'the real' does not exist and is no more a possibility as was envisioned before. Furthermore, the postmodern historical novel reiterates that the alternative versions of history should not be considered as contrasted or subverted parallelisms of official or recorded history. They are as fictitious as recorded history is and should be judged as relative artistic reconsiderations. The idea that history has been serving the dominant in the power-structure of a society, and historian was busy in constructing only those meanings that suited the privileged and the powerful, is also a point of investigation of the postmodern historical novel. The postmodern historical novel does not only give a reasonably authentic voice to the suppressed by subverting the 'tropes' of representation but also allies with the postmodern philosophy of history to release history from the clutches of the patriarchal/colonial ideological discourse of power as in the case of *Shadows of the Pomegranate Tree*. Joseph (2008), for example, has commented that a contestation of Eurocentric version of historiography is evident in writer's use of Arabic names like Gharnata, Qurtuba, Al-Andalus and Ishbiliya among others. It enhances the non-Eurocentric approach of the story. A similar treatment of history from non-Eurocentric point of view is presented in Idrisi's tale in the novel *A Sultan in Palermo*. Furthermore, the text of *Shadows of the Pomegranate Tree* as an example of the alternative historiography raves about the Muslim expansionism/occupation of Spain by labeling it as historically more tolerant and as a time of diversified cultural accomplishments. The 'anti-imperialist' writer seems to concede with a tolerant mode of imperialism by this subtle 'justification' of Muslim rule over Spain. It looks like, from the writer's perspective, that the history of Muslim expansionism is bit different as compared to the Western colonial designs. This perhaps is the one-sided view of history that finds its eligibility only because of the marginalization of the Muslim discourse on history in the Western world. The text also suggests that if Muslim imperialism had been historically 'unjustified', the Western (re)conquests were even more as they damaged whatever good, in shape of cultural hybridity, was achieved through the previous expansionism. In this regard, *Shadows of the Pomegranate Tree* is not the only novel which has validated the cultural life of the Muslim Spain. Radwa Ashour's *Granada*, thematically, is quite the same kind of historiography. Ashour's novel traces the hybrid culture of the land before Muslims and Jews faced persecution at the hands of the conquering Christians and were forced to convert or to leave the land. Both the writers use almost the same historical events to tell significant tales of struggle and resistance of the indigenous population against the victor's oppression. Guzman (2006) has substantiated that, "The Arab presence in Andalusia is widely known and celebrated, particularly for its cultural legacy; however, the details of the violence of the Castilian takeover and the horror caused by the expansion of Christianity in the region are not" (p. 131). *Shadows of the*

*Pomegranate Tree* resonates of such comparable alternative historiography as *Granada*, though with a postmodern garb.

### **Research Methodology**

The present study is qualitative and expository in nature as it compares, contrasts, analyses and synthesizes the primary and secondary data to develop new insight (Goddard and Melville, 2001). The interpretation of *Shadows of the Pomegranate Tree* as 'alternative historiography' is carried out with the help of the text of the novel as main evidence by highlighting the author's use of different narrative strategies, character portrayals and interrelated thematic lines. The following research questions become pivotal to this study: Can this novel be treated as postmodern historical novel? How does the text explicitly react to the political and cultural significance/interpretation attached to the past? How does the text manage to redress history while adhering to the postmodern ethos? These questions are dealt with the help of the postmodern notions of historiography and analysis of their functioning in the text of the novel.

### **Data Analysis**

In *Shadows of the Pomegranate Tree*, the fictional characters meet the historical ones and attempt to present alternative versions to otherwise totalizing, dominating history of the Muslim Spain by the Western and the Islamists discourses alike. This is one way to reiterate that history is constructed rather than understood. Characters' encounter with the historical time and persons destabilizes ironically different popular notions or domination of us-them reasoning contrasted by the stories from within the historical time. The novelist makes use of an omnipresent narrator who sounds distant in time and revisits the past with an indulgence in the everyday life of the people. The imaginary reconstruction of the Reconquest of Andalus makes conversations, dialogues, meetings, attitudes, gestures, and emotions seem credible when attached with the context. The reconstruction is so powerful that the reader participates in the imaginary visits to the past and becomes complicit with the narrator in creating the illusion of historical reality. The metafiction surpasses the boundaries between fact and fiction as the imagined real sounds more real than the accounts of historical records.

