Challenging Eurocentric Notions of History and Culture in Tariq Ali's *Shadows of the Pomegranate Tree*

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Introduction

*Shadows of the Pomegranate Tree* (1992) by Tariq Ali portrays an intellectually advanced Islamic civilization which is being brutally overrun by a culturally inferior and religiously fanatical Christian power on the Spanish peninsula in the late fifteenth century. The reader experiences this from the perspective of the wealthy aristocratic family of al-Hudayl in the village of Banu Hudayl when their intellectually free and tolerant way of life is forced under Christian totalitarianism. Consequently, the conventional Eurocentric notion of Western culture and history as the most advanced, rich and tolerant is here rewritten and thereby challenged.

Even though the events in the novel takes place in the fifteenth century and it was written in the early 1990s in England, it should be regarded as part of post-colonial literature. According to the influential work *The Empire Writes Back* (2002) by Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin, post-colonial literature can be said to “cover all the culture affected by the imperial process from the moment of colonization to the present day” (2). Since the author, Tariq Ali, was born, raised and partly educated in Lahore (Pakistan) during the final years of British colonial rule and the subsequent years of post-independence, he is someone very much affected by the colonial era. Another thing that should be mentioned is that Ali was good friends with Edward Said for more than 30 years, until the latter's death in 2003 (Ali 1). Said is known as one of the most influential post-colonial scholars in history, and the author of the groundbreaking work *Orientalism* (1978). According to Reed Way Dasenbrock, Said was the one who inspired Ali to write *Shadows of the Pomegranate Tree* (Dasenbrock 23).

Helen Tiffin writes that “the rereading and rewriting of the European historical and fictional record are vital and inescapable tasks. These subversive maneuvers, rather than the construction or reconstruction of the essentially national or regional, are what is characteristic of post-colonial discourse in general” (96). This statement relates back to the works of Said who in *Orientalism* showed how the West throughout history has created an image of the East as exotic, uncivilized and violent as opposed to the civilized and rational self, the West. So what Tiffin is arguing is that these historically hegemonic Eurocentric notions of what European culture and history is, and what other cultures and their histories are, is something that is being questioned.
and rewritten by post-colonial literature.

This essay will try to show that this aspect of rewriting history and notions of other cultures is essential in understanding *Shadows of the Pomegranate Tree*. It will focus on the non-Eurocentric portrayal of history and Islamic culture in the novel. The argument that will be pursued is that Ali's work is permeated with strategies for subverting Eurocentric notions on history and culture. *Shadows of the Pomegranate Tree* presents a rich Moorish history, a tolerant Moorish society, where cleanliness and culinary art are essential cultural expressions as opposed to the threat from the fanatically Christian and literally stinking colonizers.

The analysis is divided into three parts, and is preceded by a theoretical discussion. Firstly, the way that the history of the colonized is emphasized within the narrative, and also placed in a binary relation with the history of the colonizer. Secondly, it will show how different cultural expressions, bathing, culinary art and Yazid's chess pieces, are used to create opposing cultural identities. Thirdly, the most important aspect, this essay will show how Ali depicts a colonizer with a fanatical and intolerant world view as opposed to the freethinking and tolerant colonized. All parts of the analysis have in common the aspect of pointing to the dichotomy between the colonizing Christians and the colonized Muslims that is present on different levels within the work.

**Post-Colonial Theory and the Context of Interpretation**

In *Orientalism*, Said shows how the Orient (in this context synonymous to the East) in a sense is a European invention. He describes it as a place that has “been since antiquity a place of romance, exotic beings, haunting memories and landscapes, and remarkable experiences” (1). In other words, the construction of the Orient is based on general assumptions of other parts of the world as less advanced than and inferior to European culture. Therefore, notions of the Orient have in a way helped to define the West, by being its opposing “idea, personality, experience” (2). He further explains that “the Orient is an idea that has a history and a tradition of thought, imagery, and vocabulary that have given it reality and presence in and for the West. The two geographical entities thus support and to an extent reflect each other” (5). This social construction should according to Said be labeled as a discourse. This can be defined as paradigmatic ideas
that both permeate and flow through and govern thought and actions. The Orientalist discourse made it possible for the colonial powers of Europe to both control and create, “the Orient politically, sociologically, militarily, ideologically, scientifically, and imaginably during the post-Enlightenment period” (3). Consequently, the historical relationship between the West and the East is simply stated binary, and one of Western dominance. The hegemonic nature of colonialism relies heavily on the idea of European identity and culture as superior to “Oriental backwardness” (7).

This cultural relationship between East and West translates well into the idea of “constitutive otherness”. The basis for this is that what we perceive as “cultural units”, that is, “human beings, words, meanings, ideas, philosophical systems, social organizations” can only remain in their apparent state through an “active process of exclusion, opposition and hierarchization” (Cahoone 16). Unfamiliar cultural units must be expressed as “other”, where the “self” (the familiar cultural unit) is seen as the superior and the “other” as inferior (Ibid). In other words, we cannot define ourselves in an empty space. We do it in relation to and in opposition to other things or beings. Consequently, within the discourse of colonialism (in this essay synonymous to Orientalist discourse) the colonizer is the “self”, whose identity is repeatedly recreated as being in a superior position in a cultural dualism with the colonized (the “other”).

