

## Quest for Cultural Identity: Representation and Resistance in *Shadows of the Pomegranate Tree*

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### Keywords

- Culture
- Identity
- Resistance
- Representation
- Eurocentric
- Orientalism

### Abstract

*This study explores how the historical novel *Shadows of the Pomegranate Tree* (1993) offers a postcolonial reading in a cultural and religious context. The study contributes to our understanding of issues such as cultural identity and the impact of imperialism on Euro-Islamic cultural and political identities. The novel revisits the story of the Muslim community as it struggles to maintain its religious and cultural identity in the face of external pressures and internal divisions among Spanish Muslims. Furthermore, sharing a common cultural Islamic heritage, Ali attempted to articulate Euro-Islamic cultural identity in the glorious period of Moorish Spain; in doing so, Ali resisted the ethnocentric interpretations of Arab-Islamic culture as an inevitable "other." To analyze and understand this primary distinction between two major civilizations in conflict and binary oppositions of the Orient versus the Occident since the Middle Ages, the inspiration has been drawn from the theoretical concepts of "otherness," and "resistance" as post-colonial subversive strategies to resist the occident as proposed by Edward Said in *Orientalism* (1978). Religion has played an immense role in shaping people's culture and is an essential aspect of cultural identity for Muslims in Granada. Spanish Muslims' faith paved the way for Islamic intellectual culture and scholarship growth. During the crusades, Muslims in Spain struggled to defend their Islamic cultural identities against the onslaughts of the Christian reconquest. The intersection of Western history and Islam has witnessed a deep-seated and long-term civilization conflict. Moreover, to substantiate the matter further, this perennial cultural and ethnic dichotomy between "Islam" and "West" is reviewed in terms of Representation and Resistance, which surfaces periodically in postcolonial theory and literature. The study finds that the West's Orientalist perception of Muslims being despotic and barbaric is rejected, which ultimately underscores the central ideology of the text and resists the binary oppositions of intolerant Muslim versus tolerant and civilized west, thus providing the reader with a non-Eurocentric perspective on Islamic history and culture within the narrative.*

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## **1. Introduction**

In the South Asian subcontinent, the writing of English was not something new even during the period of British colonization; however, after the partition of India and Pakistan in 1947, the tradition of writing flourished and, with time, produced writers with immense potential and striking ability to address the issues and concerns of postcolonial features such as imperialism, representation, resistance, and the quest for cultural identity. Amongst the wide range of post-independence responses, Tariq Ali, an anti-imperialist voice, emerged as an outstanding British-based Pakistani historical fiction writer and novelist. Having established himself as a political activist and journalist, his primarily historical novels have also earned him a reputable position in British literary and political circles. In his most famous historical book, *Shadows of Pomegranate Tree* (1993), the first of his historical fiction called "Islam Quintet," Ali has dealt with Islamic Moorish history concerning the time it was set. Owing much to the past and present image and construction of the "Orient" and primarily the Muslims by the West, it has been a burning issue and a matter of genuine concern for Muslims worldwide. Significantly, the works written in the wake of the 9/11 episode covertly or overtly deal with the issue of resisting the ferocious western attacks upon the Muslims more upon Arabs.

### **1.1. Significance of the study**

The significance of writing on this topic is to raise awareness on the issue of the representation of Islamic civilization as an Islamic cultural heritage and identity being "organic" and "thriving" as opposed to being "despotic" and "evil" as perceived by the Occident. Additionally, in recent years, the world has witnessed an unsettling politicization, polarisation, and secularisation of culture and religious identities linked to the terms like 'Islam and the West'. In this context, it is significant to revisit the Islamic civilization and cultural heritage that provide its readers with a valuable corrective to the mainstream western misconceptions about Muslim culture and Islam in general.

### **1.2. Limitations of the Study**

Considering the scope of the study, it was not possible to include all the facets of culture in the discussion, which were many. Therefore, only a few areas were selected to address the issue of cultural identity regarding representation and resistance. Religion cannot be separated from Islamic culture, so it has been discussed as a part of the discussion and analysis; this has been done to provide possible alternative realities of Third World history.

