

## **Eurocentrism Reconsidered: (Re)writing the History of the ‘Other’ in Tariq Ali’s *Shadows of the Pomegranate Tree* and *The Book of Saladin***

**Zakir Hussain\* and Binod Mishra**

*Department of Humanities and Social Sciences, Indian Institute of Technology Roorkee, 247667 Roorkee, Uttarakhand, India*

### **ABSTRACT**

This article examines the reconstruction of Eurocentric representations of religious minorities of post-Reconquista Spain and Jerusalem through Tariq Ali’s novels, *Shadows of the Pomegranate Tree* (1992) and *The Book of Saladin* (1998). These novels suggest that the reconfiguration of history and the analysis of the traumatic experiences of characters such as Zuhayr and Saladin challenge the essentialist notion of Eurocentrism. The paper explores the narrative approaches and procedures employed in the novels to articulate the sufferings caused by the sidelining and elimination of Muslim and Jewish minorities. The study relies on concepts formulated and explicated by postcolonial critics like Fanon, Said, and Spivak in their critical works as its theoretical premise. We argue that the postcolonial outlook has the potential to challenge Eurocentric historical accounts,

as it revives the forgotten memories of the “Other” and intertwines these memories to form new compatibility across ethnocultural and religious polarization. This study demonstrates that revealing the brutality implicit in the reasonable practices of nation-building conditions causes a crisis in Eurocentric historiography.

### ARTICLE INFO

#### *Article history:*

Received: 4 October 2021

Accepted: 13 April 2022

Published: 15 June 2022

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.47836/pjssh.30.2.14>

#### *E-mail addresses:*

Zakalhoundary786@gmail.com (Zakir Hussain)

Mishra.binod@gmail.com (Binod Mishra)

\*Corresponding author

*Keywords:* Culture, Eurocentrism, historiography, marginalization, other, postcolonial theory

## INTRODUCTION

Tariq Ali's *The Islam Quintet*<sup>1</sup>, written during the last two decades, has been his main intellectual project. The first novel of the quintet, *Shadows of the Pomegranate Tree (SPT)* (1992), narrates the struggles of Muslim and Jewish minorities trying to preserve their culture and material well-being. *SPT* tells the saga of a Moorish family, Banu Hudayl, following the Spanish Reconquista<sup>2</sup> and the ultimate fall of Muslim Granada to Christendom. The title refers to a grove of trees in the family's courtyard and the Muslim civilization's legacy of turning Andalusia into a garden and making it productive through Arab irrigation techniques. This tale is narrated through the voices of multiple characters, both Muslims (such as Umar and his family members) and a Jewish character (Juan the Carpenter), who undoubtedly find themselves in a challenging position. Ali (1992), in this narrative, presents authentically the everyday aspects of Jewish and Moorish life, customs, and culture, as well as carefully structured conversations regarding the eventual fate of their religion. It also depicts the dilemmas

of a community's willingness to live in a space (Granada) they believed to be their homeland. However, according to Saman Ashfaq, they "ended up as victims of the politics of men and ideologies" (2018, p. 373). The Inquisition caused drastic changes in the lives of the Moors and the Jews, who were reluctant to become conversos. They were oppressed and exposed to innumerable forms of prejudice and violence.

The next novel, *The Book of Saladin (BS)* (1998), depicts the life of Salah al-Din Ayyubi, a twelfth-century Kurdish Muslim fighter, and his interactions with people of various faiths to emphasize the necessity of religious cohesiveness. Ibn Yakub, a Jewish scribe, records the life history of Saladin. Ali's fictional characters like Shadhi, Ibn Yakub, and Jamila give a different perspective on the documented history. Saladin is concerned about Jerusalem, or *al-Kuds* (Arabic name for Jerusalem), at the center of religious conflicts throughout the novel. The Christian crusaders are depicted as rapacious, ruthless, and intolerant. Ali (1998) highlights the ferocity of the Franj (Western Crusaders), who fight Muslims and Jews like barbarians, but Saladin allows his Christian subjects to practice their faith even after capturing Jerusalem. *BS* is set in three separate transcultural locations; the first is in Cairo, which portrays Sultan's family background and youthful memories. Many of Sultan's anecdotes and combat-ready preparations for capturing Jerusalem are reported in Damascus. Jerusalem gives a vibrant picture of the camps, soldiers, battles, and the Sultan's efforts to recapture Jerusalem.

1 A series of five historical novels which comprises: *Shadows of the Pomegranate Tree* (1992); *The Book of Saladin* (1998); *The Stone Woman* (2000); *A Sultan in Palermo* (2005) & *Night of the Golden Butterfly* (2010).

2 The time after the collapse of the Nasrid Kingdom of Granada in 1492 to the Christian Kingdoms in the history of the Iberian Peninsula. This period witnessed the forceful conversion of Muslims to Christianity, forbidden from observing their traditions; their culture was completely suppressed.