This repetitive creation of identity is achieved through countless cultural rituals and expressions. For this essay the creation and projection of history is particularly relevant. Ali’s novel is one of history. It deals with history seen from the reader’s perspective: Colonialism in the early modern era, and Muslim-Christian historical relations. In addition there is the history in relation to the story: The Moorish history on the Spanish Peninsula, their cultural traditions and the family of al-Hudayl and the village bearing their name. Consequently, this novel is written with history flowing through it from every angle.

To many readers, discussing history through fiction seems irrelevant, because of the fact that it is “only fiction”. But as Bishnupriya Ghosh writes: “the novel has borne the burden of history rather heavily in the 20th and 21 centuries – often telling “in another place, another time” those pasts that cannot be told or that are willfully buried” (19). What is meant by this is that in the manner that novels or films exist and project themselves within the orientalist discourse, creating and recreating Western notions of the East, so can writers within the post-colonial tradition counter and oppose
this hegemonic discourse by telling history from a different perspective.

In her article “Colonialist Pretexts and Rites of Reply”, Helen Tiffin argues that the reversal of otherness and colonial stereotypes is an essential strategy towards postcolonial recovery, and this is exactly what Ali achieves in *Shadows of the Pomegranate Tree*. He tells the story of an intellectually and culturally advanced Islamic civilization that is being brutally ravaged by a culturally constrained and intellectually repressed Christian colonizer. Simply stated, and as will be shown in this essay, Ali plays with the common notions of who fills the roles of the “self” and the “other”. The Muslims are the “self” and the Christians the “other” in Ali’s work.

To further clarify this essay's view on history, I would like to quote Salman Rushdie who says: “By writing or telling history, we influence it, for relating history is a narrative act” (Verma 2). In other words, history is always influenced by the interpretation and projection made by the historian as well as the novelist, and that is what influences the reader rather than a belief that history can be “objective” and untainted by the person narrating it. As Hayden White writes in the introduction of his essay “Interpretation in History”: “The historian has to interpret his materials in order to construct the moving pattern of images in which the form of the historical process is to be mirrored” (281). Therefore, the historian creates an interpretation of history, rather than recreating an objective history. White argues that interpretation affects the projection of history in at least three different ways: “aesthetically (in the choice of a narrative strategy), epistemologically (in the choice of an explanatory paradigm), and ethically (in the choice of a strategy by which the ideological implications of a given representation can be drawn for the comprehension of current social patterns)” (307).

Consequently, there can be no such thing as an “objective” history, meaning that there can only be different versions or attempts at interpreting history. Therefore, the difference between literary fiction and “proper history” becomes blurry and possibly irrelevant, since they can both project versions or interpretations of history and they can both affect readers’ perception of history. Consequently, it is irrelevant to the purpose of this essay whether Ali’s version of Moorish society and Christian colonization on the Spanish peninsula is true to reality or not, but it is very relevant in what way Ali interprets and projects history and culture. In the words of Klaus Stiersdorfer, “What characterizes both Ali’s and Rushdie's approaches... is their belief in the power of literature as a social and political force” (157).
History within the Narrative: A non-Eurocentric Perspective

As stated above, the entire novel deals with history, both from the perspective of the person reading the novel and within the story, that is, in relation to the time when the plot takes place. This part of the analysis is mainly concerned with the latter, since the essay as a whole concerns how history (in relation to the reader) is projected. Therefore, this part will discuss how Islamic and Moorish history is presented within the narrative. The fact that Western history is rarely mentioned emphasizes the feeling that this is a non-Eurocentric narrative wanting to bring other histories into the light. European history is only emphasized once, in the epilogue. This occasion is external to the main story; it takes place twenty years later, and is therefore only history in relation to the reader, but will be included in this section because of how it contrasts with the Moorish history within the story.

First of all, names of places, famous people, buildings and other important words are throughout the book presented in their Arabic versions. This is to show how these places and people have their own history with their own names, instead of being a peripheral note in Western history. At the end of the book is a glossary translating them into their English versions. For example, the famous philosophers known to us as Averroes and Avicenna are here referred to with their real names of Ibn Rushd and Ibn Sina. The cities of Seville and Cordoba are Ishbiliya and Qurtuba, and so on (242). Dasenbrock argues that the reader is given “just enough Western equivalents” to keep track of the context. The fact that there are two versions of places, things and certain people, “reminds us that though we think we know the story, we have only heard one voice telling it” (Dasenbrock 17). Therefore, the rejection of the English names in favor of their Arabic originals is in itself a rejection of Eurocentric values, pointing to a different interpretation of history.