## **2. Literature Review**

The following literature review was relevant for the present study because it helped to understand the concept of the clash of civilizations as it is witnessed between the European and Non-European, between Islam and Christendom, and between Arabic and Western culture. For example, the British-American historian Bernard Lewis advocates secure and closer Western ties with Israel than any Muslim Nation except Turkey. Bernard Lewis observes that Islam and Christendom as civilizations have been in perpetual conflict ever since the arrival of the religion of Islam in the 7th century. In his article *The Roots of Muslim Rage* (1990), he argues that the struggle between Islam and the West was gaining momentum. The phrase "Clash of Civilizations" was coined in that essay which received encouragement and prominence in the later works by Samuel Huntington. Edward Said

(1979) quotes Bernard Lewis frequently in the third chapter of "Orientalism" to give a complete account of his anti-Muslim and anti-Arabic cultural difference.

In one of his interviews (2006), Tariq Ali gives a rationale for writing *Shadows of The Pomegranate Tree* and states his reasons for writing this historical novel. He heard a famous British professor on BBC during the Gulf War in 1990 commenting that "Arabs are a people without a culture" (Howard, 2002, p.115) and was surprised at how the Muslims are framed and referred to in the Western world. Ali argues in one of his interviews that "the politicians and media have created a dominant image of Islam that is one of the bearded terrorists. Almost everywhere these days, you can read nutty right-wing novelists like Martin Amis talking about Islam as an 'evil religion.' To fight against that is an uphill struggle" (Conservations with Talat Ahmed," November 2006). After listening to him, Ali realized there was a need to resist such a Western mindset about Islam and its culture. Thus, the historical novel *Shadows of the Pomegranate Tree* is written in response to what Tariq Ali himself has called a "Clash between Western Christendom and Islamic civilization" (ibid) to redefine Islamic culture and identity.

### **3. Research Methodology**

#### **3.1. Conceptual Framework**

Drawing upon two prominent cultural theorists, Antonio Gramsci's hegemony and Michael Foucault's conceptualization of the knowledge/ power relationship, Edward Said in *Orientalism* (1978) explores the way the European or the "Occident" has constructed the Orient the "other" who is alien, strange, and primitive as opposed to the civilized and rational the West. As a discourse, *Orientalism* (1978) primarily draws upon the ontological and epistemological differences between the Occident and the Orient. Said argues that the conception of post-colonialism requires the self-motivation between itself and the occident to characterize its existence and argues that:

The Orient is an integral part of European material civilization and culture. Orientalism expresses and represents that part culturally and ideologically as a mode of discourse with supporting institutions, vocabulary, scholarship, imagery, doctrines, and even colonial bureaucracies and styles. (1978, p.87)

Said argues that academically Orientalism still lives on as congress meetings are held, and erudite versions are written with the Orient as their focal point and the Orientalist as their authority. As a final point, corporate Orientalism is historically and materially more distinct than the other two implications of Orientalism. Corporate Orientalism may be defined as how Europe has ruled the Orient and how the Orient has been stated, referred to, and taught as a discipline. In other words, it can be defined as an essential part of the "Western style for dominating, restructuring, and having authority over the Orient" (Said, 1978, p.37). Said also distinguishes between "closed" and "open" views of Islam, and states that the summarized eight "closed" views are equated with Western Islam phobia: Islam constructed as a monolithic, static, and inorganic towards evolution and change, Islam is viewed as separate and "other," inferior to Europe and the West. It is seen as primitive, barbaric, and irrational. Said also argues that Islam, generally labeled by the West as violent, threatening, and aggressive, supports terrorism and is perpetually engaged in the "Clash of Civilizations," a thesis developed by Samuel Huntington (1996) is a mere political ideology and not a religion, only used for military or political or advantage.

Muslim criticism of "the West" is rejected. Antagonism towards Islam is used to justify discriminatory practices towards Muslims and the elimination of Muslims from mainstream society. Anti-Muslim hatred and enmity are seen as normal and natural. This construction of the orient is based on the general assumptions of the predominant western worldview, thus pointing to a dichotomy between the colonizer and the colonized, European versus Eastern, and Islam versus Christianity.