*The Book of Saladin* refers to an earlier history than the period depicted in *Shadows of the Pomegranate Tree*, which in the present paper is argued as Ali's deliberate strategy to challenge the Eurocentric representations of Muslims and Jewish minorities. These fictional works highlight the subjugation of religious minorities by the monarchs—Isabella and Ferdinand. Their “intolerant principle of autonomous ethnic or cultural homogeneity and difference” sees minorities as a “problem to be resolved or eliminated” (Young, 2012, p. 31).

These novels rewrite the Eurocentric history of Muslim and Jewish minorities on the margins of Europe through a postcolonial perspective. The narratives comprise flashbacks about their critical transcultural encounters recounting memories of Muslims in Spain, the Crusades, and European colonialism, forming multi-directional connections across different histories. Ali, through these works, is “capable of examining Islam from an insider's perspective in a variety of subtle ways, while sometimes also voicing criticism of religious practice and cultural accretions” (C. Chambers et al., 2019, p. 76).

These novels foreground the uncertainty of survival and call into question the emotive and mental aspects of the relegation and segregation of minorities. In this regard, this paper attempts to study the representation of marginal religious groups of Post-Reconquista Spain and Jerusalem on the periphery of Europe to foreground their situation. These marginal groups have been barely referred to in Eurocentric historical sources, such as Madden (2004), Nerval

(1872/2012), Chateaubriand (1814/1822), and Ehrenkreutz (1972). If these groups are documented, they have been depicted as brutal and oppressing. Famous Western Orientalists like Louis Bertrand and Charles Petrie have praised the brutal extermination of Moorish Muslims in pronouncements like, “one of those bastard countries which live only by letting themselves be shared and exploited by foreigners, and have no art, or thought or civilization proper to themselves” (1934, p. 228). Carr, instead, sees this expulsion as “a powerful majority seeking to remake or define its own cultural identity through the physical elimination of supposedly incompatible minorities” (2009, p. 8). However, postcolonial critic Young presents a different view of the situation. He opines that al-Andalus under Islamic rule “involved a thriving commercial as well as intellectual culture, one in which Muslims, Jews, and Christians lived together in a relative equanimity that would be unparalleled in Christian Europe until the last decades of the twentieth century” (2012, p. 32). He further argues that “the history of the practices of toleration in Islamic societies” is such where “otherness is included rather than excluded” (p. 22).

Therefore, it is crucial to examine Eurocentrism<sup>3</sup>, which mediates all other histories throughout the history of Europe. Eurocentric representations

3 Eurocentrism emphasizes European concerns, culture, and values at the expense of those of other cultures. It assumes permanent superiority over all other cultures. Revisionist historiography looks at the longer duration, where the interactions between other cultures are traced. Scholarly works critical of Eurocentrism advocate deconstructing Eurocentric biases and call for a paradigm shift.

need to be demystified, rewritten, and challenged because it imposes “its cultural tastes, aesthetic preferences and criteria for judgment on the colonized” (Young, 2013, p. 687). This research examines how these novels portray a complex, multifaceted vision of Muslim cultures and histories and how different cultural expressions create opposing cultural identities to revolt against Christian totalitarianism through postcolonial agency and determinism. The postcolonial theory aims at comprehending the dynamics of colonialism and anticolonialist ideologies on political, social, and cultural levels.

## METHODOLOGY

Postcolonialism as a theory “attempts to reform the intellectual and epistemological exclusions of [the Western] academy, and enables non-Western critics located in the West to present their cultural inheritance as knowledge” (Gandhi, 1998, p. ix). The postcolonial approach examines the devices of colonial supremacy to recuperate excluded or marginalized voices and theorizes the intricacies of colonial and postcolonial identity. Postcolonial literature plays a significant role in re-establishing native expressions, cultural heritage, local histories, and geographies of marginalized communities. Indeed, such re-articulation of marginalized sensibilities and experiences is crucial because the legacies of these victims are prey to Eurocentric textual appropriation. Frantz Fanon elaborates on the point of natives as the passive subject of Western historiography. Colonialism is

not satiate with simply enslaving individuals and stripping the native’s mind of any shape or content. He states that “by a kind of perverted logic, it turns the past of the oppressed people and distorts, disfigures and destroys it” (Fanon, 1961/1963, p. 161).