Already in the first chapter history is put to the forefront. The libraries of Gharnata (Granada) are being burnt which in is a very concrete way of eradicating a people's history and knowledge. Muslims of all social classes stand together in the street, wailing and crying. This event seems to instill a solidarity among the Muslims that crosses all social boundaries and thereby strengthening the sense of a communal identity based in the belief that they all share a common history. What is being burnt is actually a part of the Muslim self, symbolically portrayed by the beggar who climbs on
to the pyre, burning to death. From a postcolonial perspective this could be interpreted as a way for the author to show the effects of robbing a people of its history, and how notions of history is linked with the sense of the self, one's identity. This is also a way of rebelling against the colonial idea that the colonized lack a history of their own, by pointing to its existence, and how it has been erased by colonialism.

Some of the manuscripts that were meant for the pyre are in the end saved. The narrator comments on these that, "[t]hey represented the major advances in these [medicine and astronomy] and related sciences since the days of antiquity. Here was much of the material which had travelled from the peninsula of al-Andalus as well as Sicily to the rest of Europe and paved the way for the Renaissance" (2). These are of course no small claims, the Renaissance being a period in time that for many Europeans is associated with the start of the modern world, a break with the culturally and intellectually dark Middle Ages. This was a time when the classical forms of knowledge were revived. The fact that this novel claims that it was Islamic scholarship and not European which made this possible will to many readers seem surprising. This is also commented upon by Klaus Stiersdorfer, who regarding Ali’s entire authorship writes, "Ali's shrewd move is to claim precedence in modernity and the virtues propounded by liberal humanism for the Islamic world" (154). Hence, Ali's way of presenting Islamic history as essential to the development of the modern world is an argument that is present throughout his writings.

This portrayal of Islamic scholarship as superior throughout history is stated more explicitly in the same section: "The sumptuously bound and decorated volumes were a testament to the arts of the Peninsulan Arabs, surpassing the standards of the monasteries of Christendom. The compositions they contained had been the envy of scholars throughout Europe” (3). Hence, not only did the Peninsulan Arabs believe themselves to have a more learned history and culture, but even European scholars are claimed to believe that. Therefore, from an early stage the narrative clearly takes a stand in placing Islamic learning as superior to that of Christendom.

Influential "real-life" Islamic thinkers are mentioned on several occasions. Two recurring ones are Ibn Khaldun and Ibn Rushd (83, 84), who were both radical thinkers in their time, and both highly revered by the characters of the novel. Ibn Khaldun (1332-1406) produced the first known philosophy of history and made early contributions to modern political thought. It is particularly interesting in this context
that his philosophy of history is based on material reality ("Ibn Khaldun"). In other words, it is non-religious, thereby contrasting strongly with the religiously constrained scholastic philosophy of Europe at the time. He is thought to represent a link between classical and modern theory, and the reason for him being mentioned in this novel is to emphasize this fact. That is, to present Islamic scholars and their ideas as vital for the development of the modern world.

Ibn Rushd (1126-1198) known in the West as Averroes, is the most well-known Andalusian philosopher and one who has had a profound impact on Western thought. He is mainly remembered for his translations (into Arabic) and commentaries on the works of Aristotle. These were later translated from Arabic to Latin in Toledo which in itself meant the reintroduction of Aristotle's ideas into European thought and church doctrine. They were particularly influential for the works of Thomas Aquinas who spearheaded the 13th century intellectual revolution of scholastic philosophy ("Ibn Rushd"). Consequently, Ibn Rushd is emphasized in another way of showing the superiority of Islamic intellectual culture and how ideas wandered from the East to the West causing a philosophical revolution in Europe. To conclude, the references to Ibn Rushd and Ibn Khaldun as well as other influential and radical thinkers such as Ibn Hazm, Ibn Sina and al-Ma'ari are part of the argument earlier mentioned by Stiersdorfer, that is, to claim precedence of modernity for the Islamic world. This is done by pointing to the historically most influential intellectuals of the Islamic world.

In "Rewriting Strategies in Tariq Ali's Postcolonial Metafiction”, Ahmed Gamal points to the fact that colonial history told from the perspective of the colonizer has traditionally been seen as linear, and as always moving towards progress. But the history portrayed in Ali's fiction is not progressing. The entire story moves from the intellectually advanced Moorish culture to the intellectually constrained Christian culture. Therefore, history moves from a more advanced to a less advanced state (Gamal 9, 10). This non-progressive view of history can also be seen in the Muslim characters’ view of Islamic history. For example, Umar contemplates what Zubayda keeps reminding him: "Is not Islamic history replete with the rise and falls of kingdoms. Had not Baghdad itself fallen to an army of Tatar illiterates? The curse of the desert. Nomadic destinies. The cruelty of fate. The words of the prophet. Islam is either universal or it is nothing" (19). Evidently, history is not seen as teleological but rather as something that moves in a circular or rhythm-like way. In other words, history does not
necessarily move steadily towards something better.