In Postcolonial discourse, text and textuality played a significant part in colonization. Western European texts, including their histories, anthropologies, and fiction, captured the non-European and Arabic, and Muslim subjects within the European paradigm and read their "Otherness" as either "terror" or "lack" (Said, 1998, p.188). In such a way, the European or Christian representations are taken as normative within the textual archive. In doing so, such texts and the model of Europe or Western culture did not include the accounts of different societies and people. Therefore, within the Postcolonial textual domain, resistance, and representation have taken many forms; for example, Edward Said's monumental "Orientalism" (1979) is one form of resistance; similarly, Tariq Ali, who is a staunch anti-imperialist represents and resists the dominant Eurocentric assumptions and portrayal about Arabic and Islamic culture as "lack" or "intolerant" and through historical fiction challenges the "unlocatable binaries" of self/other, Arabic /European civilization. Hence, in such a paradigm, Tariq Ali's historical novel attempts to articulate Arabic Islamic identity by subverting Eurocentric notions of Islamic culture and history.

#### **4. Results and Discussion**

The novel *Shadows of the Pomegranate Tree* (1992) by Tariq Ali captures the splendor, cultural plurality, and humanity of Muslim Spain. The novel also evokes the life of a Muslim aristocratic Banu Hudayl family in Spain. The setting of the story is Moorish Spain after the fall of Granada. The author explores the difficult decision the family and other Muslims must take after the Spanish Inquisition in 1492. The novel opens with the introduction of Ximenes de Cisneros, Isabella's confessor, on whose orders Islamic literature and books compiled over eight centuries are set on fire. Muslims are being persecuted. Omar, the head of the family, faces trial and tribulations during this devastating period of Reconquista by the catholic Spanish Queen Isabelle is doomed and inundated on all fronts by the intolerance of Christendom. Therefore, with this background, the paper will attempt to analyze how Ali's response is a struggle towards seeking Muslim cultural identity in terms of a collective heritage, Islam, and an account of Islamic Arabic culture with a focus on Muslims' quest for Knowledge, Euro-Islamic tolerance/ Violent Christian anti-Semitism, and Conflict of Cultures.

##### **4.1. Title of the Novel**

As a subversive strategy to resist the occidental worldview of Islamic culture, the novel's title is significant; Ali signifies the tree with broader meanings. On the surface, the title points towards a clump of pomegranate trees in the family's courtyard. However, the selection of the fruit "pomegranate" refers to Moorish Spain owing to it being brought to Europe by Arabs and thus becoming a symbol for Andalusia. The symbol of the pomegranate tree in the novel is also significant because it is through that image that the

cultural identity is expressed in the book. The pomegranate symbolizes the abundance and fertility associated with the Islamic culture, like literature and Islamic art, reflected even today in the monumental palaces in Alhambra, Spain. By subverting the western construct of Arabic Islam as “static,” “barbaric,” and “backward,” the appropriate selection of the title by Ali is an accolade to the Euro-Islamic Muslim civilization and heritage which transformed Andalusia into a paradise and converted it into a prosperous region of culture and society.

#### **4.2. Quest for knowledge and Islamic cultural heritage**

One of the prominent themes in post-colonial works of literature is the issue of cultural identity and values. The narrator explores the issue of Islamic culture and ideology in Muslim Spain by contrastive features of Western Christendom. The prologue of the novel *Shadows of the Pomegranate Tree* opens in December 1499, with images of Christian Knights who are on a secret mission to destroy the Muslim heritage and culture, which enabled them to rule for centuries in Muslims Spain. The story begins as the reader witnesses the legendary “bonfire of books” in Granada under the standing orders of Archbishop Ximenes de Cisneros, reflecting upon Islamic cultural history. The novel begins with the rising tension between the Arab and the Western world, “everything in Arabic was confiscated.....” and,

The bulk of these were Arab manuals of medicine and astronomy. They represented significant major advances in these and related sciences in the days of antiquity. Much of the mate had traveled from the peninsula of al-Andalus and as Sicily to the rest of Europe and paved the way for the Renaissance. (Ali, 1993, p. 10)

