Rewriting Strategies in Tariq Ali's
Post-Colonial Metafiction

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Abstract

The aim of this paper is to study some of Tariq Ali's metafictional strategies of rewriting the authoritative discourse of colonial history, including the rewriting of the document, the other, the subaltern, and the colonial language. The paper hypothesises that metafiction can function as an efficacious post-colonial act of rewriting and hence recuperating the history of the colonised. Post-colonial metafiction is hence defined as a narrative mode that accommodates the self-questioning ambiance of the postmodern and the politicised stance of the post-colonial. To demonstrate this I will focus on two particular historiographic narratives: Tariq Ali's *Shadows of the Pomegranate Tree* (1992) and *The Book of Saladin* (1998).

استراتيجيات إعادة الكتابة فى قصص القص للاستعمار فى روايات طارق على

أحمد جمال

ملخص

يهدف البحث إلى دراسة بعض الاستراتيجيات التى يستخدمها الروائى الباكستانى طارق على فى رواياته التى تتناول السرد والقص لإعادة كتابة الخطاب التاريخى الاستعمارى؛ وهى تشمل استراتيجيات إعادة كتابة الوثيقة والآخر والتابع واللغة الاستعمارية. ويقوم البحث على فرضية نظرية مؤداها أن قصص القص أو القصص التى تتناول وصف عمليات القص يمكن أن توظف كفعل مؤثر فى مناهضة الاستعمار بإعادة كتابة تاريخ المستعمَرين وبالتالى استعادته. وبناء عليه يعرف البحث قصص القص المناهضة للاستعمار بوصفها طريقة سردية تتحرى الروح التنقيحية لتوجهات ما بعد الحداثة وأيضا الطابع السياسى للتوجه المناهض للاستعمار. ولتحقيق أهداف البحث يتناول الباحث بالتحليل نصين سرديين تاريخيين، هما رواية (ظلال شجرة الرمان) (1992) ورواية (كتاب صلاح الدين) (1998).

Although a great deal of research has been done on metafiction, very little has been written on its post-colonial subgenre. Therefore, the aim of this paper is to study some of Tariq Ali's metafictional strategies of rewriting the authoritative discourse of colonial history, including the rewriting of the document, the other, the subaltern, and the colonial language. The paper hypothesizes that metafiction can function as an efficacious post-colonial act of rewriting and hence recuperating the history of the colonized. Post-colonial metafiction is hence defined as a narrative mode that accommodates the self-questioning ambiance of the postmodern and the politicized stance of the post-colonial. To demonstrate this I will focus on two particular historiographic narratives sharing the same context: Tariq Ali's *Shadows of the Pomegranate Tree* (*SPT*) (1992) and *The Book of Saladin* (*BS*) (1998) (set in the historical encounters of Arabs and Europeans during the final years of the Reconquest of Moorish Spain and the Third Crusade). I will also read some of these rewriting strategies in relation to the poetics of classical Islamic historiography.

What is post-colonial metafiction?

Any discussion of post-colonial metafiction today must pay attention to what has become known globally as the postmodernism and postcolonialism debate. Metafiction, the most reflexive mode of the postmodern novel, is markedly criticized for its turn toward textuality and turning away from history. According to Linda Hutcheon, metafiction is "fiction about fiction - that is, fiction that includes within itself a commentary on its own narrative and/or linguistic identity" (*Narcissistic Narrative* 1), and is thus generally discredited for betraying empty formalism and ahistoricism. The upshot of this obscurantist mode of reflexivity is represented in "the patently postmodernist way of debunking *all* efforts to speak of origins, collectivities, determinate historical projects" (Ahmad 38). Post-colonial metafiction can, nevertheless, contest this historical-fictional dichotomy by attempting to rewrite the textual constructions of native subjectivity with regard to its historical and cultural origins. Such

post-colonial attitude relies on the reconfiguration of the question of reference. In other words, the direct relation between narrativity and historicity can be reformulated in accordance with the insight that both history and fiction are systems of signification producing signs that function as referents. Hayden White notes:

> Recent theories of discourse … dissolve the distinction between realistic and fictional discourses based on the assumption of an ontological difference between their respective referents, real and imaginary, in favor of stressing their common aspect as semiological apparatuses that produce meanings by the systematic substitution of signifieds (conceptual contents) for the extra-discursive entities that serve as their referents. (x)

The conflation of metafictive reflexivity with documentary data in what Hutcheon calls 'historiographic metafiction' is what affirms their constitution as discourse. "Paradoxically this emphasis on what at first may appear to be a kind discursive narcissism is actually what connects the fictional to the historical in a more material sense." (Hutcheon, *Poetics of Postmodernism* 142) This postmodernist interrogation of the factuality and centrality of meaning and reference was matched by new developments in post-colonial historiography that forced a reconsideration of the problem of representation of the subaltern masses in colonial South Asia. The *Subaltern Studies* series is a typical project of rewriting: a rewriting of the political history of the Indian nationalist movement, dominated as it had been by colonialist elitism and bourgeois-nationalist elitism. That is why, according to such new revisionist historiography and contrary to both colonialist and nationalist historiographies, neither the efforts of the Indian elite groups nor those of the Congress leadership "to arouse an all-embracing nationalist consciousness among the entire people can explain the dynamics of the involvement of the peasantry in anti-colonial movements" (Chatterjee 9). As a process of cognition, post-colonial metafiction, therefore, shares the interrogative rhetoric of the postmodern and the historically revisionist mode of the post-colonial.

