

## The Ushering Violence of the Modern Nation-State in Radwa Ashour's ثلاثية غرناطة [The Granada Trilogy]

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### Abstract:

Radwa Ashour's novel, ثلاثية غرناطة [The Granada Trilogy] subscribes to the recent trends of historiographic metafiction and magic realism. As the names indicate, history and the type of realism associated with it, occupies a center-stage position in the theoretical assumptions underpinning these two literary critical paradigms. The conflation between historical facts and fictional narratives emerges as their most characterising feature. Such resolve to dethrone history and bring it down its ivory tower to partake of literature's imagination and fictitious renderings of events belies a profound suspicion towards histories that intentionally discarded whole cultures and peoples from their narrative. Ashour's Granada Trilogy is an attempt at disclosing the inconsistencies that lie at the heart of history, which claims an essentially European authorship. It highlights the huge human and cultural cost that the rise of the Spanish nation-state engendered. Where official European history hails the year, 1492, as the date of discoveries, Ashour exposes the realities associated to it, which European history is oblivious of, namely, the ethnic cleansing of both the Arab Muslims in Granada and the Indians in the New World, the wiping out of an outstanding Andalusian culture, burnings at the stake of non-conformists and dissenters, to name only a few of the realities that European history dropped out from its self-congratulating and celebrating narrative. The present paper is an analysis of Ashour's novel that aims at bringing to light these obscured realities. It is an attempt at going deep down both the content and the form of the novel to see how the narrator's profuse investment in the historical metafiction narrative strategies aided her to weave a solid and authoritative counter-narrative that punctures many of the myths of the well-established, hegemonic, European one.

**Keywords:** historiographic metafiction, magic realism, Granada, the Arab Muslims, history.

## Introduction

Radwa Ashour's novel, *The Granada Trilogy*, can be said to belong to what Linda Hutcheon, in *A Poetics of Postmodernism*, calls "historiographic metafiction", which characterizes a worldwide trend in contemporary fiction. Although Ashour's trilogy, as an Arabic novel, may not lend itself to a straightforward generic classification following the western model, It enters in a direct conversation with the postmodern and postcolonial trend with which it is contemporaneous. With considerations of historical periodization set aside, the *Granada Trilogy* evinces all the characteristics of a historiographic metafiction novel. It is set in the context of the "proliferation of historical novels with more or less overt metafictional traits" that began in Britain in the late 1970s ( Onega 8). As Marina Warner said in 2001, "this impulse towards returning to the past, to a topos in the past and rewriting it has become highly characteristic of contemporary fiction, especially when its concerns are polemical: returning to the past, re-visioning it" ("Mappings" 5).

For Hutcheon, "historiographic metafiction" is the main form taken by the postmodern novel; her definition is close to what Robert Holton calls "resistance postmodernism". This is type of postmodernism that breaks away from the traditional mimetic / realist notions of referentiality and the overdue concern with form to an engagement with, and a deep commitment to, a cult of re-visioning and reappraising events in history that have developed an immunity against questioning because they belong to a European, official grand narrative. Historiographic metafiction thus seeks to shake established truths that have, traditionally, served as a smoke screen, hiding a large portion of reality. This trend of postmodernism consists of wedding history to fiction. According to Linda Hutcheon, "the term *postmodernism* when used in fiction ...should best be reserved to describe fiction that is at once metafictional *and* historical in its echos of the texts and contexts of the past" ("Historiographic" 3). Labeling this "paradoxical beast" (Mc Cormack, 2013) "historiographic metafiction", she draws a demarcation line between such postmodern texts and the traditional historical fiction, which is largely unconcerned with the consequences of its own artifice and often reproduces and sustains the sort of master narratives that historiographic metafiction seeks to subvert. Instead of one exclusive and exclusionary metanarrative, which came under fire with the advent of the postmodern age, Hutcheon points out to "smaller and multiple narratives which seek no universalizing stabilization or legitimation" (*The Politics* 24). Historiographic metafiction attempts to throw into question totalizing narratives through its self-reflexive "use[s] and abuse[s], install[at]ions and subver[s]ions, asser[tions] and deni[als]" of "the conventions of both fiction and historiography" ("Historiographic" 4-5).

Such blurring of lines between fiction and history springs from a deep-seated belief that history itself, for all the aura it enjoys, is first and foremost a narrative, and, therefore, can be rewritten from different perspectives, as it does not tell the whole story. Half-truths are that historiographic metafiction sets to question in an attempt to fill in gaps left, intentionally or inadvertently, widely open. To implement this goal, historiographic metafiction borrows from history evidence that renders the latter problematic at best. In its self-reflexive deconstruction of grand narratives of the past, historiographic metafiction would employ "a contradictory turning to the archive" (*The Politics* 77-83) while yet contesting its authority. Incorporating the intertexts and paratexts of history and history writing into fiction is one way of highlighting the fictive quality of all narratives, regardless of whether they are historical or

literary. It is also an opportunity to underscore the contrived and often biased nature of history writing, a fact that opens up a space for investigation. As Hutcheon herself remarks, this combination in historiographic metafiction of “an aggressive assertion of the historical” with “the social particularity of the fictive” draws attention “not to what *fits* the master narrative, but instead to the ex-centric, the marginal, the borderline---all that threaten the (illusory but comforting) security of the centred, totalizing, masterly discourses of our culture (*The Politics* 82-83). It is around this master statement of Hutcheon’s that Ashour’s *The Granada Trilogy* and Tariq Ali’s *Shadows of the pomegranate Tree* revolves.

Ashour is concerned with a period in the Arab Muslim history that is especially fraught: it is the history of Moriscos who, following the description of Hutcheons, stand for the ex-centric and the marginal, whose pasts have been largely silenced, erased, and narrated from the hegemonic center, or, in other words, misrepresented to serve the center’s purposes.