After the final chapter, there is a short epilogue depicting an event taking place 20 years later in “the New World”. This is of course history in relation to the reader and not to the main story, but it is a story that contrasts strongly with the Moorish history that is depicted within the story and is therefore worth discussing further. The epilogue describes in short the rise of the young captain who orders the massacre of al-Hudayl in becoming one of the most legendary military leaders of the colonial era. The last four lines sum up the message of the epilogue: “‘Tenochtitlan is the name of the city and Moctezuma is the king.’ ‘Much wealth went into its construction’, said the captain. ‘They are a very rich nation, Captain Cortes,’ came the reply. The captain smiled” (240). The suggestive nature of this interchange is of course aimed at the greed that is inherent to colonialism. By presenting the infamous Cortes as the perpetrator behind the massacre of Banu Hudayl, \textit{Shadows of the Pomegranate Tree} connects to the global colonial project thus pointing to the dark past of Western civilization. More explicitly stated, how Europeans in search for wealth have been feeding on other lands and destroying the cultures indigenous to those places.

The picture of Moorish history presented within the story is thus very rich and traces the history of modernity to Islamic origins. Furthermore, history is not seen as either linear or progressive, as opposed to how it is normally viewed in the West. Both of these aspects show how this narrative is presented from the perspective of the traditional “other”, who in this novel is the “self”. This is further enhanced by how the epilogue paints a grim picture of Western history creating a binary relation with the greatness of Islamic history.

\textbf{Opposing Cultural Markers: Bathing, Culinary Art and Chess Pieces}

One obvious feature and strategy within the novel in playing with the binaries of colonial stereotypes is the juxtaposing of Muslims who are frequently seen bathing and cleaning themselves and Christians that literally stink because they never do it. This is commented upon by Dasenbrock who writes: "So central is cleanliness to the practice of Islam that those who convert have to be especially careful not to bathe - to smell as bad as a Spaniard. - Lest they seem to be fake converts or conversos, the target of a special
wrath on the part of the Inquisition” (Dasenbrock 13). He later continues to argue in terms of the “self” and the “other”: "Certainly, personal hygiene is something we see as part of "our culture", not "theirs," so our sense that this story is about a "them" is shaken a little” (Dasenbrock 13). Clearly, he has also observed how the text is playing with its Western audience by presenting the Christians as the dirty ones and the Muslims as the hygienic ones. In other words, the roles of the “self” and the “other” is reversed in relation to the Orientalist discourse.

The fact that cleanliness is an aspect in creating an opposing situation between two cultures is evident from early on, particularly in the descriptions of Great Uncle Miguel who converted to Christianity and has reached the position of Bishop. He is described as a traitor, one who reads and speaks Arabic, but who no longer uses it, and Ama says: "Did you notice that this time he was stinking, just like them?" (10). Yazid then asks her if he has always stunk, and is answered that he used to be "the cleanest person alive” (10). But now he smells like a "horse's stable" or "a camel that has consumed too many dates", and the reason for this change is so that no one can accuse him of being a Muslim. Therefore, what she is saying is that he has truly become one of them, the Catholics, the ones who ”are frightened of the water”(10). The body odor of Miguel is a theme that reoccurs in several places. This is also an issue with his son Juan. Yazid asks Hind if Juan smells as bad as his father, Hind then answers, "Juan smells even more than that old stick Miguel” (14). Consequently, both father and son are Christians and they literally stink.

The fact that Christians are dirty and unhygienic seems to be viewed as common knowledge. When Miguel returns to Banu Hudayl the second time, the gathering is asked to sit down for lunch. In front of the whole family, Zahra asks him whether he has washed his hands. He tries to disregard her but she stays firm and says, "I don't care whether you're ten or ninety, go and wash your hands”. Zahra wins the argument and Miguel is humiliatingly forced to wash his hands in front of a bemused family (100). It is obvious to everyone, both Miguel and the rest of the family that Christians are looked down upon as filthy and unhygienic. This is further expressed when Yazid asks the cook, "the Dwarf", why Miguel smells so bad. He answers, "I know what Ama thinks, but we must have a more philosophical answer. You see, young master, any person who inserts himself between the onion and the peel is left with a strong smell” (98). Firstly, Christians are unhygienic and therefore they smell. Secondly,
the Dwarf views Christianity as a whole as filthy, not only smelling bad, but as a filthy and corrupting idea, one that has tainted Miguel because he has been in contact with its core for too long. So as a whole, the aspect of smelling Christians should be interpreted both literally and metaphorically. This is further emphasized by how Christianity is referred to as "the plague" (12). The plague of course being associated with filth and unsanitary conditions, then and now.

The opposition between filthy Christians and clean Muslims is further achieved through recurring references and passages describing bathing Muslims. This cultural expression of bathing together, women and men separately is described in several places:

The three women were soaped and scrubbed with the softest sponges in the world, then containers of clean water were poured over them. After this they entered the large bath, which was the size of a small pond. The stream which flowed through the house had been piped to provide a regular supply of fresh water for the baths (13).