The novel contains, apart+ from the writer/narrator's posting of arbitrary remarks and intrusions, individual experiences which formulate a particular historical truth of 'that' individual only. The Reconquest does not mean the same thing for everyone. It affects the persons of the same family differently though as family they have a common interest. They become those individuals who have been silenced by history and whose understanding or experiences of history have never been represented. The

third space enters the historical reality and the individual becomes the centre of the narrative as the focus shifts from Reconquest to reactions or resistance of individual characters. It helps in adding multiplicity and dethrones the dominant concepts. Moreover, the unknown individuals interact with historical figures and attempt to demystify them, however, in contrast the unknown of the historiography attains mythical stature by advancing upon historical details. The novel also elaborates in detail the desire of the individual to change the historical course of events and to be included in the construction of history that traditional historiography ignores. All such attempts in the historical discourse go unnoticed and unlisted rather they are excluded or silenced. The text, by referring to the cultural and political resistance of members of a family against oppressive measures of Christian rule, appropriates the Western historical discourse of the Reconquest.

The novel enforces a play between the objective and the subjective versions of historical reality. The novelist/narrator assumes the role of the historian who wants to record the truth of history without affecting or altering its facts in any way. However, the characters resist this totalizing factor and posit in contrast their personal tales of woe and joy, love and intrigue, failure and success, and resilience and survival. They refuse to be the people who become passive victims of historical change, and in the novel there is hardly any character who does not desire to control her/his life and metaphorically the fate of the country. Therefore, in place of a monolithic history, *Shadows of the Pomegranate Tree* allows the space for multivocality in the construction of history.

The multivocal versions of history appear in the text to register the importance of personal experiences and interpretations over any other contrary discourse. The alternative history that these characters offer promulgates a new possibility and enlightens the context of an event which may otherwise be conveyed differently. The burning of books, in the beginning of the novel, can be elucidated as an example. The fact is not changed, but an imaginative reconstruction of the event places it in the context of the story. Multiplicity is added, with the mingling of the narrator/novelist's supposedly 'objective' approach with the individual 'subjective' reaction, as thousands of eyes watch and grieve over the act and out of them a few representative but 'unimportant' voices mark the monstrosity of this act. Furthermore, the confusion of some soldiers, who are ordered to carry the books to the fire, also adds another dimension to this act. The way some books are saved is not only interesting but also recreates an appealing illusion of the historical reality/plausibility. The description of this act is graphic and detailed to provoke a guided response to such history as par with traditional historiography, suggesting if this history speaks for specific ideology, the historical discourse would carry the same stigma. If the



historical discourse is reliable narrative so will be this. Traditional historiography relies on distance and seems to project a selected set of information with a synoptic view. The postmodern theory of historiography has already questioned the existence of the 'distant' and non-committed historian as the historian has a 'cultural/historical' background. Therefore, however remote or distant a historian may seem from the history s/he writes, s/he ideologically gets translated in the written text. If the novelist/narrator of this novel is considered as a historian, the same is applicable to him as well. Moreover, besides the political significance of the 'bonfire', the novel also describes its symbolical impact on the personal lives of Banu Hudayl family members. History affects individual life of those who are 'there' and metafictional historiography 'personalizes' rather gives voice to 'thisness' and 'thatness' of history by adding the individual voices and the possible interpretations. The novelist/narrator wants to make use of certain historical events as political workings of times with satirical intentions. For the characters these events have meanings as far as they directly perturb or dispute with their life pattern. The apparent schism between the narrator/novelist's handling of political themes and characters' emotional responses as victims of history and historical discourse highlights that narratives and counter-narratives always exist side by side. The treatment of theme of history through personal lens is an endeavor to append multivocality and alternative realities to the known historical constructs as is done in the case of burning of books and forced conversions of Muslims and Jews.