Ashour’s *The Granada Trilogy* claims a strong affiliation to the historiographical metafictional genre that translates the *zeitgeist* and lifts the veil from the intricate social and political relationships that affect the lives of communities. Like Nadine Gordimer, Ashour considers that the driving motive fueling her writing novels is a compelling need to “record”. Likewise, Gordimer emphasizes a kind of “witness literature” that grounds her body of writings.

The need to record implies the existence of a willful manipulation of facts that results in misleading the general opinion by way of disseminating distorted versions of history; thus, generating a biased discourse that ramifies well beyond the level of text. Ashour justifies the need to record as follows:

I am inclined to think that the need to record for the writers of my generation was also a response to a greater awareness of the constant threat of the word manipulation, what I would call ultra modern-germ warfare tactics. What we lived through and witnessed was denied and disfigured. Our collective memory was subjected to a double pressure; it was attacked from within and from without, with the kind of political language which Orwell once described as, “designed to make lies sound truthful and murder respectable, and give an appearance of solidity to pure wind”. (“Eye witness” 88)

Revisiting history, Ashour argues, enables us to correct several erroneous beliefs about the Self and the Other, which is a necessary step to come to terms with the modern world. Thomas Mann’s edict that “in our time the destiny of man presents its meaning in political terms” finds full accreditation in Ashour’s political commitment. Mann’s statement represents a postmodernist conviction shared by Michel Foucault, with his discursive formation and Pierre Bourdieu’s theory of power. These postmodernists’ distrust of grand narratives that go uncontested because they have acquired legitimacy has paved the ground for the development of historiographic metafiction, which seeks to problematize this legitimacy and offer alternative ways of approaching the historical archive.

In one of her articles, Ashour explains her involvement in politics, and how the latter impacted her way of writing, stressing that her engagement, just like any other person, was not a matter of choice. She singles out the 1967 Arab defeat as the real precursor of the revisionist tide that swept modern Arabic writing. She says:

The major formative influence has often been pointed out. In retrospect, I now realize that all my novels are attempts to cope with defeat...The events which preceded the June defeat and those which succeeded it made us particularly conscious that history was not out there in books and records of the past, but it was a living experience of our everyday life". ("Eye witness" 88)

Ashour's experiencing war deeply affected her writings. Her ultimate goal was to "record" and bring to light the "living experience" that history often keeps tight-lipped over. She wrote back to explain, argue, and disclose the truth. Together with other Arab contemporaneous writers; Najib Mahfouz, Emile Abibi, Allaa Deeb, Taher Wattar, Abderrahmane Munif, and others, Ashour "directly or indirectly assumed the role of a national recorder, half storyteller and half historian. They have been involved in recording aspects of their national history, both the historical present and the historical past." ("Eyewitness" 89). This obsession with recording is grounded in a feeling of defeat and a striving for reparation.

Seen from this perspective, The rise of the Arabic novel is exemplary of Frederic Jameson's concluding, along with Lukas, that "in our own time it is generally agreed that all novels are historical, in that in keeping faith with the present, their object is just as profoundly historical as any moment from the distant past"(350). Indeed, all novels are historical--and this is the very premise sustaining historiographic metafiction--since it is impossible to hermetically isolate the subject from what is going on around him politically. Ashour realized that the historical and the political could not be severed from people's lives. On this, she sounds both Weberian and Bourdieusian. The social is political, and the two can only go together.

Faithful to the spirit of historiographic metafiction, Ashour opts for representation instead of presentation, for magic realism instead of classic realism. Magic realism is particularly interesting in as much as it uses "fantasy, myth and archetype" as a "richer alternative to a realistic rationalism for recovering a people's lost identity" (Onega 59). The notion of magic realism brings to mind Micheal Taussig's "magic of the state", when the state is said to invent for itself a system of representations, to consolidate its rule by bestowing legitimacy on paradigms that are arbitrary at their very core. Magic realism starts from the same premise and questions, in a Bourdieusian and Foucauldian manner, the ordinary and the commonplace in an attempt to draw useful conclusions. This postmodern notion takes its cue in the writings of Lois Parkinson Zamora and Wendy B. Faris, for whom "politics collide with fantasy" (3). Zamora and Faris maintain that in magic realist texts, "the supernatural is an ordinary matter, an everyday occurrence", and "ontological disruption serves the purpose of political and cultural disruption" (3). The novel written in a historiographic metafiction mode shifts gears and moves from the general to the specific and from the extraordinary to the quotidian. Such purposive ontological disruption is necessary to bring about a sweeping change to a political and cultural setting perceived as corrupt and wrong.

Magic realism is situated at the heart of historiographic metafiction, which seeks to establish an alternative "order of things". If the order of things is an effect of mythical discourse, then a new discourse can remodel one's vision to reality. This new discourse leans heavily on what is labeled "postmodern ethics", with its suspicious attitude towards master narratives and its way of blaming them for the ethical degradation of the modern man. Unlike classic realism which focuses on an *is*, magic realism invests in an *ought*. Geoffrey Galt Harpham examines the *ought* that "centers all ethical discourse". He argues that "in ethical discourse, judgments

tend to issue from the future: the energies of the *ought* concentrate in promises, responsibilities, and commitments” (2). These responsibilities or “ethical obligations [s]” issue “directly from the encounter with [...] the other”( Harpham 2), and such encounter imposes responsibilities and claims rights.

### ***The Granada Trilogy and a Rewriting of History***

*The Granada Trilogy* provides an alternative reading of the order of things. The novel stakes several claims, demanding a total revisiting of the history of Arab Muslims in Southern Europe during the fifteenth century after the collapse of the Arab Muslim rule in Spain. Radwa Ashour lifts the veil from this critical era in the history of the Iberian Muslims with the view to expose the violence they were subjected to by the emerging first European imperial force: Catholic Spain. Ashour deconstructs traditional history to reveal another story, that of the silenced Arab Muslim Other. Ashour’s vocal message is that the encounter with the Other brings about with it an obligation to know and respect differences and honor ethical responsibilities. The first European emerging modern state, Christian Spain, as Ashour’s novel demonstrates, was a far remove from honoring its engagements in this regard.