Like Latin American historically located magic realism, post-

colonial metafiction is a mode of perception grounded in the political and historical formation of Third World. Conceptualized as a nationalist, Third-Worldist genre, post-colonial metafiction has lately been used by postcolonial novelists to engage the politics of rewriting the history of their Middle Eastern and South Asian societies. Rewriting the history of an imagined nation in relation to Western modernity is a recurrent motif in postcolonial Arabic and Indian novels. An Arabic novel such as Ahdaf Soueif's *The Map of Love* (1999) is characterized by "its manipulation of historical material and detail to vindicate the Egyptian and, somewhat, the Arab national cause against colonialist legacy, which is still actively surging in times of trouble to serve the interests of the neo-imperial order" (Al-Musawi 62). Indian novels in English can be bracketed with Arabic novels with regard to their common interest in revisiting and rewriting Indian history and texts. The term 'post-colonial metafiction' was used by Brennan to describe Rushdie's *Midnight Children* as a novel "about Third-World novels" (85). It is worth noting that this self-conscious focus on textuality and narrativity is not alien to Hindu and Arab classics, from the tales of Rama and the Avatars of Vishnu to those of Scheherazade and jinns. Ali's forms of narrativization are typically Arabic in their interminable, digressive form, essentially derived from *The Thousand and One Nights*. Furthermore, the growth towards indigenousness in such reflexive novels is embodied in a thematization of history and a syncretic model of hybridity. A hybrid, multi-generic mode such as post-colonial metafiction is thereby entitled to articulate the polarized categories of post-colonial Third World identity and history. Ali's gallery of diasporic Arabs, Jews and Europeans in his historical narratives reveals the heterogeneous historical sedimentation of contemporary Middle Eastern society that results from the physical coexistence of different ethnic groups (Arab, African, Asian, European), each laden with its respective cultural freight of myth, tradition, fundamentalism, Western rationalism, Judaism, Christianity and Islam.

In searching for new dimensions for post-colonial theory and writing, the historical context of literary works must be highlighted. The particularity of historical contexts helps reaffirm the post-colonial

project's agency as a recuperation of lost histories and identities. To avoid essentializing Third World history, Prakash prefers to "treat the third world as a variety of shifting positions which have been discursively articulated in history" (384). In other words, such discursive articulation must be associated with the specificities of context and authorial intentions. As a post-colonial writer, Tariq Ali (1943-) is representative of the New Leftist migrant intellectual who is a British-Pakistani historian and novelist. Ali's Islam Quintet, which records the most traumatic clash of the Empire and its Arab others in the Middle East, must be placed within the historical context of the imperial 1991 Gulf War. His rewriting of the history of the East-West encounters in Moorish Spain and the Crusades is predicated on the belief in a double agenda that can oppose the religious fundamentalism of the East and the imperial fundamentalism of the West by creating "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" (*Clash of Fundamentalisms* XI-3). In a recent study, Klaus Stierstorfer classifies Ali's historical narratives as a metafictional rewriting of Eurocentric history (153). However, such rewritten account of the tolerant co-existence of Jews and Muslims in Moorish Spain and twelfth-century Jerusalem must be read against the background of the present Israeli-Arab wars, whereas the narrative foregrounding of gender has to be associated to the twentieth century women's emancipation movements in the Arab world and South Asia. The cult of Saladin and Arab solidarity might be read according to modern Pan-Arabism and Nasser's dream of uniting Arab republics.

Methodologically, the rewriting of colonial texts and histories is idiosyncratic of post-colonial metafiction and other forms of post-colonial writing. On the one hand, Stephen Slemon writes that "reiterative textual responses" are a fundamental oppositional strategy of post-colonial writing, the basic type of which "involves the figurative invocation of colonialist notions of "history"… and the juxtaposition of the imperialist "pretext" with a dis/placive "historical" narrative" (4). As an episteme, history has been canonized in the West as a linear chronology, which pertains only to the colonizer, and it is hence an imperative that post-colonial writers

rewrite their marginalised history and engage the heterogeneous non-linear forms of historical representation. Thus, on the level of plot in Ali's narratives, a circular, repetitive structure is immanent in all real and imagined events. On the other hand, what distinguishes post-colonial metafiction from the merely deconstructive modes of the postmodern historiographic metafiction is its recuperation of its culture-specific context. Slemon argues that post-colonial writing adopts a parodic repetition of the imperial forms of textuality, but unlike postmodern fiction, postcolonial works remain basically oppositional and retain a "referential" or "recuperative" relationship to local culture (7-9). Helen Tiffin singles out the reversion of colonial stereotypes and otherness and the prioritization of native language and orality as the main strategies of the processes of postcolonized recovery and reinscription of colonial pre-texts (209-30). Post-colonial metafiction can thus be defined as that self-conscious fiction that has a dual agenda of contesting and deconstructing colonial textuality and stereotypes and simultaneously recuperating and reconstructing native agency and language. To put this definition into practice, the critical analysis of otherness and colonial language draws on Tiffin's above-mentioned notion of reinscription. This paper, nevertheless, takes a step further by attempting to shed light on the strategies of rewriting the document and the subaltern as basic transformative modes of post-colonial metafiction. Both historiographic metafiction and post-colonial metafiction draw on the concept of the document and the archive as text as theorized by Hutcheon. The category of the subaltern is drawn in accordance with the *Subaltern Studies* rendition of the mass resistance of Indian peasant rebels.