Besides the infamous bonfire of books, the other important historical reality that the novel investigates is the issue of the forced conversions. Apart from being a form of religious persecution and intolerance this historical fact carries a political significance in the novel. The novelist/narrator contrasts these conversions with the comparative tolerance of Muslim rulers of Spain and establishes a counter historical discourse which runs like a historical veracity throughout the novel. The novelist sees this religious persecution and forced conversions historically as an essential mark of Christian incivility and barbarity. The stance has a historical relevance which may have been ignored by most of the cultural historians. Sajoo (1995), for example, has referred to Karen Armstrong's findings that in Muslim history, "for a century after Muhammad's death, conversion was not encouraged and, in about 700, was actually forbidden by law" (p. 582). However, most of the characters react to forced conversions according to their own circumstances. While they are aware of the burden of history that they carry as an individual, they also try to face this form of oppression based on individual choices. The individual choices to accept conversion and attain a new identity or to resist it as long as possible or to rebel against it by taking up arms refer to

individual's effort to extract personalized meanings and interpretations from historical discourse. That is how a historical event loses its overwhelming impact and differs in context and degree of its ability to represent a population. The postmodern historiographic tendency also favors the personal accounts of history over metanarratives. The individual responses though may not alter the foregrounded historical approach as in the case of this novel but they do add such versions to it as were ignored or sidelined. Metafictional space suggests that history as narrative is incomplete without the voices of those who endure it in time and space. The individual characters show their own assessment rather writing of history. Their comments on the past events and attempt to understand the contemporary political system in the light of their understanding of historical process confront with the so-called impartiality of the historical constructs. The individual can recreate and reassign new meanings to the known facts which may closely be identified with writing fiction. Therefore, each personal account of historical reality is more a fiction than historiography or a mingling of history and fiction. Metafictional historiography establishes it as veracity of historiography and contends that the historian as individual is bound to dedicate meanings and interpretation to the otherwise seemingly objective set of truths. So instead of relying on the 'information' that historical discourse contains, the reader's focus should be on the manipulation of the information in shape of meanings and interpretation – the message of history – that it offers or rather than focusing on the meanings the reader should take into account the 'making' of a set of meanings and objective/universal constructs/truths. That is why the extinction of Banu Hudayl family runs parallel to the destruction of Muslim Spain to draw attention towards the construction of emotive meanings.

*Shadows of the Pomegranate Tree* also includes the point of view of those who are either outcast for one reason or the other or considered eccentric of the society and whom neither society nor historical discourse offer any consolation. They represent the marginalized voices of doubly oppressed groups of society. Any historical reality from their point of view is a sort of rewriting of history from an altogether different angle. Their permeation in the text of the novel results in dissociating the historical narrative from the mythical one. In other words, they symbolize a mythical view of history which transports them to another intensity of metafictional historiography, namely, the deconstruction of mythical pronouncements of historical constructs. The presence of these characters in the text is subversive in spirit. They not only question the Western account of the Muslim history but also demystify the so-called Islamists' version of the Muslim civilization. Their role is cleverly imbibed in the chronological succession of different events of the plot and themes of the novel. They do not disturb the flow of the tale

and aid in carrying it to its logical ending. However, as discarded mutes of the history they provide the story a few provocative digressions, remarks, and even analysis based on their personal experiences. For the other characters of the text they serve as a link between the past history and the current, even future happenings. They are the customary oral historians of their society as their version of history has not been written or recorded. Therefore, their flashbacks and foreshadowing do not accord with the traditional conventions of scientific analysis and though the story is incomplete without them there is no evidence that they claim their story to be the whole story or the only story worth telling. This makes their position as subversive to the objective historical discourse and its claims to authenticity.