By combining the narrative techniques of classic realism—the construction of a well-made plot, carefully delineated characters, and realism-enhancing narrative techniques, with the use of a polyphonic structure, pastiche, and irony to show how European history is but one version of a plural truth, the novel shows that the historical narrative is selective and subject to revision, as it is, invariably, linked to a socially constructed and legitimized authority. Both Max Weber’s and Pierre Bourdieu’s notions of authority find full shape and splendor in Ashour’s *Trilogy*. Power articulates all models of thinking and ways of life of a community that finds itself in a subordinated position. Discourse is a construct that dictates a specific order of things designed to be the rule. *The Granada Trilogy* challenges the official history by laying bare its artifice and rewriting it from the point of view of the silenced other. It aims at filling gaps putting order to the “episodic chaos” New Historicists associate modern History with. As Susana Onega explicitly remarks, “the contemporary creative writer becomes a historian in an attempt to fill in the gaps left by traditional totalitarian history” (16).

To revisit the past, Ashour grounds her novel in geographical, historical, and cultural reality, thus connecting her readers to the world outside the page. The novel is rooted in geographical space and time; the story is located in Granada, with references to other Andalusí cities like Balansia, Jian, and Malaga. The trilogy spans three generations, covering the period between the fall of Granada in 1492 up to the historical expulsion of Muslims from Spain in 1609.

Names and dates correspond to well-documented historical facts: the two viziers who entered in negotiations with Ferdinand and Isabella, when signing the rendition of the city of Granada; the Arab sultan Abu Abdullah, known by the Christians as Boabdil, lamenting his wretched fate; the sudden, inexplicable conversion of Musa bin Abi Ighassan, who was initially against the treaty; the volte-face of the Christians and their violation of the treaty; the notorious historical figure of the inquisition, Ximenes Cisneros, known for his hostility towards Muslims of Granada; the witch-hunt; the auto de fe; the Al-Pujarrat rebellion; and, finally, the expulsion.



The Geographic and natural features of the Iberian Peninsula are also recorded: the harsh cold of winter, the violent wind, the Channel and the Hadurra rivers, the Palm, the pomegranate and the olive trees, the Albaisin district; all of these and other features situates the reader well in time and place.

The main narrative thus rooted in space and time, is supposed to represent what “really happened”, to borrow Leopold Von Ranke’s slogan, that is, to capture the very essence of the historical events as they took place. Although Ashour gives voice primarily to the voiceless Muslims, we do hear echoes of the monological official discourse of the European Christians. These have a romantic vision of themselves as the agents of God and their King:

[...] a noble and lofty dream that can be epitomized in just two objectives: to spread the word of God among the people who have not received it and bring them into the fold of the church; and to ...unleash a holy crusade on the holy lands, liberate Jerusalem, and rescue the tomb of our Lord and Savior from the hands of those who do not believe in him. (Granara 166)

"حلم سام و نبيل يتلخص في هدفين جليلين لا ثالث لهما : أن ينشر كلمة الرب بين من لم تصل اليهم من قبل فيضمهم الى أحضان الكنيسة، و أن... يجرّد حملة صليبية الى الأراضي المقدسة تفتح القدس و تستعيد قبر السيد المسيح من أيدي من يكفرو نه. .. (Ashour 178).

For Europeans, non-Christians are heathen creatures and sorcerers. Saleema is depicted as a soft target of European superstition. Saleema, Abu Jaafar’s granddaughter, known for her devotion to books and learning, is accused of witchcraft and burned at the stake. *The Granada Trilogy* reflects upon the Spanish Europeans the image they project on the Arab Muslims. Scenes of gratuitous violence perpetrated in the New World betrays the real motives behind the Spanish colonization of these countries which have to do more with propping up the nascent economy of an emerging modern state in need for territories and resources than with any purported civilizing mission. The lust for gold, slaves, and land result in unsustainable levels of violence. Ashour brings the reader close to the barbarity of the Spanish, including a slice of a chilling genocidal scene:

When the Castilian soldier caught her by surprise, she was startled, and her sudden shrieking scream failed to prevent the baby from being snatched away from her. In a moment’s flash, he had pounced on her and grabbed the infant from her arms and threw it on the ground between his feet and his hungry dog. It was a black hunting dog with a long snout, high haunches, and two big dangling ears like a goat. The dog took one leap at the baby and grabbed it by the teeth. The screams of the mother and the baby blended with the chortles of the Castilians who gathered around to watch. They were all laughing uproariously except for two of them, one of whom looked on and shook his head in disbelief, and the second who struggled to keep his arms around the woman to prevent her from getting to her child. The dog continued its meal, the men laughed, and the woman screamed until a shot rang out and she fell to the ground soaking in her own blood. ( Granara 163)

... و لما باغتها الرجل القشتالي بوغتت و انطلقت منها صرخة حادة مفاجئة لم تحل دون انتزاع الطفل منها. في لحظة كان القشتالي قد انقض عليها و اختطف الصغير من بين يديها و ألقى به على مد ساعده باتجاه كلبه الجائع. كلب اسود قناص له و قوائم عالية و أذنان كالماعز كبيرتان و متهدلتان. قفز الكلب قفزة واحدة على الطفل و راح ينهش. و اختلط صراخ الأم و صراخ الصغير بضحكات القشتاليين الذين التقوا للفرجة. كانوا جميعا يضحكون بصخب سوى اثنين، أحدهما يحدق في المشهد بشكل الي، و ثانيهما: يستخدم قوة ذراعيه في تطويق المرأة لمنعها من محاولة الوصول الى صغيرها .