To sum up, post-colonial metafiction is that type of reflexive fiction that fundamentally espouses non-mimetic narrative strategies usually embraced by indigenous literary texts to engage with the problematics of writing about Third World history from a post-colonial perspective. Post-colonial metafiction could be said to have two major characteristics: 1) the deconstructive interrogation of the factuality of colonial history, document, and otherness; 2) the reconstructive mode of recuperation of native, subaltern agency and language. On these foundations we may argue that despite the

frequent equation of postcolonialism with postmodernism, as a reconstructive mode of cognition and transformation, postcolonialism constitutes a turn towards indigenousness via the reaffirmation of the agency of subaltern identity and language.

Rewriting the Document

The fetishization of the document is a foundational paradigm of modern Western historical thought. Such intellectual propensity is predicated on the subjugation of Western historical thought to the modern Industrialism of Western life. Western historical works have been basically devoted to "the 'assemblage' of raw materials - inscriptions, documents, and the like" (Toynbee 4). One point of departure for the rewriting of Western documentary historical texts in Ali is Ibn Khaldun's[1] concept of the double nature of historiography as both documentation and interpretation or "speculation and an attempt to get at the truth, subtle explanation of the causes and origins of existing things, and deep knowledge of the how and why of events" (5). Along with factual documentation, a historian is highly expected to apply the hermeneutic acts of selection, explanation, judgment and interpretation. To Dominik LaCapra, the documentary is located within the factual and empirical, whereas the "worklike" "involves dimensions of the text not reducible to the documentary, prominently including the roles of commitment, interpretation, and imagination" (30). Postcolonial metafiction attempts to incorporate and challenge such factual documentation by implicitly juxtaposing the documentary with the metafictional and explicitly problematizing the writing of history. Ali's metafiction, furthermore, rewrites the linearity of the colonial archive from an indigenous point of view.

The surface structure of Ali's two novels is framed in accordance with a document-like form that is inscribed within a style of truth claims. *SPT* is framed by an illustration, an Author's Note, a Prologue and an Epilogue. All these paratextual forms implicitly install both the factuality and fictionality of the primary texts. The Banu Hudayl family tree documentary illustration juxtaposes the fictional names of the family members and the built village that bore their name with the historical dates that relate the present in 1499 AD to the past of the

clan of Hassan al-Huadayl in 327 AH – 932 AD. The fictive nature of the Banu Hudayl characters subtracts from the verity of the positivist data of history and geography. Similarly, the "Prologue" and "Epilogue" are used to implicitly frame the entire structure of the novel in historical as well as fictional contexts. The Prologue incorporates referential statements that present a typically detailed scene description of the actual event of book burning in Granada that was initiated at early December in 1499. Referentiality in the Prologue is however undermined by the performative act of hermeneutic interpretation: Ximenes de Cisneros' alleged negation of any personal vendettas is debunked by the narrator as "not strictly true" (1-2).

In *BS*, the documentary frame of the narrative structure is similarly presented in the paratextual forms of a map, explanatory note and descriptive chapter headings. Despite the rooting of paratextual illustrations, subtitles, prefaces, epilogues and epigraphs in documentary reality, they are still presented as "created forms" (Hutcheon, *Politics of Postmodernism* 79). The documentary form of the map of the Near East in the late twelfth century is hence implicitly juxtaposed with the explanatory note that asserts the partly fictional and provisional nature of the history of the Crusades and Saladin. The significance of historical evidence is ironically contested by explicating interpretative and explanatory strategies: "Any fictional reconstruction of the life of a historical figure poses a problem for the writer. Should actual historical evidence be disregarded in the interests of a good story? I think not." (*BS* xiii) The fetishization of the archive is further parodied through the subdivision of the narrative into three parts, each one after a real city's name. Extensively descriptive chapter headings are similarly used to problematize the narrative claim to mimesis. The historical factuality of Saladin's military career, his rise to power in Egypt and Syria, his siege warfare and final capture of Jerusalem is placed in the chapter headings against the fictional world that operates within an erotic context of several 'stories' of harem, eunuchs, gay and straight love and rape. The dominant subjective presence of Saladin's scribe in the chapter headings through the strategies of ordering, assorting, varying, and qualifying, is simultaneously distinguished from the objective, annals-

like description of the battle of Hattin and Reconquest of Jerusalem. The contestation of the authority of history in both of Ali's narratives disrupts the binary of the colonizer and the colonized. Both the oppressor and oppressed, Spanish colonizers and Moors in the first narrative and Crusaders and Arabs in the second, are rendered as both factual and fictional, thus enabling the rewriting of their long history of miscegenation and syncretization as well as of collision and contradiction.