To extend its counter-discursive appeal, the novel mocks at some of the historical figures. It focuses on the way how people try to impose their version of history on people. That is perhaps why Cisneros, and the other Christian rulers Isabella, Don Inigo, etc. are not given a historical stature rather their characters are used to debunk the Christian ideology and its hostility towards the diminishing culture of the old order. Further, the character of Cisneros is exposed as representing the extremist fundamentalist mind set of those who believe only in one truth and would go to any extent to prove their sincerity for the self-assumed cause. His character also suggests to the West that extremism and religious fundamentalism are not the sole products of Islam. Cisneros's acts, his private thoughts, his unflinching hatred for the Other, and his lust for power are not only spotlighted but also made a part of the alternative history that the text presents. On the one hand Cisneros's letter and asides reflect his point of view as an element of history while on the other his hold on the power politics of the country is viewed with awe and annoyance in the context of the story. The simultaneous presence of two opposing narratives instills the dialogic composition of history in the metafictional space. Through multiple individual experiences of history, the novel portrays the existence of cultural diversity of people as opposed to the homogeneous tendency of the historical discourse. In other words, the historical realism is approached through multiple voices to suggest that a single version is incapable of communicating the complex *mélange* of culture and nature of interpersonal relationships of the people of Muslim Spain. It encourages multiplicity and brings down the superior thoughts and historical events/figures to the individual level of understanding history to sustain that historical reality is constructed and its absolutism is phony. Moreover, the novel as historiography also proposes that historical text is open to detect personal meanings and any closure of it in this sense would only reinforce the vulnerability of dominant meanings.

Furthermore, the writer also questions the colonial imperative of cultural erasure in the prologue. The victors wish to install their discourse through brutal power and eliminate all existing modes of representation. The cultural life of the vanquished which is chiefly denoted and celebrated through language (both oral and written words) becomes a prior target of colonial ideology. It is obliterated, extinguished or simply evaded. The language of the extreme centre replaces it with its own idioms and semantic rules to render impossibility of representation and refusal of the local linguistic norms which consequently serve to enslave the indigenous culture:

Ximenes de Cisneros had always believed 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. (Ali, 2000, p. iv-v)

This ensues in the fear of the Centre to lose its dominance because of the collision with the Other's culture. Welhoff (2008) has read history in this context to comment upon Cisneros's scheme as imposition of colonial order upon its subjects: "Religious unity was promoted as a means to reinforce the centralized political monarchy. The Inquisition was also later allowed to confiscate people's property". In other words, to maintain its superior claims the dominant discourse must resound for its purity and sanctity in all areas of representations. However, the text maintains that the Muslim empire expanded on a different approach. It shows that Muslim ideology welcomed cultural diversity and promulgated a sort of multiculturalism which enabled Granada to become symbol of progress and civilization.

Inversion, as a counter discursive strategy, is used in the novel to inform the Self of its stereotyping by the Other and hence to attempt a fracture in its image of wholeness. The cultural context of the novel seems to simultaneously provoke and subvert us-them binary. As a polemic of the Christian Reconquest of Granada the novel establishes the cultural supremacy of the vanquished in contrast to the bohemian and envious Christendom. The prologue to the novel argues that the idea of 'clash of civilizations' is manifestation of Christian ideology of power as the history of the Reconquest of Granada proves it be a destructive and annihilating culture compared to the Muslim culture of tolerance and progress. The myth of white civilization is dethroned early in the text through Cisneros's action of destroying the libraries and a complete body of Muslim scholarship. The novelist eagerly puts forward the dependence of Western progress on Muslim learning and openness of Muslim scholars to share their knowledge with the less enlightened. The historical reference to Renaissance reminds the

West and the Christian ideology of the positive role that Muslim scholars played in shaping up the future of humanity. The writer seems to reverberate here with the counter historical claims in his attempt to overthrow the Western biases. Paradoxically, the text which devolves the Western historical constructs produces new stereotype to counter the old ones. That is why each claim to civilization is in assumption of the other being uncivilized. Perhaps a counter discourse and alternative to stereotypical constructs is not possible without interchanging the supposed oppositions of the binaries. This is symbolically presented through Yazid's chess-set:

The Moors had been assigned the colour white. Their Queen was a noble beauty with a mantilla, her spouse a red-bearded monarch with blue eyes, his body covered in a flowing Arab robe bedecked with rare gems. The Christians were not merely black; they had been carved as monsters. The black Queen's eyes shone with evil [. . .] Her lips were painted the colour of blood. A ring on her finger displayed a painted skull [. . .] The King [. . .] a tiny pair of horns [. . .] The knights raised blood-stained hands. The two bishops were sculpted in the shape of Satan [. . .]. (Ali, 2000, p. 2-3)

The reverse stereotypes denote the assumed cultural superiority of one discourse over the other as for Ama all Christians are "Stinking Catholics!" and "when she talks about the plague she means Christianity" (Ali, 2000, p. 9) as for Cisneros the Muslims are "Hateful, spineless, confused, witless wretches" (Ali, 2000, p. 138). In other words the claims of Muslim culture to civilization are as plausible as those of the Christians and if not then the Christian discourse of civilization is as faulty as the Muslim discourse is. The collision of culture in the backdrop of imperial expansion and occupation of lands reinforces the competing stereotypes of one discourse against the other. Of course, the political domination silences the weaker discourse and paves way for cultural hegemony of the 'authentic' discourse of the victors. That is why history produced by the victors is unreliable and homogenized. *Shadows of the Pomegranate Tree*, therefore, rewrites history with the help of cultural artifices of the vanquished to frustrate the assumption of the dominating Western representations.

The colonial/imperial ideology is mostly power-centered. The meeting between Umar and Captain-General of Granada, Don Inigo offers a face to face argument between the vanquished and the victor respectively. They not only represent two confronting religions at a political/historical moment but also two different cultures. Don Inigo, though a Christian is shown in the 'Moorish robes' (Ali, 2000, p. 67). The meeting triggers the imperial discourse of power. Inigo's 'Moorish robes' may have been a political disguise or an imperial strategy to embrace the 'exotic oriental' as

well besides an act of acknowledgment of Muslim superior culture of Granada on his part. The novelist avoids stereotyping all Christians by putting his words in Inigo's mouth to mock the impartiality of the historical text in his fiction. The novel should not be read as a 'Muslim text' only. Furthermore, it also creates an illusion of historical reality. There must have been Christians, like Inigo, who in history were reluctant to allow religious persecutions and could possess historical conscience:

They [the Muslims] 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 mesquites. They are not a rootless phenomenon. They cannot be wiped out with a lash of the whip (Ali, 2000, p. 67).

Inigo also unmasks the historical mistake: "Burning their books was a disgrace. A stain on our honour. Their manuals on science and medicine are without equal in the civilized world" (Ali, 2000, p. 69). In this way, he challenges the process of 'othering' the Andalus society to establish the superiority of his culture. He exhibits a split self torn between 'civilized' ideas that demand exercise of good judgment beyond racial or religious prejudices and cultural imperialism which seeks for absolute hegemony. That is why he identifies himself with the prevailing hybrid culture of Granada but at the same time shows complete allegiance with his clan. Unfortunately, Inigo prefers his political self over the moral one as he finds a breach between the two in Imperial context. Inigo is portrayed as the voice of reason that knows the folly of religious fanaticism but is helpless rather forced to follow the political necessity. He knows that the Church is more powerful now and his dissent may allow a replacement by more radical followers. For Inigo, the only wise decision people like Umar and rest of the population can make is a complete and unconditional surrender to all demands that are made from them. He warns Umar that any act of resistance would be mere foolishness in these circumstances.