واصل الكلب وجبته، و الرجال الضحك، و المرأة الصراخ حتى أسكتها طلقة نارية فسقطت على الأرض غارقة في دماؤها ثم . ساد الصمت (Ashour 175)

Ashour introduces such scenes of violence to throw into question the European civilizing mission. It also exposes to view the poor achievement of the Europeans on the ethical level and their failure to live up to the grandiose principles of the Christian faith. Ashour's ironic use of scenes of ethnic cleansing is meant to provoke the reader and incite him to define his position towards the issue raised. We are made to hear Naim, a character in the novel, who happens to witness the massacre of the Indians, distancing himself, prudishly, from the European invaders' heinous crimes. Unable to communicate with an Indian elderly because of the barrier of language, he expresses his wish to tell him that he is not one of them, and that he is from Granada: "I'm not one of them! Did you think I was one of them? I'm from Granada!" (Granara 165),

" لست منهم ... هل ظننتني منهم ؟ أنا من غرناطة" (Ashour 176).

Ashour emphasizes Naim's Otherness, which, in this case, merges with the Otherness of the Indians as opposed to the European invaders. The encounter between the self-- the Arab Muslim and Indian "self"-- and the European Other is a prominent theme in the trilogy and the concepts of identity and alterity punctuate the whole narrative. In another scene of the novel, we hear Saleema identifying herself, as she probably feels the need to assert herself again in front of an indifferent, ignoring Other. She restates with no little pride, while thinking of her inquisitors, "I am Saleema bint Jaafar", "أنا سليمة بنت جعفر", (Ashour 243), which, for her, makes a big difference. Another powerful segment of the Arab Muslim identity in the aftermath of the collapse of their rule is the city of Granada. The narrator highlights how Naim, and most of the protagonists in the novel, identify themselves with this city, which is presented as their anchor, without which they remain unidentifiable.

The gap between the Self and the Other is made unbridgeable with the emerging modern state. Following Max Weber's insight, the European Spanish dominant group seeks to wipe out all traces of both the Arabs Muslims of Granada and the Indians of the New World. A new worldview is being implanted to the high cost of murder, enslavement, and systematic depletion of land and resources.

Right from the beginning of the novel, Ashour introduces a parade, a rite of institution the Spanish state makes use of to display the spoils of Christopher Columbus after his return from the New World. Indian men, women, and children were paraded indiscriminately with objects and animals. Bourdieu is very eloquent when he points to the role of rites of institution in consolidating the worldview of the dominant group. Ashour introduces the parade as one form of rites of institution the Spanish drew heavily on as early as the fifteenth century. It is meant to accentuate the Otherness of Indians and their base level compared to the Spanish Christians. This peculiarly modern practice sets barriers between people and assigns roles to everyone. Consequently, Indians are transformed into an object of the Other Christians' gaze, and in the process, they lose their humanity and become indistinguishable from the exotic birds, artifacts, and other queer beasts on display.

What is interesting is the way the Spanish Christians used parades to implement goals Pierre Bourdieu delineates in his theory of symbolic power, the most important of which is the

“consecration” of “arbitrary boundar[ies]” (*Language and Symbolic Power* 118). Indians are cast as a heathen and an uncivilized Other like the Arab Muslims of Granada. This explains the sympathy of the narrator with the Indian slaves, noting that, despite their eccentric ways, they were not repulsive: “Although strange indeed, they were not at all repulsive to look at. On the contrary...” (Granara 29).

... و كانت هيئتهم على غرابتها لا تثير النفور ، بل على العكس تماما من ذلك...

Ashour implements what Linda Hutcheon refers to as “the presence of a lower text on the same page” (*The Politics* 81). This lower text subverts the linear primary narrative of official European history, providing an alternative view of events. After all, Indians are not what the Europeans made them to be. They are not that different. Karen Castellucci Cox posits that “To retell a fixed narrative, such as an established history, revisionist writers may need to insert jarring shifts, discomfiting the reader enough to draw attention to the new interruption and then to the ways it alters the older narrative” (157). Ashour makes use of such “jarring shifts” throughout the novel with the aim of opening up a space for speculation and inviting the reader to challenge his “prejudices”, to quote Hans George Gadamer.

The *Auto de fe*<sup>1</sup> staged towards the end of the first section of the novel offers another opportunity to revisit the established European narrative. It, also, provides sheer evidence of the modern pedigree of violence. The *Auto de fe* stands as another rite of institution the Spanish emerging modern state drew upon heavily to divide people along lines of race, sex, and religion. Saleema is accused of witchcraft by the Inquisition. She is burned at the stake under the watchful eyes of her family and community.

Ashour’s choice of Saleema to be burned alive throws into question the Western stereotype about Arab Muslim women being passive and powerless. It is another “jarring shift” that brings the reader to question the mystification surrounding the role of the Arab woman in history. Throughout the novel, Saleema is portrayed as an avid reader and devotee to books. The novel relates how she managed to hide her grandfather’s books in the family’s old house on the outskirts of *Albaicin* to spare them decimation at the hands of the Inquisition. Saleema’s free mind and brave character casts the Arab Muslim woman in a new light, totally subverting the notorious European harem cliché.

Ashour presents the events from two opposing points of view, pitting the point of view of the subordinate Arab Muslims against the monological official discourse of the Europeans. The double narrative serves to undermine the assumptions underlying the traditional perspective and force the reader to see events from a different lens. The narrator introduces the trial proceedings to give voice to the witches and enable them to tell their story. *Saleema* is accused of witchcraft and is transported in a basket to prevent any bodily contact with her. She is presented as an evil witch who practices black magic and copulates with the devil. Ashour inserts bits of biting irony that leads the reader to laugh, exposing, sardonically, the superstitious mentality of the Europeans, a mentality that Saleema’s Granadan Muslim mind fails to accommodate. She is accused by the inquisitors to have had a sexual affair with a goat and to have conceived of her daughter *Aicha* as a consequence. Ashour inserts a monologue to enable the reader to partake of *Saleema*’s thoughts during the trial:

<sup>1</sup> The *Auto de fe* is a ceremony conducted by the office of Inquisition to pronounce judgment on and order the execution of a heretic.