Following Said’s *Orientalism* (1978), postcolonial critics have examined how Eurocentric representations of the Muslim world serve the political welfares of the West. Eurocentric discourse plays a significant role in promoting the colonial authorities of the West to govern and fashion “the Orient politically, sociologically, militarily, ideologically, scientifically, and imaginably during the post-Enlightenment period” (Said, 1978/2003, p. 3). So, the reversal of stereotypical colonial appropriation is a crucial strategy in recovering the peripheral cultures of Western civilization. Postcolonial critic Spivak describes such subversive strategies as “a careful deconstructive method, displacing rather than only reversing oppositions” (1999, p. 244). Ali, in these novels, transfigures the imperial artifact of the “Other” by evoking and obliterating Eurocentric stereotypes at the same time. Such a strategy shifts the representation of identity from the Eurocentric view to the writing space.

The paper critically examines the first two novels, namely, *Shadows of the Pomegranate Tree* and *The Book of Saladin*, which expose the discriminatory attitude of Christian Spain and Jerusalem, during the Spanish Inquisition and the King’s Crusade, towards the native Muslims and Jews by engaging them into a series of historical

events. Native minorities are persecuted and discriminated against by Anglo-Spanish Catholics because of their differing religious practices. The critical parameters of the study emerge from an investigation of the postcolonial context to rewrite Eurocentric discourses. In postcolonial theory, “Othering” refers to how colonial discourse generates its subject matters. It is “a dialectical process because the colonizing Other is established at the same time as its colonized others are produced as subjects” (Ashcroft et al., 2007, p. 168). “Othering” is the act of judging everyone different as being less than completely human, and “it divides the world between ‘Us’ (the ‘Civilized’) and ‘Them’ (the ‘Others’ or ‘Savages’)” (Tyson, 2006, p. 420). Besides, the paper explores the ideological othering of the native Muslims and Jews by using the critical formulations of postcolonial critics, such as Frantz Fanon’s concept of “the Other.” Fanon instancing the “Other” in his book, *The Wretched of the Earth*, states that the governing race is first and foremost those who come from elsewhere, those who are unlike the original inhabitants, “the Others” (1961/1963, p. 40). The colonized subject is described as “Other” through discourses that construct binary division to demonstrate the colonizing culture’s naturalness and superiority. In colonial discourse, the subjectivity of the colonized is continually located in the colonizer’s gaze. We shall examine in the next section how the Self/Other dichotomy is discursively formed by power structures aimed at projecting minorities as inferior. Further, the section

will also emphasize the “Other” capacity to overcome recurrent Othering processes implicit in Eurocentric discourses.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

### Central and Peripheral Culture

Eurocentrism has created a center/periphery polarization in which European culture is at the center, and this cultural center silences minorities and pushes other cultural groups to the periphery. The notion of center and periphery depends on the outlook of the observers. Concerning colonialism, the imperialistic stance of any country motivates it to proclaim itself as the center—a strong, controlling, dominant, oppressive, and imposing body of governance. Against this background, the occupied territory, oppressed, ruled, marginalized, remains obedient and submissive to the center. Eurocentrism constitutes an authentic paradigm of Western ideology, which, as Thomas Kuhn observes, “is internalized to the point that it most often operates without anyone noticing it” (1970, p. 61). If we adopt William Egginton’s notion of “the major” and “the minor,” the center henceforth becomes “the major,” and the periphery becomes “the minor strategy” (2010, pp. 4–6). The center attempts to persuade us that what is presented is true when it is only a representation and framework for something that does not exist. Such a representation contradicts reality. Because of the center/periphery conflict, the peripheral culture either surrenders to the mode of the new center, thus, pushing their habits, customs, traditions, and opinions, or shows resistance

towards the socio-cultural politics of the presumed dominance, intending to reject it.

*SPT* begins with Banu Hudayl—a Muslim family living in the al-Hudayl village, along with the Jews, Muslims, and other marginalized societies. These societies are under the direct control of the Christian culture. In reversing the gaze of Eurocentric historiography, the central/peripheral contrast is defined in terms of ideological expressions. On one end is the dominating, suppressive societies; on the other are the marginalized, suppressed societies. The historians, in their representations, leave out these peripheralized societies in their consideration of “real events and processes in the past” (White, 2005, p. 150). Thus, the central culture is responsible for the relegated status of peripheral societies. The marginalized societies attempt to shatter the oppressive social power with the artillery of ideology and exercise their ideology and cultural expressions. History shows that peripheral societies have experienced difficulties promoting themselves above their marginal strata. The more significant constraint of less advanced societies seems central to unequal development.