History as archival discourse is thematized as vulnerable and prone to revision and reconstruction in different historical versions and narrative situations. The two novels juxtapose different versions of the same historical events to undermine their imagined referentiality and to assert their salient textuality. In *SPT* two different accounts of Cisneros' Jewish origin are provided: one of denial by himself and another of assertion by Don Inigo. Two incongruous versions of al-Zindiq's paternal origin are similarly given by Umar and al-Zindiq himself. In *BS* Saladin's boyhood memories are repetitively provided by Saladin himself and Shadhi. When Saladin calls into question Ibn Yakub's method of inscribing heterogeneous versions of the same historical events, the scribe answers, "Your Majesty is talking about facts. I am talking about history" (*BS* 12). As Hutcheon points out, "Historiographic metafiction suggests that truth and falsity may indeed not be the right terms in which to discuss fiction." (*Poetics of Postmodernism* 109) The plurality of truth therefore paradoxically asserts the discursive structure of history and fiction and negates the true-or-false criterion in both.

History is furthermore interpellated through 'mise en abyme'. The historical figure of Saladin is ironically parodied in a fictional text within a text. The discursive construction of Saladin as a chivalrous, generous knight typically drawn in European historical and fictional narratives till the nineteenth century is juxtaposed with another that renders him ironic and unheroic. Ali draws on Western textual versions of "the Saladin legend that enabled the 19th century to create the concept of a superior warrior breed, wielders of damascened weapons as described in Lane-Poole's *Art of the Saracens*" and by

writers from Sir Walter Scott to Graham Shelby ([Jakeman](#) 55). Instead of artificially galvanizing the traditional medieval image into new life, Ali transposes that great, free and noble historical image into a subversive metafictional one through the literary device of mise en abyme. A miniature replica of Saladin's several fictional erotic adventures with women is produced in a carnivalesque shadow-play performed in public. Through dramatic metamorphosis, Saladin is transformed into a half-blind preacher who is "a barely disguised version of the Sultan" (*BS* 59). In relation to the other erotic scenes of the book, the shadow-play represents "a simple reduplication, in which the mirroring fragment has a relation of similitude with the whole that contains it" (Hutcheon, *Narcissistic Narrative* 55).

Formally, the provisionality of the document is underlined in shifting the narrative focus from history to the attempts of writing history. The bulk of the narrative is focused on texts and their writing processes. In *SPT* writing history is problematized as both creation and devastation or rise and decline. The 'story' (*histoire*) of the cataclysmic fall of Granada is initiated by an act of destruction, namely the barbarous burning of Arabic books. On the personal level, Zahra burns her autobiography or personal history on a tiny replica of the bonfire lit by Cisneros' soldiers; "It did not occur to her that in erasing what she regarded as the mummified memories of her own history she was also condemning a unique chronicle of a whole way of life to the obscurity of the flames." (*SPT* 140) She remains outside of history, outside, that is, of the writing-of-history. On the other hand, al-Zindiq dies, but his manuscript, which attempts to resolve the theological wars of Islam, eventually survives the demolition of al-Hudayl village. Finally, there is the 'story' (at the level of *narration* itself) of the progress of the "historical research" done by the grandson of Ibn Khaldun, Ibn Daud al-Misri, and intermitted by Cisneros' burning of books in the Bab al-Ramla on the same day he arrived.

By the same token, the 'story' (as both *histoire* and narration) of *BS* is concerned with the real history of Saladin's rise to power and recapture of Jerusalem as inscribed in a book by his Jewish scribe, Ibn Yakub. The climax of such story is marked by Ibn Yakub's critical

decision to stop writing Saladin's history. Ibn Yakub is then advised to resume his work in letters. The oral versus written transmission of Saladin's history by Ibn Yakub rewrites the homogeneity of orality and written records, commonly found in the early years of Islamic historiography and Tabari[2] as well (Osman 69). Second, there is another 'story' (at the level of *discours*) involving the personal lives that are touched by Saladin's history and are similarly inscribed in books, one of which focuses on inscribing the radical thought of Jamila, who, unlike Zahra, insists on never burning her book: "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. It will be left in a safe place, and it will be read by those who understand my quest for truth." (*BS* 362) The other history to be inscribed is that of the Jews, compiled by the fictitious character of Ibn Yakub. According to the plot, these two histories are to be completed after Saladin's official history will have been written.

In addition to rewriting the factuality of the document, Ali's post-colonial metafiction rewrites the linearity of the colonial documentary archive from an indigenous point of view. With regard to temporality and chronology, the notion of history invoked is that based on circularity and repetition. The historical model congenial with the traumatic and turbulent history of the Third World abides by the theory of the cyclical rise-and-fall of civilizations founded by Ibn Khaldun, Gibbon and Toynbee. "Ibn Khaldun," Robert Irwin observes, "like Gibbon, Volney and Toynbee himself, received his impulse to write his historical work from ruins." (466-467) As far as Ibn Khaldun's theory is concerned, Third World history is represented in *SPT* as punctuated by two forms of great devastating invasion and decline, one explored in the Prologue and the other in the Epilogue. In the first the grandeur of Arabic civilization is devastated by the Spanish Reconquest of Granada and in the second the civilization of the Aztec Empire in Mexico is damaged by Cortes and the military leaders of the Catholic kingdom of Spain. Repetition rather than progression is the rationale of the passage from one decline to another; the narrator records his observation of such recurrence: "Over the embers of one tragedy lurks the shadow of another." (*SPT* 5) On the