Was it a nightmare, Saleema thought, that shoved her into an absurd game directed by three strange, demented people? The judge accuses her of copulating with a billy goat...even those men who came and arrested her acted strangely. One of them tried to fiddle with her books, and when she reached over to stop him, he jumped away in a panic and screamed at her, "Don't touch me!" as though she were some kind of snake or scorpion that could kill him in a second. Then they tied her up as though she were a raging bull, and they put her into a large basket. You don't put a raging bull in a large basket. Maybe, a lamb, a chicken, or a rabbit. But this was only Saleema bint Jaafar whom they were taking away, tied up and in a basket! Whenever she recalled the scene, she would laugh a laugh that verged on sobbing, and then she would laugh no more. (Granara 219)

هل هو كابوس زجها في لعبة عابثة يديرها معتوهون غريبوا الأطوار؟ يتهمها القاضي بمعاشرة تيس...و من جاؤوا للقبض عليها تصرفوا بما هو أعجب. حاول أحدهم العبث بكتبها فمدت يدها لتمنعه، فإذا به يقفز مرتاعا و يصيح بأعلى صوته: " لا تلمسيني" كأنها حية أو عقربة في لمستها هلاكه، ثم يقيدونها كأنها ثور هائج و يضعونها في قفة، بل السخل الصغير أو الدجاجة أو الأرنب، وهي سليمة بنت أبي جعفر، حملوها مقيدة في قفة؟ تستحضر المشهد فتضحك ضحكا كالبكاء ثم لا تضحك.  
( Ashour 235)

Such a slice of black humour exposes the illusions underpinning the modern European state. Witch-hunt emerges as a fundamental constituting part of European culture and has largely influenced the Europeans' dealing with other cultures and nations. Modernity has proved unable to get rid of the relics of this legacy. Michel Foucault's insightful study of the European culture reveals the tenacity of the practice, which, albeit a thing of the past, still surfaces under the guise of interrogations, extraction of confessions, bureaucracy, binarisms, and an unrelenting pursuit of the truth. Witch-hunt is an early precursor of modern violence. Saleema is depicted as the cast away, the heretic, who refuses to abide by the Spanish state's rules. Difference is regarded as deviance, and, clearly, the European mind finds it particularly hard to deal with a deviant Other.

Alongside being a rite of institution in the Bourdieusian sense, the *Auto de fe* reflects Micheal Taussig's "magic of the state". Like the parade mentioned above, it is an orchestration as well as a celebration of the binary system that premises the European culture. It is a way of setting boundaries that define acceptable modes of behavior together with the limits of their transgression. The deviating behavior of Saleema: her playful attitude towards attending Masses, her keeping the banned books, her continuing down the path of searching for herbal plants to cure the sick in her community, in clear defiance of the Spanish rules, made her an easy target of the Inquisition.

Ashour's choice of a woman to stand at an *Auto de fé* is no figment of her imagination. She did not do what Alexander Duma tolerates doing with history while writing fiction to have "des beaux enfants" [beautiful kids]. The Inquisition records include countless instances of Muslim women tortured or burnt at the stake. Records even talk about women being more obstinate and resisting than their male counterparts<sup>2</sup>. In the novel, *Saleema* exhibits exemplary

<sup>2</sup>See Mary Elizabeth Perry's *The Handless Maiden* for the pioneer role of Morisco women in

preserving their culture and religion in what Perry calls "domestic resistance". This is, in principle, the

courage in front of the inquisitors, who ended up concluding that she was aided by Satan. Ashour, again, gives us a glimpse of her protagonist's thought during the *Auto de fe* :

Saleema tried as best she could to withstand the agony of walking on two feet swollen and burned by torture...She didn't dare look at the people around her. She occupied her mind with her thoughts. They were going to sentence her to death, so why didn't her inside roil with dreaded fear, or why didn't she cry out in anger and fury? She wondered if it was because she wished for death, that she was imploring God to relieve her of the unbearable suffering of her body and soul...She decided without any forethought not to humiliate herself by screaming or begging...she would not add insult to injury onto herself... ( Granara 227)

(...كانت تجتهد في تحمل مشقة السير على قدمين متورمتين ملتهبتيين من جراء التعذيب...لم تكن تتطلع الى ما حولها، بل شغلتها أفكارها. سيحكمون عليها بالموت، فلماذا لا تتزعزع أحشاؤها خوفاً و لا تصيح فزعاً أو ثورة، هل لأنها تمننت الموت و تضرعت الى الله تطلبه حتى بدا الموت خلاصاً من عذاب لا تطيقه النفس و البدن؟...لن تهين نفسها بالصراخ و التضرع... لن تضيف على المهانة مهانة) (Ashour 24).

Granada ends with an *Auto de fe* , which is the culmination of the Spanish Inquisition's violence. Ironically, Bab-al-ramla, the place where books were burned, and where Saleema witnessed the barbaric act, is the very one to harbor her decimation. The burning of the books, this act of symbolic violence that initiates the novel, bears within it the seeds of the ethnic cleansing that seals the narrative. Saleema's tragic death is another long-term effect of the bonfire of books in Bab-al-ramla.