This adds to the sense of a peaceful, beautiful and advanced Islamic culture, one that adheres to the wellbeing of the body, and which contrasts strongly with the Christians who smell bad and do not care about their bodies and only seem to be worried about the next life.

The importance of being clean is also expressed in relation to other Muslims. When Zuhayr returns from seeing al-Zindiq, Zubayda tells him: "'Go and bathe, Zuhayr. Your hair is full of dust'. 'And he smells of horse-sweat!', added Yazid, pulling a face". Obviously, to be unclean deserves to be made fun of, and it should be viewed as a strong identity marker. This is also observed by Stiersdorfer who remarks that, "their superiority of hygiene has become a matter of religious identity" (154). As described earlier, Miguel needs to smell bad so that no one suspects him of being a Muslim, and Zuhayr needs to be clean and smell good to show that he is a Muslim.

Another aspect that emphasizes this notion of the Islamic culture as superior, although this is not done in a juxtaposing way, is the way that culinary art is portrayed. Culinary feasts are described in detail on several occasions and are always highly appreciated. The menu of the feast celebrating the family's return from Gharnata at the beginning of the novel includes, "a heavily spiced and scented barbecue lamb; rabbits stewed in fermented grape-juice with red peppers and whole cloves of garlic;"
meat-balls stuffed with brown truffles which literally melted in the mouth; a harder variety of meat-balls fried in coriander...” (17). The description of the menu continues for another seven lines with this colorful language. Adding this appreciation for culinary art to the relaxing ritual of bathing, the Islamic culture portrayed in the novel is one of enjoyment, as well as taking care of oneself, which strongly contrasts with the unhygienic and seemingly morose Christians.

A final aspect relating to the binaries of Islamic and Christian cultural expressions is the description of Yazid's chess-pieces, constructed by the Christian, Juan the Carpenter. The chessboard is divided between the juxtaposed cultures. The color white is given to the Moors, where all pieces are depictions of real life people and objects. For example, "[t]he knights were representations of Yazid's great-grandfather, the warrior Ibn Fahrid, whose legendary adventures in love and war dominated the culture of this particular family” (7). These romantic pieces are contrasted with the black pieces which depict Christian motifs. The black king, "had been carved with a portable crown that could easily be lifted, and if this symbolism was not sufficient, the iconoclastic carpenter had provided the monarch with a tiny pair of horns” (7). In other words, the Muslim pieces are portrayed as white and beautiful and the Christian pieces as black and monstrous, thus emphasizing the opposition between colonizer and colonized. There can be little doubt regarding who is the “self” and who is the “other”.

**Philosophical Opposites: Christian Fanaticism and Islamic Tolerance**

The binary relation between Christian fanaticism and Islamic tolerance is arguably the most central theme of the novel. This is produced mainly through characterization. This is also reflected upon by Steirsdorfer who contrasts Ali's characters with those of fellow author Salman Rushdie. According to Stiersdorfer, "many of Ali's characters become emblematic for ideas and visions” as opposed to Rushdie who accentuates “hybridity and transcultural migration”. He therefore concludes that, “Ali is much clearer when it comes to the social and cultural propositions underlying the novels” (156). This is evident from the way that characters in *Shadows of the Pomegranate Tree* from the two different sides carry opposing ideas and thereby achieve a binary relation which in itself opposes the idea of cultural hybridity.
The Christian fanaticism is mainly presented in the form of the instigator behind the book burning, Ximenes de Cisneros. He is presented as Queen Isabella's confessor, and her political tool, and someone living in conditions suitable to a "fanatical monk" (1-5). He is the highest church authority of the region, but also Isabella's proxy ruler, giving him both religious and political authority. Considering the fact that his religious views govern his political acts, he is looking to turn the region into a totalitarian theocracy. His central views are presented early in the novel: "Ximenes de Cisneros had always believed that the heathen could only be eliminated as a force if their culture was completely erased" (4). The book pyre is his way of achieving this end. It is later stated that, "[m]ore than anybody else in the Peninsula, more even than the dread figure of Isabella, Ximenes understands the power of ideas" (7). So by burning the libraries of Gharnata, he believes he will erase their culture and learning, thereby making it possible to fill that void with his own Christian ideology.

This very brutal idea is expressed on several occasions by Cisneros, making him the true villain of the novel. When reflecting on his predecessor Talavera, who tried to establish an ecumenical dialogue wanting conversions to come from rational argument instead of force, he says, "That phase is mercifully over, and with it, I trust, the illusion that these infidels will come to us through learning and rational discourse” (62). Basically, he believes that the way of God is to force conversions, any other method is naive, or at least inefficient. It has been tried and it failed, and the reason for this is that he views Christianity as the rational faith and the Muslims as at heart irrational and therefore unable to comprehend this. Instead they need to be forced to see the truth. Nevertheless, he thinks this is the most humane action to take: "Nothing more or less than the future of thousands of souls is at stake” (62). Therefore the implication is that physical suffering in this life should be traded for the promise of eternal bliss. From a modern perspective, Cisneros is truly a religious fanatic, disregarding this life for the belief in the next.