other hand, the rise of Saladin in *BS* is projected as a universal sign between the decline of the Fatimid dynasty and the Abbasid Caliphate and its revival in Ottoman Turkey. Hence the anachronistic depiction of the fall of Islam in Spain in the first novel of the Quintet is followed by the rise of Saladin and the taking of Jerusalem in the second. The withdrawal of Arabs in al-Andalus is therefore counteracted by their return to Jerusalem, and reversibly the withdrawal of Europeans from Jerusalem is counterbalanced by their return to Spain.

Rewriting the Other

The intellectual scheme of colonialism is predicated upon a paradigmatic model of similarities and differences. Hence the hierarchical structures that equate the self/same with excess of value and the different other with lack of value must be constructed as essentialistic. The challenge to these colonial stereotypes takes the form of three mechanisms in Ali's two novels: reversing oppositions, valorizing the other, and hybridizing self and other. Such subversive strategies are associated with what Gayatri Spivak describes as "[a] careful deconstructive method, displacing rather than only reversing oppositions" (*Postcolonial Reason* 244).

Contrary to the Western equation of Islam with danger or threat, it is the West that is associated with barbarity, doctrinairism and extremism. The barbarity consists in burning books and killing defeated enemies. Western historical figures are thus transformed into everyday objects to be viewed through the prism of subversive laughter. In *SPT* historical figures are ironically caricatured as deformed chess statuettes. To entertain Yazid Ibn Umar, Juan the carpenter carved a set of chess for his tenth birthday in the year 1500, mimicking Spanish historical figures. Generally, they are carved as black monsters; Ferdinand is sarcastically carved with a tiny pair of horns and Isabella's lips painted the colour of blood. Such semiotic transformation is extended to all Inquisition monks, and its potentialities for humour and caricature are therefore exploited in playful signs. Such semiotic demonization of the Spanish knights and monks signifies the refusal of a society to constitute itself through the recognition of the differential status of opposed groups.

On the other hand, Islamic culture, which has been generally constructed in the West as static, retrogressive and anti-modern, is presented through the prism of rational enlightenment as comprising a comprehensive world vision that consists of hygiene, diet and rituals as well as a sociopolitical system that is founded in rational management, social solidarity and egalitarian governance. In the intellectual domain, the Arab manuals of medicine, philosophy and astronomy that were exempted from burning by Cisneros travelled from al-Andalus and Sicily "to the rest of Europe and paved the way for the Renaissance" (*SPT* 2). In the political arena, Saladin denounces the hereditary principle or nepotism as the main cause of political disasters in the Umayyad and Abbasid Caliphates and as foreign to the foundational bases set by the first Caliphs who were chosen by the Companions of the Prophet, and endorses instead the principle of meritocracy through the establishment of an advisory "Council of the Wise" (*BS* 131) to determine succession and to be in control of decision making. Such political system is deeply rooted in the principle of 'consultation' and the model of the *'ulama'* and notables council, or 'those who bind and loose' *(ahl al-hall wa'l-'aqd)* (Hourani 92), in Islamic political thought, and which can function as equivalents to modern European political doctrines and institutions.

In opposition to the orientalist vision of the historical decay of Islamic culture and civilization as pre-destined, Ali defines such decline as due to the absence of solidarity and socio-political development. On the one hand, orientalist discourse defines decadence as fated and due to an innate mentality, where "the 'failure' of Islam is located within a broadly teleological conception of history in which the unfolding of Islam and its interruption are explained by reference to certain innate and ineradicable features of the 'Muslim mentality'" (Turner 67). On the other hand, Ali suggests through his mouthpiece, al-Zindiq, that solidarity, or the Islamic principle of '*asabiyyah* in Ibn Khaldun, is a typical modern principle that can empower communality. Al-Zindiq voices Ibn Khaldun's presupposition as the only strategy to combat the defeat and subjugation of Arabs in al-Andalus: Ibn Khaldun "would have argued that without a strong sense of social solidarity in the camp of the believers, there could be no

victory. It was the absence of this solidarity amongst the followers of the Prophet that led to the decline in al-Andalus" (*SPT* 85).

The other strategy of subverting colonial stereotypes is the valorizing of the other, represented by the female colonized. Oriental women have been generally falsified in the West as part of the inferior underworld of the harem. According to such bigoted vision, women occupy a despised and degraded position in the social and economic order of Islamic civilization. Leila Ahmed defines the harem "as a system that permits males sexual access to more than one female", a homosocial world that is usually associated with homosexuality, sexual laxity and immorality (524). Ali juxtaposes the private world of the harem to a more public one, where Muslim women are given an opportunity for resisting a system implacably opposed to their autonomy and independence. In *SPT* the social space of Umar's liberal house nurtures the free minds of Hind and her mother Zubayda in contrast to the other contented older sister Kulthum and the old woman servant Ama. Hind is represented as an iconoclast who is temperamentally wild and exuberant. She feels free to confess her love to Ibn Daud and to her mother. At the same time, her wild dissidence is iconoclastically directed against traditional theology. At the age of nine, she defiantly repudiates a theologian's debilitating patriarchal prescriptions denouncing every possible pastime in which Muslim nobles indulged as forbidden. Her stance is deeply informed by veneration for rational thought which is undercut by traditional theology; she affirms, "The worst thing in the world is ignorance. The preachers you seem to respect so much say that ignorance is a woman's passport to paradise." (*SPT* 164) Therefore, she emphatically rejects the social stereotype of Oriental women as irrational and erotic and compares her cousins' accounts of lecherous concubines to those of fallen women in brothels.