The story is recounted from an omniscient third-person narrator position. Yet, Ashour appears to incessantly disrupt this traditional way of narrating, inserting "jarring shifts" that take the reader away from what the narrator is talking about to hear other narratives recounted by the characters in the novel. This is often done abruptly. On page 37, Ashour makes a sudden, unexpected shift from the parade event to kids playing the game of the battle between the Christians and the Granadans. There is no smooth transition in the traditional sense, and the reader needs time to realize that he is dealing with a children's game. Here reality is mixed with fantasy and the two are hardly distinguishable. The message of Ashour is that the line between reality and fiction is thin to the point of invisibility, which implies that there exists a plurality of narratives that invite a myriad of interpretations. Therefore, History should be stripped of its immunity to questioning, and, in a postmodern fashion, be brought to trial.

Similar disruption of the narrative takes place on page 39. After we get the point that the narrator is describing a scene about children playing Christians and Muslims, we are, again, lost, groping for meaning, before we realize that the narrative is a flashback about Saad reminiscing the traumatic events that led to the death of his little sister and the enslavement of his parents during the Spanish siege on his city, Malaga. Similarly, on page 52, we follow Abu Jaafar on his way back home. The narrator describes how he stumbles and falls down and

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persistent use of Arabic inside homes and the perpetuation of customs and Islamic rituals, in defiance to the Spanish prohibitions. Perry points out how Morisco women turned their homes into sites of resistance, most of the times at the risk of being tried and executed for heresy.

gets injured in his knee and nose, and how he, finally, sits down, motionless, until sunset. Unexpectedly, we are told that he is dead.

Such “jarring shifts” interrupt the flow of the narrative, creating a sense of urgency throughout the novel and a state of alertness in the reader. We are kept on our toes, as readers, anticipating the unanticipated. Such abrupt interruptions of the main narrative yield a fragmented product that is meant to reflect the equally fragmented nature of the Andalusí Arab Muslim history. This fragmented narration, implemented on purpose by Ashour, draws attention to blank spaces and lends a sense of erasure to the text as if information and scenes have been physically wiped out by an invisible hand. In many ways, this fragmentation mirrors the silence of the Arab Muslims of Granada and points to the black holes that mark their history.

The silences and blank spaces are vigorously pronounced in the novel. Abu Jaafar, traumatized by the capitulation of his city to the Christians and the bonfire of books, seeks refuge in silence, as if he thinks language falls short of spelling out his trauma: “ Naim stared at him inquisitively, but Abu Jaafar remained silent, explaining nothing of what he had just said” ( Granara 3), ( " تطلع اليه نعيم مستفهما و لكن أبا جعفر ظل صامتا و لم يفسر شيئا من كلماته. " ( Ashour 35).

Abu Jaafar’s muteness grows more acute with the running of the hard times in Granada: “ Abu Jaafar, now in his seventies, was becoming more taciturn as he shielded from those closest to him the turmoil he was suffering”( Granara 21).

" كان أبو جعفر و هو يخطو في عقده السابع يزداد صمًا. صمت كثيف يحجب عن عيون أقرب الناس اعصارا داخليا " (Ashour 27)

Saad is another character in the novel, who keeps silent on his traumatic experience in Malaga, which resulted in the enslavement of his parents and his sister’s death of hunger. When Naim asks Saad about his origins, and how he got to Granada, the latter abstains from telling him anything: “ He [Naim] never tired of asking questions, and Saad had no desire to reveal anything to him, so he responded with terse, evasive answers” ( Granara 13),

( Ashour 20). " كان الولد يسأل بلا كلل و سعد لا يرغب في الافضاء بشيء ، فيجيب اجابات مقتضية أو مراوغة

Yet, even if Naim is willing to recount his story to Saad, he fails to remember anything about his father and mother, or about his origins and seems to be entrapped in a state akin to amnesia. In the third section of the trilogy, “Departure”, Ali, Abujaafar’s grandchild, standing for the third generation of the Arab Muslims, manifests an acute dearth in his knowledge of his family’s history: He was told nothing about the existence of his father, and he scarcely knows anything about his aunts. Another instance of silence is Naim’s reticence to speak about his experience in the New World, despite Maryama’s persisting questions. Naim was an eyewitness to the ethnic cleansing of the Indians, which claimed the life of his Indian wife and unborn child. After his return to Granada, Maryama doubts his identity after the trauma changed him beyond recognition: “but this broken man, is he really Naim?”, (Ashour 259). " و لكن هذا الشيخ المهدم هل هو حقا نعيم

The Spanish violence has turned most of the victims to the mute mode. *The Granada Trilogy* focuses on moments of intense trauma, and this explains largely the silences and gaps that suffuse it. Following Jack Lacan’s psychoanalytic insights, the traumatic experience is one of

radical alterity that resists linguistic representation. It produces a hole or empty space in representation. It is a kind of absence that Lacan calls “the real”. The traumatic “real” eludes representation. As Slavoj Žižek puts it, the real is “that which resists symbolization: the traumatic point which is always missed but none the less always returns, although we try – through a set of different strategies—to neutralize it, to integrate it into the symbolic order” (69). Ashour uses flashbacks abundantly to offset the heavy silences of the protagonists and provide the reader with a glimpse into the indescribable traumas that condemned them to silence.

The instances of absence and silence that characterize the novel call into attention the fragmented history of the Arab Muslims in the aftermath of the collapse of Al-andalus. We hear little about the marriage of Saad and Saleema before Saad chooses to join the rebels in Al-pujarrat. Similarly, the narrator keeps tight-lipped over the marriage of Hicham and Aicha, Saleema, and Saad’s daughter. We do not know how Aicha died, or the circumstances that led Hicham to leave and join the rebels in the mountain. Hicham is introduced in the novel as a stranger who comes to pay visits to Maryama and Hasan. The narrator does not disclose his identity immediately, and the reader takes time before he realizes that Hicham is Hasan and Maryama’s elder son since the narrator does not reveal his identity when he reached the adult age. The transition from Hicham’s childhood in the first section of the novel “Granada” to his adulthood in the second section “Maryama” is done abruptly, and a huge unsettling gap lies between the two periods.