Many of Cisneros’ convictions are truly frightening to a modern reader. On several occasions his opinions on "race" are declared. The first is in the prologue stating that, "Ximenes was proud of his purity. The childhood jibes he had endured were false. He had no Jewish ancestors. No mongrel blood stained his veins” (4). Obviously, his physical features have had him encounter verbal abuse, and this has left a deep emotional scare, one that he is now projecting on others. This view is later brought out
in a discussion with the open-minded or at least moderate Christian, Don Inigo Lopez de Mendoza, Count of Tendilla, Mayor and Captain-General of Granada. Cisneros considers Don Inigo's blood to be "impure", since it is "tainted" with African ancestry (63). Don Inigo later puts Cisneros' views under scrutiny, by asking him: "Tell me, Father, is it always the case that the children of your so-called heretics are also guilty?". To this Cisneros answers that the loyalty within the family is something that is taken for granted. Don Inigo then refers to Torquemada, the infamous leader of the Inquisition, as someone with Jewish ancestry. This is acknowledged by Cisneros, who states that Torquemada therefore had to work hard to prove his loyalty. Obviously this is a hint to his own situation. Clearly, he has been forced to work hard all his life to prove his loyalty because of his physical features. He reflects on these later: "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" (183). He obviously sees this idea of purity as something essential, both in himself and in others. This leads to another conclusion, since he believes that everyone needs to be Christian, but all are not equal before God, some are inherently better than others. Consequently, internalized within his religious views is a racial hierarchy.

This idea of making strong distinctions between different peoples, and creating well defined hierarchies, instead of seeing humanity as a whole is something that seems to be inherent to all colonial ideology. It is evident that Cisneros has these ideas and believes in them strongly. For example, he is well aware that he has many enemies within the church. He reflects sitting at his desk: "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 of Mahomet?" (183). It is evident that he believes there is one view that is right, his view, and that everything else is heretical.

In a letter to Queen Isabella, Cisneros lists a series of suggested restrictions for the Muslim population. He wants to ban the Arabic language, prohibit them from wearing Moorish clothing, forbid them to close their front doors, disallow their festivals, weddings and their music, destroy all their bathhouses and to punish homosexual acts by death (117). So, what he is doing is trying to create a completely totalitarian society, where only one belief is allowed.

This frightening image of Christian power and ideology is opposed by a
vision of a far more advanced Islamic culture. Gamal comments on this vision in Ali’s novels: "Islamic culture, which has been generally constructed in the West as static, retrogressive and anti-modern, is represented through the prism of rational enlightenment as comprising a weltanschauung that serves as a framework for generating rational systems and theories in all fields” (Gamal 11). In Shadows of the Pomegranate Tree, its main advocate is al-Zindiq, the old man who lives in a cave in the outskirts of al-Hudayl. The contrast with Cisneros is striking. Barely introduced, al-Zindiq utters: "Falsehood hath so corrupted all the world That wrangling sects each other’s gospel chide; But were not hate Man’s natural element, Churches and mosques had risen side by side” (28). In contrast to Cisneros, he believes humanity to be one, and Christianity and Islam to have equal rights. Consequently, al-Zindiq believes in an inclusive view of the world as opposed to the exclusive Christianity of Cisneros.

Al-Zindiq, meaning the sceptic, is very proud of his name (29). When asked by Zuhayr why he goes by this name, he answers: "The answer is simple. It describes me well. I am, after all, a skeptic, an ecstatic freethinker!” (41). The contrast to Cisneros is yet again evident. Al-Zindiq claims to be free from exactly the same dogmatic that governs every act committed by Cisneros. Cisneros is proud of being a dogmatist and al-Zindiq is proud to be free from all such "mystical rubbish" (32).

Furthermore, he constantly argues for rationality, idealizing the Enlightenment ideal. For example, he thinks Zuhayr is too easily influenced by others. He says: "You do not question enough. You must think for yourself. Always! It is vital in these times when a simple choice is no longer abstract, but a matter of life or death” (34). Clearly, he wants Zuhayr to question what other people say and not just accept anything as the truth, the rationale of a critical thinker. On another occasion Zuhayr enragés the old man when showing his ignorance or lack of opinion. He says: "I pose a dilemma which has confused our theologians for centuries and all you can say is ‘I suppose so.’ Not good enough. In my day young men were taught to be more rigorous” (83). So, not only does he demand that one should think for oneself, but also the necessity of having an opinion, and being ready to argue for it.