Gender and class are granted a central focus, as "[t]he paradox of the position of women and the working class," Toril Moi writes, "is that they are at one and the same time central and marginal(ized)." (171) They are marginalized because of their significant relations to the mode and process of production and reproduction in capitalist and

colonialist systems. Their connection is not however sentimentalized, as it takes the dialectic form of withdrawal-and-return. Zahra's love for Ibn Zaydun, the washerwoman's son, transgresses domestic and public patriarchy to end in loss of love, history and life. Zahra is metafictionally punished by being relegated to the classical position of the monstrous madwoman in the attic or the *maristan* (madhouse), only to be later released and transformed into an icon of withdrawal through the burning of her personal history and then dying. On the contrary, the withdrawal motif is transformed into positive return in the story of Hind, Zahra's niece, and Ibn Daud. Unlike Zahra who ends in failure and socially mistaken madness, Hind succeeds in endorsing her love and identity. She first manages to transgress Ibn Daud's past sexual preference for an Egyptian male friend and then defies domestic patriarchy by convincing her father Umar of the truthfulness of her love. The final survival of Hind and Ibn Daud, who are entrusted by the dwarf cook with the mission of critically revising al-Zindiq's papers and hence reviving the intellectual legacy of the waning Arab civilization in al-Andalus, signifies their future success. The final solution of the novel therefore consists in a balance of the masculine and feminine quest for truth.

In the author's words, women are assumed to be "a subject on which medieval history is usually silent" (*BS* xiv). Women are generally located in a fixed locus of sexuality in the harem. Halima is accordingly conceived as just a property by her husband, Kamil, and later, as a sex object by Saladin. Ali exposes the illogical nature of this sexual mode of thought by grounding his oppositional stance towards colonial society's stereotypes in feminine agency; it is only through her relationship to Jamila that Halima can be edified. Halima confirms, "It is Jamila who keeps our minds alive." (*BS* 94) Like Hind, Halima is quite aware of the gross discrepancy between the biological identity of women as sexual beings and their intellectual capacity as independent subjects; she commends Jamila for recognizing such difference and for speaking especially about women: "I was exhilarated when she started talking about us in a very bold way. Not us in the harem, but us women." (*BS* 94-5) From within such exclusively female space, women are portrayed as capable of

developing their intellectual and imaginative skills across class differences. Like Hind, Jamila's subjectivity as a public citizen is pinned down to her role as a heretic iconoclast. Jamila, one of the rationalist mouthpieces of the author, teaches other women in the harem Ibn Rushd's rationalist philosophy and his defence of women: "Ibn Rushd once remarked that if women were permitted to think and write and work, the lands of the Believers would be the strongest and richest in the world." (BS 126) According to Saladin, Jamila has become a temporary man or the typical figure of the forceful queen-wife because of her indefectible knowledge of the *hadith* (Prophetic Tradition). Women's participation in the field of *hadith* transmission has received sporadic attention at the hands of Western historians of the medieval Islamic world. Ignaz Goldziher is a founding figure in stressing the role of women in the *isnads* as authorities for *hadiths* in his observations about this phenomenon (366-8). Moreover, women are habitually identified with eunuchs in the harem. However, in contrast to the darker side of women, which is "the sphere of the exile and the eunuch" (Showalter 285), the traditional role of eunuchs as sexless is uninstalled through their sexual and political potential. Yaruktash, a typically ex-centric eunuch figure, conventionally represented as inherently obsequious and hardly better than barbarian, is positively reasserted as defying such subject position and killing the great Sultan Zengi out of his passion for a young soldier the Sultan used to "assuage his lust" (*BS* 32) rather than for mere penis envy or eunuch narcissism and masochism.