Scholars such as Malik et al. (2013) and Gamal (2017) have celebrated Ali’s attempt to interweave the life stories of Muslims from diverse topographies and historical eras through multidimensional narrations. The promotion of a complex and vivid interpretation of society by integrating fiction with the application of fragments and recollections and the practices of mirroring and redoubling is an integral element of

Ali’s novels. Mahjoub Jamal stresses the importance of literary works as a means of thoughtful expression and communication. Regarding the influence of the past on the present, he mentions in his lecture *The Writer and Globalism* that literature “can link the diverse cultures which are now, for better or worse, stuck with one another, and whose encounter now defines the world we live in” (quoted in Mohammad, 2017, p. 319). Certainly, set in different spaces within Europe and the Middle East, the novel’s multicultural characters and multifaceted experiences throughout centuries portray their subversive skirmishes with identity politics. These narratives delve into the historical interactions and deal with the Middle Eastern and European cultures. A significant strength of the novels is that the marginalized people in Europe “become the subjects rather than the mere objects of European history” (p. 319). Ali’s unique narratives invoke imaginings from bygone ages. These novels hold a momentous significance since they symbolize superimposed memories of the ancestors of Umar, their former workers, as representational palimpsests. They revive memories of European colonialism, ethnic superiority, Umar’s detestation of the imposed culture, and his nuanced experiences in Banu Hudayl’s family. The multilinguistic and multicultural structure of al-Hudayl in Gharnata “immediately invokes the movement of peoples, histories, and cultures that underlines the continual sense of historical transformation and cultural translation, making it a site of perpetual transit” (I. Chambers, 2008, p. 32).



In *SPT*, a pivotal moment occurs when Zuhayr and his companions are found in political discussion in the public bath, discussing how the recent sequence of atrocities had “subjected and annihilated them through the force of their oppression” (Ali, 1992, p. 13). Muslims and Jews were compelled to convert because of oppression. The death of the *faqih*s (religious scholars) was the immediate result, leading to despair and fatalism. One of Zuhayr’s friends, Ibn Daud, shares information that he had heard in Balansiya (Valencia) about how the inquisitors were preparing to deliver the deadly blow. He adds that “Arabic will be banned on pain of death. They will not let us wear our clothes. There is a talk that they will destroy every public bath in the country. They will prohibit our music, our wedding feasts, our religion” (p. 79). The conversation between Zuhayr and his friends suggests that the European Christians of this region were adamant about creating a homogeneous society. According to their expectations, this society could be unified in language, culture, and religion to provide an objective base for the expanse of the Western state. This collective consciousness was attributed to adapting the Muslim culture described in *SPT* as a peripheral society to their demands. Saladin’s great revolution in *BS* shatters this notion of Western collective consciousness. With this revolution, “things that are long forgotten remain hidden in dark corners, suddenly emerge into the light” (Ali, 1998, p. 3).

Saladin’s accession to power follows the incongruous portrayal of the fall of Muslims in Spain in *SPT* in *BS*. In conversation with his scribe, Saladin says, “Yet the real day is not so far away, Ibn Yakub. Our people soon will return to al-Kuds. The city of Tyre and Acre, of Antioch and Tripoli, will once again belong to us” (p. 33). As the story unfolds, Saladin reclaims lost territories and subverts the notions of center/periphery and Europeanization imposed by external forces. In *BS*, Saladin achieves absolute power in the Islamic World, where “Islam constitutes not only a cardinal component of Muslims’ identity but also becomes a prominent feature in the identity of non-Muslims who happens to live in Muslim communities” (Malak, 2004, p. 124).

The comparison shows the fluctuating nature of Muslim revolts, oscillating between the poles of Muslim identity and Western colonization or the debilitating fragmentation volunteered by religious conflicts and ethnic affiliations. These two novels contrast the Christian civilization of Europe with its periphery Muslims, favoring the latter by portraying them positively while exposing the former’s hegemonic ambitions. Both the works decentralize Europe and build up an alternative center occupied via different geo/cultural localization. Further, Ali (1992) reveals the agency and determinism of his characters through artistic creation as a form of resistance.

### The Problem of Agency and Determinism

*SPT* emphasizes the problems of agency and determinism that these groups suffer because of unjustified subjugation. On the one hand, Ximenes de Cisneros, who symbolizes Christian power, is a religious zealot who wishes to unleash God's vengeance upon the unbelievers. He believes that the "heathens, if they cannot be drawn towards Christianity voluntarily, should be driven in the direction" (Ali, 1992, p. 66). On the other, Umar bin Abdullah's elder son Zuhayr al Fahl is portrayed as a young man embodying great zeal and valor who tries to initiate a physical battle against the Christian forces to defend his family and community. He consults with the villagers to discuss how they would live following the reconquest of Gharnata. Zuhayr raises a volunteer army to counteract their marginalization and adopts overt and covert strategies to fight existential instability, resulting in frivolity. Despite his outward display of bravery, his plot to ambush Ximenes is uncertain. This ambiguity is related to the seriousness with which he must consider the necessity of subsistence. This decision was based on logic rather than fear:

Once again, he was racked by doubts. Perhaps he should ride out of the city and link his fate to that of the al-Ma'aris. Perhaps he should just go home and warn his father of the catastrophe that threatened them all. Or, and this thought shocked him greatly, should he flee to Qurtuba and ask Great-Uncle Miguel to baptize him? (Ali, 1992, p. 183)

Zuhayr's hesitation in carrying out the ambush is due to his encounter with the al-Ma'aris.<sup>4</sup> Abu Zaid, the group commander, prevents Zuhayr from assassinating Cisneros. Umar also denounces Zuhayr's plan and criticizes, "history is full of young fools getting drunk on religion and rushing to battle with the infidels. Far easier to drink poison underneath a tree by the river and die peacefully" (Ali, 1992, p. 146).