In terms of religious views, he is as his name implies a sceptic. He never explicitly says that he does not believe in God but it is implied on several occasions. When discussing the ideas of Ibn Rushd, and the fact that the great philosopher has often been deemed as a heretic, he says: "As for myself, I think Ibn Rushd was not
heretical enough. He accepted the idea of a Universe completely in thrall to God” (84). Consequently, al-Zindiq criticizes Ibn Rushd for believing in God and for including this in his philosophy. He later affirms this opinion in a village meeting in the mosque. When there he states, "blind faith alone would not get us anywhere. You thought that the Sultans would last till the Day of Judgement" (110). Therefore, it is easy to conclude that al-Zindiq himself is not persuaded of the existence of God.

Another aspect closely tied to al-Zindiq and his views is the league of bandits that shares his values and those of the hedonist poet al-Ma'ari. When Zuhayr meets them in the desert and asks the leader who and what they are, he gets the answer:

We have flung away our pride and have no cares or troubles. We can slow down the speeding torrent, tame a troublesome steed. We can drink a flask of wine without pausing for breath, consume a lamb while it still roasts on the spit, pull the beard of a preacher and sing to our hearts' content. We live unconstrained by the need to protect our reputation, for we have none (152).

The bandits are hedonists. They have no morals assigned by God, because they obviously do not believe in God. The leader of the group further explains: "As you can see we are men who live by what we can steal from the rich. In line with the teachings of the great al-Ma'ari, we do not distinguish between Muslim, Christian or Jew. Wealth is not the preserve of one religion" (153). He sees himself as a Robin Hood-like figure that feeds of the rich, because they have more than they need. Furthermore, he does not believe that one religion is superior to another. Their victims can belong to any faith.

Their views on religion are explicitly defined in a later passage: “What is Religion? A maid kept hidden so that no eye may view her; The price of her wedding gifts and dowries baffles the wooer. Of all the goodly doctrine that from the pulpit I have heard My heart has never accepted so much as a single word” (156). Consequently, in the same manner that they would never pay an expensive dowry to marry a woman they have never seen, they cannot accept the words of religious authority concerning supernatural events or beings they have never experienced. This view of course coincides with the empiricist philosophical tradition which gained influence much later in Europe. In other words, their non-religious philosophy is based on knowledge as the experience of material reality.

Another juxtaposed relation which in a more concrete way shows the
causal effects of a clash between tolerance and fanaticism is the liberal lifestyle of the family of al-Hudayl who in the final chapter (along with their village) are being massacred by the young and fanatically ambitious Captain Cortes and his Castilian troops. The family of al-Hudayl is presented as tolerant in terms of religious views, and liberal regarding gender roles. Particularly the female members of the family hold strong and interesting views. This is also affirmed by Stiersdorfer who writes that, ”Ali's novels are full of independent-minded, strong women in direct opposition to today's stereotype of Islamic chauvinism” (154). So, traditionally, the Muslim “other” is viewed as having strict gender roles with low levels of equality, but in *Shadows of the Pomegranate Tree* the gender stereotypes are challenged. The relative equality between the genders and the independence and strength of character among the females of the novel should be seen as part of the tolerant philosophy embodied by the family as a whole and other characters such as al-Zindiq and the league of bandits. Therefore, the gender perspective taken in the forthcoming paragraphs is part of the same argument that has been pursued in the previous paragraphs concerning the dichotomy between tolerant Muslims and religiously fanatical Christians.

Zubayda, married to the patriarch of the family, Umar, is a very impressive figure and one who wields great influence. She is a strong advocate of women's rights, which is visible in several statements and descriptions of her, as for example when the narrator describes her as having had an unorthodox upbringing "thanks to a freethinking father" and how she is therefore "determined that the younger of her two daughters should not be subjected to the straitjacket of superstition or made to conform to any strictly defined role in the household” (170-171). In other words, Zubayda dislikes superstition, which in this case is regarded as synonymous to religion. She obviously thinks it is restrictive, intellectually and physically, mainly because she is a woman. Also, she wants more for her daughter than being imprisoned within the household. Furthermore, the fact that Hind's husband-to-be, Ibn Daud is an impoverished scholar of lower social standing does not bother her at all. She says for example, "Hind must not go through all that just because the boy is an orphan” (170). Clearly she does not think that those things are important..

Her daughter Hind is in many ways a younger version of herself. Gamal describes her as ”an iconoclast who is temperamentally wild and exuberant” (12). She is strong and outspoken and fiercely independent. For example, at a dinner gathering with
uncle Miguel she is described as being particularly outspoken; "She had interrupted her
great uncle several times, laughed sarcastically at his attempts at witticisms and
muttered the odd obscenity under her breath, but the night air had carried her voice and
village women had applauded" (125). So, this is obviously not a description of a woman
who is being controlled by social convention. She sees herself as a strong individual and
acts like one. What are also interesting are the final few words of the sentence, that she
was applauded by the women of the village. This should be interpreted as meaning that
Hind's strength and outspokenness is something that is being appreciated by all or most
women, and not something heretical or negative.