Fragmentation is also exemplified by the multiplicity of narratives in the novel. The trilogy’s dialogic structure allows for questions that open up a space for debate between the protagonists. The Granadans are depicted as split among themselves over the various issues at stake. This is very telling. The diverging views over the fate of Ibn-abilghasan, for instance, belies a missing link that prevents the population of Granada from coming to terms with the new status quo after the fall of their city. Ashour’s choice to include this real historical figure into her narrative throws his case into question, inviting readers to make their own judgment. The disappearance of Ibn-abilghasan, a prominent political figure in Granada, who opposed the treaty of capitulation, leaves a blind spot that the narrator does not settle.

The polarity of opinions among Muslims of Granada over the treaty of capitulation or the choice between conversion and departure is indicative of the fact that against a single monological official discourse, there exists an infinite range of interpretations. Ashour deftly demonstrates that Muslims and Arabs cannot all be lumped into one homogeneous category the way Europeans tend to visualize them. She answers back, explaining that unlike the European’s portrayal of Islam as a fixed, totalitarian creed, the latter manifests a discursive tradition that allows room for debate. An instance would be the divergent attitudes of Hasan and Saad regarding the issue of Al-pujarrat rebellion. Saad decides to join the “Mujahidin” to retrieve land and religious rights. Hasan sees things differently, displaying a more compromising attitude towards the Spanish violence and arguing, following a Tunisian faqih, that Morisco Muslims are licensed to change their religion to Christianity under duress, and that they can continue being Muslims in clandestinity. This is a well-documented historical event that Ashour inserts into her narrative to deconstruct the Western version and provide an alternative reading of history. The Spanish violence triggered different reactions from

Muslims, and the tendency to fix the floating signifier that Islam stands for involves a great deal of falsification and delusion.

The fragmentation of the narrative in *The Granada Trilogy* reflects the fragmented lives of the Arab Muslims in fifteenth-century Spain and goes counter to the discourse of unity and national coherence the Spanish modern state wielded. It can be said with no little certainty that the Spanish nation state's striving to build a modern country for the Spanish Christian cult and its dogged persecution of difference, both religious and cultural, have contributed to a systematic, unrelenting process of disintegration of the lives of the Iberian Muslims.

Leaning upon a solid bureaucracy and an excessive obsession with fault lines and social boundaries, the Spanish Inquisition was able to inflict devastating, irreversible damage on the Granadan population. Ashour depicts the Spanish feat in the use of bureaucratic tools like writing and recording. Naim asks Father Miguel about an activity he sees him most of the time engaged in:

“Father Miguel, may I ask you something?”

“Go ahead my son”

“What are you writing? What exactly are you writing?”

“I'm writing, I mean, I wrote the story from the beginning. I wrote about Christopher Columbus's four voyages, the difficulties he encountered and the successes he achieved. Now, this past month, I'm writing about the island and its inhabitants. I'm describing the climatic conditions over the course of the year, and I'm writing down my observations about the different species of plants, birds, and animals... ( Granara 165)

- سيدي القس هل تسمح لي بسؤالك عن شيء؟

- اسأل يا ولدي

- ما الذي تكتبه، ما الذي تكتبه بالضبط؟

- أكتب، أقصد تكتب فعلا الحكاية من أولها. كتبت عن رحلات كريستوبال كولون الأربع ، و الصعوبات التي واجهته، و النجاح الذي حققه، و الان في هذا الشهر الأخير، أكتب عن الجزيرة و أهلها، أصف الأحوال المناخية على مدار العام ، و أرصد أنواع النباتات و الطيور و الحيوانات.

(Ashour 177)

Ashour's insertion of this dialogue is meant to expose the reader to the high level of erudition the Spanish priests entertained. Father Miguel is depicted as a man of letters, wedded to pen and paper. In another scene in the novel, towards the end of the first section, we are made to see the Inquisitors, equipped with their pens and papers, busy recording the proceedings of the trial, where Saleema is convicted of witchcraft:

The scribe dipped his feather into the inkwell to record what the old man was about to dictate.

“ In the name of the Father, Amen.

“In the year of our lord and Savior Jesus Christ 1527, on the fifteenth day of the month of May, in the presence of we the undersigned, Antonio Agapida, presiding judge of the Office of Inquisition, and Alonso Madera and Miguel Aguilar, investigators of the Office of Inquisition...”. ( Granara 213)



"باسم الرب، امين.

انه في عام سبعة و عشرين و خمسمائة و ألف من ميلاد المسيح، في اليوم الخامس عشر من شهر مايو ، و بحضورنا نحن أنطوننيو أجابيدا القاضي بديوان التحقيق و كل من الونسو ماديرا و ميغيل أجيلار المحققين في الديوان..."  
(Ashcour 227)

Ashour's turn to the archive to recollect the proceedings of trials before the Inquisition belies the narrator's concern with the early modern streak of bureaucracy the Inquisitors manifested. Grand Inquisitors were engrossed with recording files that comprised meticulous details about names, dates, and other information only modern trials are interested in pinning down. This "contradictory turning to the archive", as Linda Hutcheon prefers to call it, serves to highlight the inherent bureaucracy of the Spanish institution, which grants it a very comfortable seat among modern states.