Hybridizing self and other is enacted through the notions of mixed genealogies and cultural dialogue and amicability. Ali undermines the distinction between Orient and Occident as dramatized in the al-Hudayls' Jewish-Christian-Muslim-Arab genealogy in *SPT* and in the unity of different religions and races under the banners of Saladin. *BS* is "designed to show that the peoples of the region, such as the Jews, Copts, and other "people of the book," share a common culture, and tolerance, and were united behind Saladin's liberation of Jerusalem" (King 245). The friendship between Ibn Farid and Don Alvaro and between Umar bin Abdallah and Don Inigo stresses the possibility of looking at the civilizing process as the universal triumph of human

species rather as the global spread of European civilization under the banner of modernity. Count Don Inigo declares to Umar, "My entourage consists of Jews and Moors. For me, a Granada without them is like a desert without an oasis." (*SPT* 68) Saladin similarly does not wish to assail Tyre to avoid killing his friend Raymond of Tripoli, who hides there in a citadel. Cultural exchange and conviviality are conceived as a prerequisite for progress and prosperity. In Ali's words, "The mix produced by the commingling of cultures during the Cordoba caliphate and the Arab occupation of Sicily left marks on the histories and geographies of both Islam and Europe." (*Clash of Fundamentalisms* 38)

Rewriting the Subaltern

Ali's post-colonial metafiction contests Western totalized history by attempting to inscribe the history of Arab peripheries from below, reconstituting their own particular forms of subjectivity, experience and agency and thus restoring them to history. The major strategy used is to reconstruct the multiple histories of the losers collectively and individually and relocate them along the matrix of dissident resistance. The ordinary life events of the subaltern are therefore juxtaposed with the extraordinary historical personages and events, generating an ontological dualism between historical actions and the happenings of life or between history proper and alternative histories. The resolution of that duality in Ali's two novels is found through the identification of history with various forms of subaltern existence. The category of the subaltern covers the historical experiences of workers, peasants and common people. According to the *Subaltern Studies* series, this category functions to recuperate the subaltern "as an agent, rather than as the helpless victim of impersonal forces, or the blind follower of others" (O'Hanlon 80).

The basic reporter role played by both al-Zindiq and Shadhi in the two novels highlights the significance of the common people in Ali's alternative histories. The main story-teller in *SPT* is al-Zindiq, a marginalized intellectual whose peripheral positionality towards al-Hudayl village and family allows him more freedom of thought and expression. To Zuhayr bin Umar, he represents the sceptic intellectual

who reveals the true history of the noble family of the Banu Hudayl and al-Andalus as well. He bluntly discloses the secrets of the Ibn Hasd's mixed origin, Ibn Farid's sexual discontent with his dead wife's sister, Maryam, and his final marriage to a Christian slave-girl. Al-Zindiq conforms to the role of the post-colonial trickster/shape shifter who is an iconoclast and breaker of traditions in opposition to the "dogmatic philosopher" (Spivak, *Outside Teaching Machine* 44). He offers the most scathing satire of the two basic frailties of al-Andalus: disunity and nostalgia. Al-Zindiq's critical interrogation of traditional politics and theology consists in an utter disillusionment with an Arab glorious past; "[i]nstead of looking to the future we Muslims have always turned to the past" (*SPT* 110). Though he dies at the end, his narrative is not concluded, because his intellectual influence dominates the future of the survivors through his writings.

In *BS* Shadhi is similarly used to decenter class barriers and power relations. Shadhi's subjectivity is constructed as an intrinsic part of Saladin's personal narrative. The unheeded but central role of the subaltern subject unfolds in parallelism to the imagined history of the centre. While Ibn Yakub writes the book of Saladin, Shadhi orally provides it with the forgotten fragments that comprise the secret history of the ruler's life. Shadhi foretells, "The memory of great men is always faulty. They forget their past so easily, but fortunately for you, my good scribe, Shadhi is still alive." (*BS* 51) Shadhi's role is moreover foregrounded through the authentic nature of his historical testimony. He presents his oral reports of Saladin's history as an eyewitness, one of the most reliable sources in Tabari. In his study of Tabari's numerous *turuq* (channels) to give accounts, Shoshan notes, "The eyewitness is undoubtedly the ideal reporter on detail as well as the unfolding scene, and his word is assumed to command respect. The seeing eye behind the spoken word is the safest medium to inscribe history 'as it really was'" (25). In the tenth volume of Ibn-al-Athir's *The Complete History* (*Al-Kamil fi al-Tarikh*), a basic medieval source of Saladin's history, there is no eyewitness to report the heated argument involving Saladin's family members concerning their plans to revolt against Sultan Nur Ed-Din (36). Quoting from Ibn-al-Athir verbatim, the narrative presents Shadhi as the only

eyewitness to recount such meeting and the following rebuke of Saladin by his father.

The collective agency of the subaltern is effectively highlighted at the end of the primary narratives. In *SPT* al-Hudayl's mass struggle against the Castilians represents the potential agency of semi-feudal Arab societies in the face of the colonial interests of consumerism and mercantilism that aim to destroy local culture. Confronted with the confiscation of their land and the erasure of their culture, the Moorish peasants, agricultural labourers and nobles prefer to resist than to convert to Christianity. All the subaltern classes unite to enunciate their collective history of resistance that is muffled in colonial and national elitist history; in the rural space of al-Hudayl, "[w]eavers and rhetoricians, true believers and false prophets, men and women, they had fought together and died in view of each other." (*SPT* 232) Instead of the passivity usually associated with the masses, they are reconstructed as conscious human subject-agents that are capable of "purposeful action" and "self-determination" (O'Hanlon 80). By the same token, in *Gharnata* (Granada) the lowest strata of the urban subproletariat, including tanners, tambourine makers, potters, and brick-makers, producers of antimony, forge an alliance and insurgency. Zuhayr wonders about such mass autonomy and agitation, "What had happened to incite a mass which, till yesterday, had seemed so passive?" (*SPT* 188) Moreover, violating the symbols of the dominant, women, veiled and unveiled, join the throng, handing out hundreds of tiny silver crescents to the children. In symbolic opposition to real or material acts of resistance, the crescent functions as a cultural symbol spotlighting "the importance of the violation of signs" (O'Hanlon 90) in the history of the subordinate. The primary narrative in *BS* similarly contests the traditional marginality of the masses. An image of an ideal state that highlights political and social solidarity, assimilating the contributions of all classes, sexes and religions to history, is drawn with regard to Saladin's empire that stretches from the Tigris to the Nile. Saladin's army expounds the ethos of solidarity and egalitarianism, as soldiers speak to emirs as equals without threatening the discipline of the army. The equal significance of the people to their ruler is spotlighted in Saladin's last