It is Ali’s stylistic approach as he brings in the reader’s focus on the main pillars of Euro-Islamic cultural stability, “its language and literature.” The Middle Ages was a period of Islamic Renaissance of Mulish intellectual growth that sprang with the Abbasid caliphate when Arabic scholars and learning were termed the “House of wisdom.” The burning of these manuscripts by the Christens denotes in metaphoric and literal terms their desire and intolerance towards Muslims by burning away Islamic culture in totality. Edward Said writes in “*Orientalism*” that the Occident has always feared and labeled the Islamic heritage as “primitive” and “despotic” however, Ali subverts this Western fallacy associated with the Islamic culture by interweaving historical truth of Islamic culture and knowledge being the strength and epitome of European learning and later advancement. Perhaps out of this latent fear, Ximenes de Cisneros desired to eliminate the “heathen,” a term used for Muslims, thereby attempting to erase the force of Islamic Arab culture. In the prologue, Ali revisits the historical reality of 1499 when,

Several thousand copies of the Koran with learned commentaries and theological and philosophical reflections on its merits and demerits, all crafted in the most exquisite calligraphy, were carted away indiscriminately by the men in uniform. (p. 11)

Ali refutes and resists the Occident stereotyping of the Islamic culture as ‘despotic’ and articulates their quest for knowledge that the Muslims had cultivated over centuries. Thus, the first half of the novel deals with the Spanish Muslim community having been recently shaken by the brutality of the Catholic Christian church on the orders of Queen Isabelle. This primary aspect is the cultural dualism initiated with the Orientalist discourse, the

superior “self,” an identity that clashes with the dichotomous relation in Orientalist history and discourse. The libraries of Granada and the scriptures that were set to fire exemplify a concrete way of eradicating Muslim culture, history, and knowledge that was a part of the 'self' being burnt.

However, the author's primary intention is to highlight the superiority of the Arab Islamic heritage and culture as opposed to the Arab stereotypes that are so prevalent in Western media and discourse.

#### **4.3 Euro-Islamic tolerance**

Religion and culture are intertwined and not alien entities. Religious beliefs affect culture, creating identities and subjective values that impact collective concepts (Esteban, 1990). Religion is a subset of culture and has always been an expression of not only spirituality, but behaviors based on collected beliefs, way of life, and a cultural system of symbols in all societies (Edara, 2017). One such religious belief in Islamic society and culture was the idea of tolerance and convivencia or coexistence (Chak, 2009). Islamic Andalusia cultivated a distinct cultural and historical identity by emphasizing the element of tolerance and multiculturalism (Hirschkind, 2016). However, the pluralism of Muslims in the western discourse has often been undermined and critiqued, which Tariq Ali resists and presents as a non-Eurocentric narrative. Therefore, resistance towards the Western construct of Muslims being "intolerant" has been explored extensively in the novel by Tariq Ali. Drawing upon Said's thesis in "Orientalism," the argument can further be developed within the context of the novel. Said in "Orientalism" draws our attention towards Bernard Lewis's influential book "The Revolt of Islam," in which Lewis has taken up a project to debunk and discredit the Arabs and, in particular, Islam (Said, 1978, p.317). He aimed to show that Islamic ideology is anti-Semitic and not just a religion. Lewis claims, "Islam is an irrational herd or mass phenomenon, ruling Muslims by passions, instincts and unreflecting hatreds" (ibid). However, at another place, he writes, "Muslims are to be watched, on account of that pure essence of theirs (according to Lewis) which happens to include long-standing hatred of Christians and Jews" (ibid, p.137). Resisting the predominant western ideology as Bernard Lewis lashes against Islam, Ali in the novel thematically represents intolerance and an anti-semanticist attitude associated with the historical character of Francisco Ximenes de Cisneros' life (1436-1517) as visible from Christian Catholic monastery. The author emphasizes one character Cisneros and highlights Christian intolerance and hatred towards Islam through him. Cisneros's character in the novel overlaps with the sovereignty of Ferdinand of Aragon and Isabella of Castile, famous as "The Catholic Monarchs." Cisneros, in 1492 became the confessor of Queen Isabelle of Spain. He is described as a priest who is "loyal to the crown and so dutiful to increasing the property and thereby the weight and supremacy of the Church". Being the counsellor of Castile, he reached Granada with the newly recognized Spanish Inquisition set up in 1478 by 'Catholic Monarchs' whose duty was to ensure the accepted belief of recent converts. Bernard Lewis, who accused Muslims of being anti-Semitic towards Jews and their lack of tolerance, has been debunked and subverted by Tariq Ali as he historically situates Cisneros, who followed the Alhambra Decree diligently called "Edict of Expulsion" (Edwards, 2011. Para.2) and on Queen's orders compelled all Jews and Muslims either to convert or to leave the Kingdom or to embrace death. Cisneros remarks,