When Jews are subjected to barbarism and fanaticism and are viewed as the enemy, they express their agency through artistic endeavors. Juan, the carpenter, a Jewish character in the novel whose family has been in the service of the Banu Hudayl for ages, has been assigned to carve a chess set. Some six years ago, Juan's father was "charged with apostasy and died in prison during torture where his fingers had been snapped off each hand" (Ali, 1992, p. 3). Umar had commissioned Juan to carve a chess set for his younger son Yazid's tenth birthday. Juan adopts artistic creation to take revenge, and "the design of the chess-set was only a beginning" (p. 3). The chessboard is divided into opposing cultures, with historical personalities from Islamic and Christian cultures caricatured as deformed chess statuettes. Ferdinand is chiseled with a portable crown that could easily be lifted. In case this symbolism was not adequate, the iconoclastic carpenter

<sup>4</sup> A group of bandits who follow the teachings of Abu al-Ala al-Ma'ari (973-1057). A blind Arab philosopher, poet, and the author of *Resalat Al-Ghufran* (The Epistle of Forgiveness). He is considered one of the greatest classical poets of the Arab world.



provides Ferdinand with a “tiny pair of horns,” and Isabella’s “lips were painted the color of blood” a ring on her finger displayed a “painted skull” (p. 2). Such semiotic transformation of Christian historical figures extended to knights and inquisition monks signifies disobedience to an imposed culture. The Moors had been assigned a white color. These romantic pieces, such as the queen was ‘a noble beauty with a mantilla’, and the Moorish knights were “representations of Yazid’s great-grandfather, the warrior Ibn Farid, whose legendary adventures in love and war dominated the culture of this particular family” (p. 2). The chess pieces carved as Muslims are depicted as beautiful and white. The pieces representing the Christians are grotesque figures that emphasize the opposition between the colonizer and the colonized.

Ali’s presentation of artistic creativity as a form of resistance is not limited to male characters; females also use such tactics to combat the imposed culture. The female characters are depicted as powerful and assertive, such as Ibn Farid’s daughter Zahra. She is presented as an influential Muslim woman who views religion as purely conventional and emotional rather than spiritual. Zahra, in the *Maristan* (asylum) of Gharnata (Granada), has “concentrated on the three or four good years of her life—these she would relieve and even put down on paper” (Ali, 1992, p. 157). Nevertheless, before returning to al-Hudayl, she destroys her diary, which was the written account of the experiences of the colonizers’ torture in the *Maristan*.

Zahra does transform herself into the fictive “Other” and enables a narcissistic reflection of the ‘Self,’ which resonates with the burning of the books at the beginning of the novel. This testimony, in the form of diaries, “articulates the in-articulatable” and appears as a counter-narrative carrying to the front the “inexplicable, ambivalent and paradoxical horrors of violence” (Saint, 2010, p. 23). Zahra’s memoir of her life written in the *Maristan* opens the ground to counter-strategic potentials that do not contribute to the official Eurocentric history. Nevertheless, it reminisces the histories that are forgotten. Such a strategy supplementarily helps to highlight the alternative historiography of the marginal, the exiled, and the outcast.

*SPT* lays bare an intricate understanding of Eurocentric historiography by uncovering the gloomy legacies of the Western colonization of Moorish Spain. Jopi Nyman states that “to understand Europe is to understand the intertwined histories between it and its others and recognize the various cultural and historical layers of Europe that are often forgotten and to see it as a transcultural construct” (2013, p. 235). Ali’s emphasis on diverse historical events of the societal problems of agency and determinism applies to all the novels in Islam Quintet. According to Robyn Creswell, “Each of Ali’s novels recounts a turning point in Muslim history, when a cosmopolitan but predominantly Islamic culture is on the verge of collapse or defeat” (2010, para. 8). In *SPT*, Wajid al-Zindiq is portrayed as the leading advocate of rationality who

lives in a cave on the outskirts of al-Hudayl. The role of the basic reporter played by al-Zindiq highlights the significance of the common people in Ali's alternative histories. He plays the postcolonial trickster, an iconoclast who offers the most scathing satire on the basic frailties of al-Andalus: "Our defeats are as a result of our failure to preserve the unity of Al-Andalus. We let the caliphate collapse and, in its place, we let poisonous weeds grow, till they had covered each of our garden" (Ali, 1992, p. 142). Another character, Ama, an older wet nurse in Umar's family, is a uniting figure who is familiar with the predicament of the Andalusians and manages the troubles logically. The novel begins with her critical statement: "If things go on like this, nothing would be left of us fragrant memories" (p. 1). On another occasion, Ama condenses all these shortcomings, frustrations, and lack of solidarity in one person, Zubayda, Umar's wife:

She regarded the lady of the manor as over-indulgent to her daughters, over generous to the peasants who worked on the estate, over-lenient to the servants and their vices, and indifferent to the practices of their faith ... Zubayda was equally entertained by the thought that the frailties of al-Andalusian Islam were symbolized in her person. (Ali, 1992, p. 13)

As a result of the factionalism and divided politics in Andalusian culture, the notion of a single monolithic Muslim community has become a myth. It happens "because the self-styled defenders of the faith quarreled among themselves,

killed each other, and proved incapable of uniting against the Christians" (p. 34), which eventually led to the alienation and powerlessness of the community. The victimized communities felt estranged and perplexed, unaware of how to resist the ways of oppression in which they were oppressed by innumerable practices of discrimination and fundamentalism-driven violence through countless "cycles of hatred" (Mander, 2002, p. 104) from Ferdinand and Isabella's unification of Catholic Spain.

Western defenders of the faith programmed the dominance of European culture and created hierarchies between the Muslim and Jewish minorities. Cisneros plays a vital role in propagating Western colonization. Cisneros, through his honeyed words, propagates aggression, gives justification for pillage, attempts "to wipe out their traditions," and shows keen interest "to destroy their culture without giving them ours" (Fanon, 1961/1963, p. 15). Miguel, a converso, is adamant about converting his relatives to Christianity. This power projection leads colonial subjects to lose agency and become weak. Ali (1992) reconstructs the "Other" history to restructure the multiple performing experiences of the marginalized. He keeps them together in a dissident confrontational setting so that "others must be recognized in the fullness of their traditions and indigenous subjectivities, which are denied in the discourse of imperialism and oppression" (Dirlik, 1999, p. 22). The mass struggle in Ali's novels embodies the future agency of

Muslim and Jewish minorities in response to imperialist desires for consumerism and mercantilism. These societies are often associated with the unitary assumption of collectivity; in the novels, they are reimagined as cognizant human subject-agents capable of “purposeful action” and “self-determination” (O’Hanlon, 2000, p. 80). These marginalized and oppressed classes struggle to articulate their cultural past stifled in colonial history and trigger a crisis in Eurocentric historiography.

### **The Crisis of Eurocentric History as a Representation**

The question of representation plays a prominent role in postcolonial literature and the possible potential of the postcolonial agency. Agency, in postcolonial theory, refers to the “ability of postcolonial subjects to initiate action in engaging or resisting imperial power” (Ashcroft et al., 2007, p. 9). The postcolonial agency is concerned with offering a voice to individuals who have been excluded from historical representation and are subject to violence, prejudice, and exploitation. Eurocentric representations are either distorting or manipulative or favoring their political establishment. Such representations of the Muslim and Jewish minorities by their colonial masters should be entirely rejected since they are based on bigotry and European supremacy principles. *BS* examines how these marginalized communities received those representations and their circulation. These individuals confront such orientalized representations, bringing them to a situational and political

crisis. According to Heinrich Pierer, a crisis is “a rapid change from one condition to another, change in someone’s circumstances: critical moment or critical case” (quoted in Reinhart & Richter, 2006, p. 366). We use the term ‘crisis’ to record critical situations that indicate a historically immanent transitional phase in which decisions have momentous consequences. Ali’s portrayal of the agency of oppressed minorities catapults the Eurocentric representation into a state of crisis through “the collective practical activity of the people who struggle against their reduction to objectified commodities” (Memos, 2017, p. 122). Ali, a non-Western author located in the West, is acquainted with how “Western representations might have been received, accepted, modified, challenged, overthrown or reproduced by the intelligentsia of the colonized countries” (Ahmad, 1994, p. 172). Ali (1992) addresses resistance within the West and opens to counter-hegemonic thought, thus making every Eurocentric representation imperialist, racist, and monolithically ethnocentric.