advice to his son to keep connected to his people and never to isolate himself from them. A sense of dignity and connectedness is thus always insisted on with regard to the common people.

Rewriting the Colonial Language

In opposition to colonial scenarios that homogenize culture, identity and language as one whole and attempts to prioritize the written over the oral, post-colonial metafiction seeks to articulate linguistic hybridity and variation by interconnecting the vernacular and oral along with the standard and written. As language is an unstable site of translation, post-colonial texts attempt to rewrite colonial target languages by reshaping their texts through the insertion of the cultural nuances of the source language. That is why Bill Ashcroft has recently remarked that both translation and transformation overlap "because the context of the post-colonial writer is profoundly transcultural: the postcolony is the archetypal contact zone" (159). Tariq Ali applies two metafictional strategies to rewrite Standard English: glossing and orality.

Glossing is both paratextual and textual. On the frontiers of the post-colonial text is located the Other in the form of an author's explanatory note or glossary. The culture specificity of Arabic proper nouns, common nouns and cultural and literary concepts is explained in the author's Note and Glossary in *SPT*. The specific affinity between Moorish Spain and the Arab World today is deftly marked through their common identification of men's public names by the name of their father or mother as Ibn farid, Ibn Khaldun or Zuhayr bin Umar and Asma bint Dorothea. However, the simple and reductive translation of the culture-specific concept of Jihad as "holy war" (*SPT* 242) withholds much of its religious and communal formulations that highlight internal endeavour to maintain faith and improve the Muslim community. Textual glossing is basically used within the text to explain some of the meaning of crafts which are particularly characteristic of Arab societies such as *al-Dabbagan* (tanners), *al-Fajjarin* (potters) and *al-Tawwabin* (brick-makers). In *BS* the culture-specific concept of al-Azl is explained by Jamila as "withdrawing at the critical moment and spilling his seed on my stomach" (123). The

Bedouins' mythical *udar*, which is "supposedly a monster who rapes men and leaves them to roast in the desert", is dismissed by Jamila as mere fabrication (*BS* 180).

Orality is broad and elastic, including everything from legends, proverbs to songs, poems, rituals and prayers. The novels themselves are made up of oral testimonies and reports which resist the Inquisition's burning of books in Granada and represent the basic sources of Saladin's written history. In contrast to the written text that ends in destruction, oral texts are to survive in the minds and hearts of the colonized. The collective oral recitation of Ibn Hazm's poetry about the survival of ideas converts a day of potential mourning and dismay into one of hope and solidarity after the burning of Arabic books in Granada: *"The paper ye may burn,/But what the paper holds ye cannot burn;/'tis safe within my breast."* (*SPT* 24) Oral Legends and fables signify ancestor and tradition veneration. The legendary figure of Ibn Farid represents the utopian model of Arab mythical chivalry and prowess. Such oral myths which are transmitted by successive generations help communicate the "history, traditions, morality, customs and values" of their societies (Ashcroft 126). In both hard times and good times the Koran is collectively or individually recited to reinforce social solidarity, perseverance and serenity. The proverbial mode is moreover stressed as characteristic of Arabic speech in particular. What Don Inigo remembers about Umar's grandfather is just a proverb, "When the eye does not see the heart cannot grieve." (*SPT* 67)

To sum up, the rewriting of colonial historical discourse is a fundamental feature of post-colonial metafiction. The study of the vast range of rewriting strategies in post-colonial literature should draw our attention to the potential of the aesthetic obsession with writing to resist and transform stable colonial totalities and identities. The questioning of the form of the archival document and the episteme of linear chronology functions as a discursive contestation of dominant paradigms of colonial historical knowledge. Rewriting the orientalist discourse on the otherness of the Arab World similarly disrupts the assumption of an irreducible, finalist divergence between self and

other or the West and Islam. The re-identification of history with various forms of subaltern classes is markedly indexed by such features as agency, subjectivity and authenticity. Finally, inserting the indigenous oral culture and language of the post-colonial writer in the English text rewrites the oral-literary binarism and translates difference into similarity.

Notes

1. 'Abdu r-Rahman, Ibn Khaldun (1332-1406), the North African philosopher-historian and author of *The Muqadimmah* (*An Introduction to History*).

2. Muhammad b. Garir al-Tabari (839-923), the author of the famous medieval *Ta'rikh al-rusul wa'l-muluk*, (*The History of Prophets and Kings*).

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