I believe that the kindness shown by my predecessor was misunderstood by the Moors. They showed no inclination to convert to our holy faith. It was for that reason that I decided they must be taught the time was past for idolatries and heresies. (Ali, 1993, p. 128)

One is not surprised to find the tables turned, the Christian Bishop expressing his wrath towards Islam by calling the Koran an “evil book” and saying the “poisonous doctrines” were to be “consigned to the fires of hell” (Ali, 1990, p.7). On the contrary, Plurality was a predominant factor associated with the Euro-Islamic beliefs in Moorish Spain. According to Tariq Ali, Cisneros measured that “until these people are subdued and made to respect the Church, they will never be loyal to the Crown”. According to Galman, “more than merely a spiritual shift, conversion can also be a complex physical and cultural process” (2013, p.424).

The same year, in 1499, the archbishop sanctioned the destruction of all Arabic manuscripts except manuals of medicine and astronomy. The intolerant attempt was to eliminate Muslim culture from the soil of Spain. Tariq Ali underscores that this was a great bereavement for a massive intellectual life not on the indigenous level but for the entire of Europe, which drew sustenance from Euro-Islamic intellectual and cultural richness. The major contributors of Moorish scholars are the Spanish philosopher Averroes (in Arabic as Ibn- Rushd), who influenced European thought. After the episodic event of the “bonfire of books” in the novel, the Muslims began to decipher the inherent imminent danger in their lives. The head of the family thus expresses his feelings,

“The fire which burnt our books will one day destroy everything we have created in Al-Andalus, including this little village built by our forefathers”. (p. 10)

This, however, was too late; this was also a fact that Granada was to be the last city with the Muslims to fall to the Christians in 1492, which was ruled by the Muslim power for nearly eight centuries. Tariq Ali explains with graphic details how the church policy violated the agreements of tolerance once the Muslims surrendered Granada. The anti-Islamic intolerance cannot be more severe than not allowing Muslims to maintain and practice their religion, language, schools, and customs. Ultimately as the author progresses with the unfolding of Christian intolerance and Islam-phobia by 1502, the catholic Monarchs openly announce Muslims surrender and submission to Catholics as an official decree in the Castilian domains.

The protagonist of the novel Zuhayr ibn Umar, the elder son of the landowners in Banu Hudayl, was driven to the first rebellion after the forceful conversion of Muslims by the Church. However, the narrator portrays him in the light that is not fanatic but rational, and neither does he force anyone to yield to his point of view- for example, his father Umar tells his people “the choice is yours”. What is important to note is that the Banu Hudayls follow the Islamic principle of consultation. Muslim characters like Zuhayr are depicted as mature and responsible compared to the irrationality and barbarity of the Christians in Spain. Zuhayr is conscious that ending Cisneros would not result in better living-condition for the Muslim population. As a second alternative, he manages to persuade the Muslim swarm in Granada to discharge Christian militia to avoid massive reprisal against the Muslim populace. Finally, Zuhayr becomes the person in charge of the three hundred young men from Granada who unite the army trained in the nearby Alpujarras hills. However, on the contrary, the Christian army hastily retorts and surrounds them. As they

are trapped, Zuhayr dares the Christian captain to a duel to the death. But the price of the victory was immense. His temporary victory resulted in the extinction of his family: to penalize Zuhayr, soldiers were sent to destroy his village and massacre all its occupants, including Zuhayr's family.