Following Hannah Arendt, bureaucracy enables the generation of devastating powers of destruction. In the trilogy, the Inquisitors seem to know everything about the private lives of their subjects, things these subjects themselves tend to ignore. Ali is taken aback to hear the Inquisitors giving him a detailed account of the history of his family and talking to him about aunts he never saw in his life. The Inquisitors tell Ali that he is going to stay in prison for a while. The "while", though, turns out to be "three years, five months, and four days" ( "غادر علي بوابة السجن و قد انقضي بعض الوقت" الذي قرروه له. وكان قد أمضى في الحبس ثلاث سنوات و خمسة أشهر و أربعة أيام ( Ashour 387). Ashour's pedantic mentioning of on the precise period of Ali's incarceration is laden with irony as it exposes the Inquisitors' notorious practice of detaining people without trial over extended periods for lack of evidence. The Inquisitors' bureaucracy makes that Ali stays in prison without being convicted of any crime.

Hannah Arendt's claim that bureaucracy wedded to race thinking has the potential of unleashing substantial powers of destruction is a thesis that is entirely endorsed by Ashour. Zygmunt Bauman's claim that racism is " the shrillest voice of alarm in the face of ambiguity" finds full accreditation in the Trilogy.

The theme of blood purity is also treated in Ashour's trilogy. The narrator depicts a scene where Abu mansur fights with one of Hasan's clients over the latter's claim that he is from a pure Castilian blood:

This boy is the son of Yaseen the stoker. His father, may God have mercy on his soul, used to work as a stoker in my bathhouse. I just heard him now with my own ears bragging that he is a Castilian, born and bred, and that he is of pure blood. Where in hell did you get pure blood...Pure blood?...You son of a whore. (Granara 203)

"- هذا الولد ابن ياسين الوقاد. أبوه رحمة الله عليه كان يعمل وقادا في حمامي، وأنا سمعته الان بأذني يتفاخر بأنه قشتالي أبا عن جد، و أن دمائه نقية. من أين تأتيك الدماء النقية...نقاء الدم، هه يا ابن الحرام"  
(Ashour 216)

Ashour includes this incident in her text to highlight the remarkable way in which the purity of blood laws have made part of the population deny their Arab Muslim identity to be granted approval within the new Spanish order of things. Abu Mansour expresses his indignation at the boy's repudiation of his true origins and his forging himself a fake identity whereby he

presents himself as a Castilian with pure blood. The purity of blood inflicted an irreversible psychological damage on the Arab Muslims, causing them a dire crisis of identity. Some Muslims were compelled to ally with their oppressor. They would hide their origins and pretend they were Castilian to partake of the privileges restricted to the Spanish Old Christians<sup>3</sup>.

The purity of blood cult makes the interaction between the Arab Muslims of Granada and the Christians a source of interminable problems. In the trilogy, Christians are depicted as constantly provoking the Arabs into fights and eventual imprisonment. Racist and hate speech is the order of the day. The narrator describes the tense atmosphere:

You walk and eyes turn towards you in a stalking manner, you hear with your own ears expressions like “ a dirty Arab”, “ a Morisco dog” and you continue down the road as though you did not hear anything, once, twice, and three times, and you grab the teller by the collar and you hit him and he hits you, and your blood and his flow.

"تمشي فتحدق بك العيون، متربصة، تسمع بأذنك عبارات " عربي قذر"، " كلب موريسكي" فتمضي كأنك تسمع شيئاً، مرة و مرتين و ثلاث، ثم تمسك بتلابيب القائل فتضربه و يضربك، و يسيل دمه أو دمك ("). لم ( Ashour 380)

Ashour's text draws attention to the Spanish state's efforts to confiscate the very identity and existence of the Arab Muslims, referring to them at one point as “dirty Arabs” and describing them as “Morisco dogs” at another. Racism engendered by the cult of the purity of blood exacerbates the fragmented and depleted selfhood of the Granadans. The self-reflexive nature of Ashour's metafiction allows for a mending of past injury. It is an attempt to throw into question issues that the official European history tends to gloss over, supposedly because they fit badly within Europe's grandiose civilizing mission.

The Spanish delving into the modern age called for the total extermination of the Arab Muslim civilization in Iberia. On the other side of the Atlantic, the indigenous Latin American civilizations suffered the same fate. Modernity entered the world, treading upon the corpses of wretched Arab Muslims and American Indians, doomed to encounter Western violence as early as the fifteenth century. Walter Benjamin, in a fit of anger after the terror that swept Europe in the wake of the First World War, declared that “there is no document of civilization which is not at the same time a document of barbarism” (qtd.in. Guillory 55).

## Conclusion

In this paper, I have tried to shed light on the content and the form of Radwa Ashour's *The Granada Trilogy*. Based on the underlying assumption that history encompasses a great amount of fiction and falsification of facts, the narrative attempts to write the history of the Arab Muslims of Spain after the collapse of their rule. The exponential levels of violence, both physical and symbolic, that this Granadan population suffered has been underplayed by official European history, who would associate the year 1492 to the discovery of the New World. Ashour rewrites the history of this critical period in both the Europeans and the Arab

<sup>3</sup> The term is used to refer to the Spanish population, whose Christianity is the first religion. It is opposed to the “New Christians”, which is reserved to denote the Arab Muslims who converted to Christianity after the collapse of Al-andalus.

Muslims' history to add the missing parts of the story. I have explained how the use of the historical metafiction techniques of subverting the temporal and spatial conventions in novel writing has contributed to bringing to the lime light the sense of fragmentation and loss in the Arab Muslim population, crushed under the Spanish oppressive rules. The insertion of the historical events in the novel has the double effect of firmly grounding the novel in history while achieving a kind of revisiting project to the latter. The long purported sanctity bestowed upon history is dramatically shaken by Ashour's version of it, thus throwing the seeds of doubts into the validity of historiographical writings at large, and blurring the lines between what are commonly regarded as historical facts and pure fiction. Ashour's trilogy told the story of the Granadans from their perspective. In so doing, she has recorded their lost and muffled voices in something akin to a "return of the oppressed". Ashour's trilogy has given voice to the voiceless and shape to the shapeless and succeeded largely in rescuing the fifteenth century Arab Muslims of Granada from languishing further in the black hole of the European history.

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