*BS* portrays the victory of Muslims through the conquest of Jerusalem. Saladin, the protagonist, is the liberator of Jerusalem, which was invaded and forcibly held by Christians during the First Crusade in 1099, resulting in the horrible massacre of Muslims and Jews. Saladin makes his scribe remember how the crusaders “wished to wipe out the past and to rewrite the future of al-Kuds” (Ali, 1998, p. 33). He ensures that his “people will soon return to al-Kuds” (p. 33). After a century, Saladin rises to power “to create a landscape of

perfect visibility” (Anderson, 2006, pp. 184-185) with a historical overview of his Battle to recapture Jerusalem from the *Franj* (Western Crusaders) soldiers. Ali rewrites Eurocentric history by emphasizing Salah al-Din and showing the Crusade from an insider’s perspective by providing a Jewish narrator who observes and experiences all the events from Cairo to Damascus to Palestine.

Ali’s new dimension in postcolonial writing is to highlight the historical context of the conquest of Jerusalem. This contextual particularity helps reaffirm postcolonial agency to recreate the lost history and identity “which have been discursively articulated in history” (Prakash, 1990, p. 384). Ali’s rewriting of the Muslim/Christian encounter in Moorish Spain and Jerusalem can be regarded as an agenda to challenge both the imperial and religious extremism of the Christian West by building “a space in the world of Islam and the West in which freedom of thought and imagination can be defended without fear of persecution or death” (Ali, 2003, p. ix). Ali’s historical narratives are rewritten accounts of Eurocentric history, which depict the tolerant coexistence of Muslims and Jews in Jerusalem and Moorish Spain. These narratives can also be read against the background of the current conflict between Israel and the rest of the countries in the Middle East region.

In contrast to their Eurocentric misrepresentations, Ali (1998) portrays Islamic civilization as the most advanced socio-political culture. He portrays

Muslims as more sophisticated, open-minded, and sexually nonconformist than Christians, whom he portrays as aggressive, discriminatory, and intellectually inferior. One of the famous historians, Paul Cobb, recounts that “to medieval Muslim eyes, Western Europe was superficially impoverished, one might even say ‘developing’ region on the margins of the world. It was inhabited by a fanatical, war-like people, adherents of a backward creed” (2014, p. 19). Ali makes Saladin dictate to his scribe, “if we did not succeed in civilizing the lands of the *Franj*, the fault is ours alone. It was a human error that prevented us from educating and circumcising the *Franj*” (Ali, 1998, p. 34). Such anti-Eurocentric statements serve as a strategy to counter the self-appointed paternalistic duty of colonizers to a crisis. He rewrites colonial history and problematizes the Eurocentric discourse on Islamophobia. He, therefore, deliberately presents a peaceful relationship between Muslims and Jews and tries to strengthen the Judo-Islamic tradition.

Methodologically, Ali adopts reiterative textual responses as a fundamental and oppositional strategy that “involves the figurative invocation of colonialist notions of history ... and the juxtaposition of the imperialist pretext with a dis/placive historical narrative” (Slemon, 1990, p. 4). Eurocentrism canonizes history as a linear account. However, Ali engages in a heterogeneous non-linear, and repetitive structure. As a scribe, Ibn Yakub not only writes the life events of Saladin but also interviews other members of his family,

including his friend Shadhi and wife, Jamila, thus retains a referential relationship to minor characters. Claire Chambers observes that the scribe portrays other successful characters such as “Halima and Jamila, intelligent, skeptical women who meet and begin a sexual relationship in Salah al-Din’s harem” (2011, p. 38). Saladin is not only portrayed as the strongest hero and liberator but also as the novel’s imperfect protagonist, who has his flaws and strengths. We have the picture of a cynical man about his wives and workers. Ali even exposes certain libidinal encounters of Saladin through Shadi, which is evident from the following lines, “that sorceress mounted our boy and taught him what it was like to be a man ... There underneath the clear blue sky, under the gaze of Allah in his heaven, they were behaving like animals” (1998, p. 50). Later, Saladin confesses this relation to his scribe and says that “she was a woman some ten years older than me, possibly more. She gave me great pleasure and taught me how to enjoy a woman’s body” (p. 71). Through the multiple voices in the novel, the public and private life of Saladin ultimately appears as a well-balanced and more believable character in the novel.

The plot of *SPT* centers on the challenges of the agency of the inhabitants of al-Hudayl, who are victims of Cisneros’ violence and injustice. It begins with the barbarous burning of the books in which “everything written in Arabic was confiscated” (Ali, 1992, p. x). In *SPT*, whether to convert to Christianity or to leave the Iberian Peninsula compels Zahra

to burn her autobiography. By doing so, she remains outside history or the process of writing history. Unlike Zahra, Jamila in *BS*, whose radical thoughts to be inscribed by Ibn Yakub alongside the history of Saladin, contends not to destroy her writings. She says, “I wish to die where I was born. Till that day arrives, I will continue to transfer my thoughts to paper. I have no intention of destroying this manuscript” (Ali, 1998, p. 362). Ali implicitly describes Muslims as upholding values about gender equality and sexual harmony. The powerful Orientalists’ myths about the Arab and Muslim world are a hotbed of repressed sexuality, which Ali contravenes and counters by depictions of happy and sexually liberated Muslims. The author rebuts the popular image of a monolithic Islam in which Muslim women are viewed as victims of male oppression and brings such representations to a crisis. These narratives highlight the predicament of minority figures to create alternative spaces to mirror, interrogate and challenge the subversive strategies of Eurocentrism. Thus, literary writing takes on the dimensions of history by providing a fictitious chance to the “Other” and calls for a world free of hatred and violence.