#### **4.3. Culture and conflict in Shadows of The Pomegranate Tree**

When the plurality and rich cosmopolitan culture established by the Moors of Cordoba is juxtaposed with the enforced brutal Christianity of the Catholic Church in Moorish Spain, Tariq Ali falsifies the pronouncement of Huntington and Bernard Lewis on the “clash of civilization” doctrine. As Edward Said has pointed out in "Orientalism," there are conflicts between the "Orient" and the "Occident" that began with the wars of Greece and Persia and recommenced in the form of the prolonged contestation between Christendom and Islam. This "clash of civilizations" doctrine, coined by Bernard Lewis but employed most cheerfully by Samuel Huntington, is also pervasive in the novel. For example, Tariq Ali, through the character of young Yazid shows how difficult life became for the Spanish Muslims and how some, including his uncle Miguel (convert), had chosen to join forces with the Spanish and become Christians to advance. In contrast, other citizens were being forced to give up their profession, their language, and (publicly) their faith. The following extract from the text explains the author's crux of the whole matter and the inherent cultural clash:

Miguel had dominated the evening. At first, he had sounded bitter and cynical. The success of the Catholic Church, its practical superiority, he had argued, lay in the fact that it did not even attempt to sweeten the bitter taste of its medicine. It did not bother to deceive; it was not searching for popularity; it did not disguise its shape to please its followers. It was disgustingly frank. It shook Man by the shoulders and shouted in his ear: You were born in excrement, and you will live in it, but we might forgive you for being so foul, so vile, so repulsive if you sink to your knees and pray every day for forgiveness. Your pitiful, pathetic existence must be borne with exemplary humility. Life is and will remain a torment. All you can do is save your soul, and if you do that and keep your discontent well hidden, you might be redeemed. That and that alone will make your life on earth a mite less filthy than it was on the day you were born. Only the damned seek happiness in this world. (Ali, 1998, p.124-125).

This is the central theme; the narrator subverts the usually attached vocabulary towards Muslims and Islam as cruel and "unchangeable," but the passage suggests a profound contrast in roles that were usually misunderstood as historically contingent. In the passage, even Uncle Miguel, who has converted to Christianity and poses loyalty towards the Christian monarchy, cannot help vocalizing the brutality implicated with the Christian conquest of Granada. The author focuses on the innate hatred in the West irrationally embedded in them, which is bound to result in a clash of cultures and fundamentalism. It also shows the impact hegemonic power has on society at large. Enforced acculturation by the Catholic Church was a reality in that historical moment and a sordid issue in this novel; Ali makes use of the narrative structure of telling the family history of the Banu Hudayl to explore the violent effects and reasons for the cultural clash between the Spanish Christians and the Muslim Moors in the late Middle Ages.



## 5. Conclusion, Implications and Recommendations

### 5.1 Conclusion

Viewing South Asian literature as a source of documenting and preserving the culture and history of people with their own distinct identity and voice as parallel and even sometimes against the mainstream historiography is an attractive vintage point. Similarly, Tariq Ali's view on Islamic culture from a historical perspective offers a picture of living Islamic identity and culture with strong values and glories and the binary relationship between Islamic tolerance and Christian fanaticism. In many ways, such fictional narratives by writers like Tariq Ali offer a blueprint of an Islamic culture that is organic, thriving, and vibrating as a living entity by recording many vital events and moments of its culture, history, and evolution. Therefore, this article has tried to underscore how the novel *Shadows of the Pomegranate Tree* gives its Western audience a different perspective by altering the roles of the "self" and irrational "other." This is realized by creating binary relations between the self and the other, between the colonizer and the colonized, through cultural expressions, images of history, and religious ideas. From this point of view, Tariq Ali's historical novel is a pertinent example of post-colonial literature representing, challenging, and subverting descriptions of history and culture from a non – Eurocentric perspective.