Hind's most memorable and most powerful line in the novel is when
arguing the social hierarchy with Ibn Daud. She says: "The only true nobility I can
accept is that conferred by talent. The worst thing in the world is that of ignorance. The
preachers you seem to respect so much say that ignorance is a woman's passport to
paradise. I would rather the creator banished me to hell" (164). This sounds like a truly
modern voice. Ghamal draws the conclusion that, "she emphatically rejects the social
stereotype of Oriental women as irrational and erotic" (12). Although she herself belongs
to the top layer of society, she still thinks that greatness is something one earns, not
something one is being born into, and she strongly disagrees with the place women are
supposed to fill in society, the way they are controlled by men, and how religion
justifies this.

The religiously sceptical, tolerant and somewhat egalitarian lifestyle of
the al-Hudayl is in the end physically massacred by a brutish force. This force is
personified by the young captain, later revealed as the legendary conquistador Hernan
Cortes. The novel, as expected, describes him as pure evil. His own soldiers are even
said to "fear him as though he were Satan himself" (224). He orders the assault on the
village, urging his soldiers to spare not one of its 2000 inhabitants. Later, when the
massacre is more or less completed, a fiercely fighting Umar is captured and dragged to
face the captain. Cortes looks at him filled with hate and utters: "You see before you the
wrath of our lord" (231). From this statement one can deduce the fanaticism in Cortes,
but also how this kind of Christian dogmatism is associated with violence.

A truly fascinating aspect is how Ali paints the picture of how Cortes
symbolically closes the door between the East and the West, and thereby the possibility
for coexistence. Before the attack, Cortes asks Ubaydallah, Umar's treacherous manager,
about a standard depicting "a blue key on a silver ground” with an inscription stating: "There is no other conqueror but God” (226). This standard is supposed to symbolize the opening of the West, and Cortes is very eager to get hold of it. Consequently, when Cortes obliterates Banu Hudayl from the maps and destroys the standard, he redefines the imagined boundaries between the East and the West. He removes the symbolical key, the standard, but he also destroys the real key, the idea of religious tolerance and coexistence.

The world of ideas in the novel is thus represented by juxtaposing the two main cultures: the colonizing Christians who are religious fanatics and the religiously tolerant colonized Muslims. Once again one feels that the author is playing with his Western readers. To use the words of Dasenbrock when commenting upon this aspect, "We view religious tolerance as a feature of our Western culture, not of Islamic culture, so the (accurate) assertion that our tradition of tolerance was better exemplified in the middle ages by Islam than by Christianity displaces our received fault lines a little” (15). Consequently, the orientalist idea of the West as the self, the tolerant, rational and superior culture, and the East (or the Orient) as its binary opposite, the religiously fanatical and violent counterpart, is here being put on its head.

**Conclusion**

This essay has shown different strategies deployed by Ali to produce a narrative that questions common Western depictions of the history and culture of the "other”. This is based on the simple idea that history can never free itself from being a subjective production and that literature carries a heavy load in projecting images of history.

The first part of the analysis dealt with how history is presented within the story. First of all, names of places and famous people are written in their Arabic forms. This emphasizes that this is a non-Eurocentric narrative, even though the implied reader is European, an aspect which is further expressed through the fact that Western history is more or less non-existent within the story, with the exception of the external epilogue. This of course presents a low-point in European history, that is, the greed of Western Imperialism. This creates a binary relation with the advanced learning of the Islamic history, and brings us to the most fundamental aspect which is how Ali traces
the trajectory of modernity to Islamic origins.

The second part of the analysis dealt with how different cultural expressions are used to juxtapose the culture of the colonizer with that of the colonized. In Ali’s novel personal hygiene is something that is particularly used as an identity marker. The Islamic culture is portrayed as obsessed with cleanliness as opposed to the Christians who literally stink. Furthermore, culinary art is something shown to be very appreciated among the colonized, presenting them as strongly life-affirming. Finally, the way the Moors view themselves as opposed to the "other" is clearly expressed through Yazid's chess pieces, which portray heroic Muslims as opposed to the monstrous Christians.

The third and most extensive part of the analysis showed how Ali creates a binary relation between characters through their ideas and values. Firstly, there is the polarity between Ximenes de Cisneros and al-Zindiq, who represent opposing philosophical traditions. Cisneros is the fanatical Christian wanting to bring the wrath of God to the infidels. Al-Zindiq is the complete opposite: a religious skeptic who preaches rationality of mind, a true modern cosmopolitan. The second binary relation is that between the family of al-Hudayl and the legendary conqueror Cortes. The family is represented mainly through female voices. They are strong, independent and highly opposed to any notions of Islamic chauvinism. They are truly modern voices whose tolerant and liberal views of life are destroyed by the violent fanaticism of Cortes.

To conclude, this essay has tried to show how Shadows of the Pomegranate Tree plays with its Western audience by reversing the roles of the "self" and the "other". This is achieved by creating binary relations between the colonizer and colonized through images of history, cultural expressions and philosophical/religious ideas. Therefore, Ali's novel is a perfect example of how post-colonial literature subverts and challenges common depictions of culture and history.
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