Ali (1992) identifies himself with the forgotten or silenced histories to unfold the oppositional alternative histories and bring dominant Eurocentric historiography to a crisis. Zuhayr, familiar with the tragic stories of his ancestors and other minority communities, draws a meaningful connection between their experiences and the institutionalized hostility towards

Muslims and Jews. Indeed, to resolve the isolation and perceptual distortions (due to colonialism and religious prejudices), he tackles the past and distorts composite Western cultural memory. He frequently visits the cave of al-Zindiq, where he connects with the past and the wisdom of lesser-known Muslim scholars such as Ibn Quzman, Ibn Rushd, and Ibn Khaldun.<sup>5</sup> The memories, such as the genocide of the Jews and Muslims during the crusades, and their expulsion from Spain, followed by European conquests, are disturbing and relate to racial violence. Such experiences foreground marginal perspectives and “create a rupture in the linear and progressive time of modernity” (Mohammad, 2017, p. 322). The communal agency of minorities has been stressed in both novels by portraying collective opposition. In *SPT*, the mass struggle of al-Hudayl, in which “weavers and rhetoricians, true believers and false prophets, men and women, they had fought together” (Ali, 1992, p. 264) against the imposing colonial authority. Such resistance represents the postcolonial agency of Muslim and Jewish minorities to maintain their local culture. In this regard, Ahmed Gamal rightly opines that “the rewriting of colonial historical discourse is a fundamental feature of postcolonial

metafictions” (2017, p. 47). Thus, the description of the collapse of Islam in Spain in *SPT* is followed by the rise of Saladin and the taking of Jerusalem from the Crusaders. Their return to Jerusalem impedes the expulsion of Muslim and Jewish minorities in Andalusia. When we relate the events in Islam Quintet to the current situation in different places in the Middle East, we see how history repeats itself. It is apt to quote Reed Dasenbrock, who says:

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. (Dasenbrock, 2008, p. 15)

However, this depiction of a tradition of tolerance is one of the most critical aspects of Ali’s agency and the act of rewriting the “Other.” It goes against the well-established scheme of colonialism based on the model of European supremacy. Ali employs a thorough deconstructive approach, reversing the oppositions and displacing them completely.

## CONCLUSION

To conclude, we find that Tariq Ali’s novels deconstruct the Eurocentric representation of Muslim and Jewish minorities through the postcolonial agency. Postcolonial inversions of imperial formations in these novels are deliberately subjective. They reverse the less dominant to become the dominant order and question the mythic foundation of the ontological and epistemological systems

5 Ibn Khaldun (1332-1406), the Arab Social scientist, historian, philosopher, and writer of *The Muqadimmab* (An Introduction to History); Muhammad Ibn Ahmad Ibn Rushd (1129–1198), one of the greatest Muslim thinkers, whom the Christians of Europe known as Averroes. He was the author of *Al-Kashf’an Manahij al-Adillah* (Exposition of the Methods of Proof) 1179; Ibn Quzman (1087–1160) was one of the most prominent poets in the history of al-Andalus.



of the West. Rewriting the Eurocentric rhetoric regarding the Muslim world as “Other” interrupts the presumption of an irreducible deviation between the West and Islam or the “Self” and the “Other.” As responses to threats posed to the survival of minorities (Jews and Muslims), these works emerge as counter-narratives at two levels. First, these novels unravel and resist the politics of silence embedded in Eurocentric discourses. This silence speaks of suppression, a sense of evasion, an absence of guilt, or a lack of repentance. Secondly, by highlighting the predicament of the minorities, these narratives create alternative spaces to mirror, interrogate and challenge Eurocentric representations. Ali’s ability to write the history of other societies and cultures depicts them differently, revealing that only the Eurocentric representation makes them seem violent. He is successful at compassionately portraying the troubled psyche of those who have been universally demonized. Literary writing takes on the dimensions of historiography by offering the “Other” a fictitious opportunity. That being so, this analysis of Ali’s *Shadows of the Pomegranate Tree* and *The Book of Saladin* as multicultural novels delineates the effects of only one-sided Eurocentric historiography.

### ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The authors are incredibly grateful to the editorial team and the two anonymous reviewers for their observations and comments that have enriched this article. We also express our gratitude to the Ministry

of Human Resource Development, Govt. of India, for funding this research.

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