Summing up the above discussion, one can say that Ali has successfully recollected, re-appropriated, and portrayed a facet of culture and its manifestations concerning Euro-Arab Islamic culture that has for centuries claimed the spiritual and, at the same time, pluralistic way of existence when viewed in contrast with the Western mode of thought about Islam in particular. Thus, in the historical novel *Shadows of the Pomegranate Tree*, Tariq Ali represents a vivid, captivating picture of the ideological siege of the Muslims of al-Andulas after the political collapse and fall of Granada on the standing orders of the Christian Catholic Monarchs. Moreover, one notices that Tariq Ali struggles to recapture and remind his larger audience about the Islamic cultural heritage commonly shared by all Muslims worldwide. At the same time, the author strongly resists the dominant Occidental view of the Islamic worldview as "degenerate" and "intolerant" and without culture. Ali's novel is favorably read as a historical plot, a narrative in the guise of fiction. All major characters in the novel, Yazid, Hind, Uncle Miguel, and Zuhayr emerge as mere representatives of hundreds and thousands of Spanish Moors in the sixteenth century and late Middle Ages. However, Tariq Ali underscores a striking contrast between the ideological Arab-Islamic and Christian cultural values. The Spanish Muslims are never seen as brutal, uncultured, or intolerant louts throughout the novel. Neither are they seen as a societal community seeking by force of military and law conquering people for so many centuries in Spanish conquest. One witnesses a drastic contrast between the vindictiveness of the Christian side, which massacres hundreds of innocent civilians, including minor and older adults, during the Al-Hama carnage, whereas the Muslims are represented as prone to confer with the enemy before taking up arms, not only when they are defeated but also when they are victorious. Zuhayr's father's claim: "*We have always prided ourselves on how we treat the vanquished*" seems partial but convincing. Therefore, with a dialectical approach, Tariq Ali resists the western constructs of the Arab-Islamic culture as "intolerant" or "other," thus subverting the occident's notion of Islam being the "evil" religion or the perpetuation of the false idea that "the Arabs are without a culture." On the contrary, one realizes after reading the novel that the Spanish Inquisition, which resulted from Christian revival in Moorish

Spain, was in the history of mankind one of the most repressive regimes. However, parallel to the Christian tapered-minded zealotry is the depiction of one-time magnificent Euro-Muslim culture. Thus, written and represented evocatively, Tariq Ali subverts and resists Eurocentric Occidental construction about the "otherness" of Islamic culture and religious identity.

### 5.1. Implications

The in-depth study and exploration of the novel in multiple ways may show how postcolonial texts represent cultural and religious identities and which may work towards countering negative stereotypes that associate Muslims and their Islamic culture with exclusively alienated people or violent people in crisis. The findings highlighted in the article may inform people about Muslims and their culture, which generally remains obscure or distorted.

Additionally, the historical novel contributes to multiple areas of scholarship, such as literature, history, and cultural studies, because of the historic nature of the novel and the underlying themes it presents. If read as a work of historical fiction, the novel contributes to the genre of historical novels, which revisits the past life through storytelling through vivid descriptions and illustrations. The readers are transported to medieval Spain and brings the conquest of Muslims by Christian monarchs to life. As a part of history, the novel contributes to the reader's understanding of the political, cultural, and social climate of Medieval Spain. It provides a nuanced and complex portrayal of Muslims' internal and external conflict. Secondly, the historical novel also contributes to cultural studies: the novel's underlying theme contributes to our understanding of issues like the cultural identity of the Andalusian Muslims and the impact of colonialism on political and cultural identities. The fictional narrative portrays the struggle of the Muslim community of that time, who were trying to maintain their religious and cultural identity in the wake of internal divisions and external pressures, thereby providing a complex and rich portrayal of the Islamic traditions and culture of that period.

### 5.2. Recommendations

Despite centuries of relations between Muslims and the West, historically and otherwise, the historical memories of the Islamic culture and Muslims have generally been stereotyped and quite regularly been viewed as "other" as an inferior irrational rival under the shadow of the superior "self" of the Western world that led to dehumanizing stereotypes and a habit of selective perception in which mostly undesirable interactions are remembered. At the same time, more positive liaisons are conveniently forgotten. History has been venerated in the West as a linear chronology marginalizing or even, at times, deleting the voice of the colonized. It is therefore recommended that for future research, novels that rewrite history in the form of textual response to the dominant western discourse could be considered as an option to investigate the strategies of postcolonial metafiction like the *Book of Saladin* by Tariq Ali or "The Ornament of the World" by Mariam Rosa Menocal. These works provide a cultural and historical background that explores the rich cultural heritage of Islamic Spain from Medieval times. Similarly, "The Moor's Account" by Laila Lalami, is a fiction spun

around the first black explorer of America in the 16<sup>th</sup> century. He was part of a Spanish expedition sent to Florida. The book explores the complexities of cultural identity and colonialism. To sum up, books like these are a platform through which one can investigate a wide range of strategies in postcolonial literature that could draw the reader's attention to resist and transform colonial discourse and present a more fluid interpretation. Rewriting the Orientalist narrative and discourse on the Islamic world's assumed otherness, particularly the Arab world, would possibly help disrupt the assumption of a complex, finalist conflict between Islam and the west or between self and other.

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