Umar's meeting with Don Inigo is symbolical as it reflects the futile exertion of the resistant subject to enlighten the centre of the existence of alternative discourse. He realizes the moment he sees Don Inigo that as an individual of the subjugated class/people he is already 'othered'. Umar takes in his odd position as a vanquished and admits that his argument would not signify in this newly given political identity: "It is always presumptuous of the vanquished to lecture their victors" (Ali, 2000, p. 73). The political rift between the two groups is not only focused on a few characters but also runs through the entire length of the text. The novel discredits the persistent existence of the colonial/imperial discourse with the help of dissenting and resisting voices. The initial shock of the Granadian on the breach of political

treatise between them and the conquerors later transforms into different ways of resistance during the story. Umar as a representative member of the vanquished feels wronged in his victor's wish to delink himself from his cultural roots: "I tried to kill our past, to exorcise memory once and for all, but they are stubborn creatures, they refuse to die" (Ali, 2000, p. 74). He senses the overwhelming imperial ideology and its attempt to erase the culture of his people: "They wanted to occupy minds, to pierce hearts, to remould souls. They would not rest till they had been successful" (Ali, 2000, p. 75). In this way, he is able to view the victors as cultural outsiders who are bent upon othering a population on religious, racial and ethnic grounds. Despite of Don Inigo's intellectual freemasonry, the subjugated others and their culture become invisible and grotesque for the ruling class. This develops the feelings of insecurity and doubt in the people and subsequently produces a tug of war between the two discourses over cultural identity and its preservation. The novel suggests that it is a historical mistake to see culture from the lenses of power. The cross-cultural contact may have produced a new hybrid culture through evolution rather than the imposition of something from the outside. However, as hinted above, the imperial discourse is itself insecure of the cross-cultural effect and tries to suppress its workings lest it should weaken the political power over the occupied land. Therefore, in place of a dynamic hybrid culture it attempts to 'takeover' the existing culture by replacing all possible ways and means of cultural representation and manifestations. The idea is to substitute the weaker/subjugated culture with the dominant one until it is reduced to mimicry of the latter. The cultural imperialism invades in everyday life of people to transform them into slaves. This is what Umar concludes from the meeting:

They will soon forbid us our language. Arabic will be banned on pain of death. They will not let us wear our clothes. There is talk that they will destroy every public bath in the country. They will prohibit our music, our wedding feasts, our religion" (Ali, 2000, p. 78).

It is against such cultural imperialism that the novel records historical resistance of the unnamed heroes of Granada. The novel unrelentingly not only combats the imperial ideology and its tendency to produce a unilateral cultural history but also exposes the ways it works to form new identities. That is how the fictitious adaptation of history becomes more reliable and real than the known history.

### **Findings**

The discussion identifies some of the issues and problems that a reader of this novel should entertain or feel compelled to investigate other than relying on the answers provided by Euro-centric history. The literary

motifs, erasure of so-called hierarchies, in-depth inception of Muslim culture and above all the treatment of vibrant but evasive historical world and its representation through fiction draw the attention not only towards the mechanics of the story but also its relevance to the present times.

### Conclusion

The primary focus of this research paper was to establish the status of this novel as postmodern historical fiction which has been achieved by interpreting the primary data in the light of postmodern historiography and the contextual precepts of the metafiction. The novel under study highlights the subversive and counterfactual aspects of political and cultural significance attached to the past by exposing the postcolonial binaries and process of the writing of history from within. Similarly, the redressing of history by maintaining the postmodern ethos has been validated by observing the schematics of historiography. The postmodern (metafictional) historiography is subversive in spirit since it very often presents the Other version of the historical discourse. This alternate narrative in *Shadows of the Pomegranate Tree* is delicately mixed with irony in the sense that most of the times the reader is unaware of the fact that the narrative is exposing the singularity of the historical meanings. The cataclysmic ending suggests a monologist meaning on the part of the narrator/novelist as the melodramatic events encourage the reader to empathize with the victims and condemn the victors for their cruelty. However, it also suggests to the reader that the existing monologist meanings of historical reality are perhaps made or popularized by using the same mechanism. The form of the novel parodies the creation of unified meanings of the historical discourse and the counter-discursive production of meanings becomes a mockery of the stable universal truths of Eurocentric historiography.



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