Rewriting Strategies in Tariq Ali's Postcolonial Metafiction

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Contemporary literary theory and fiction are inextricably bound up with the question of rewriting. Kristeva's "intertextuality" and Baudrillard's "simulacrum" are typical critical prototypes of the imperative of return and iteration. Moreover, the feminist appropriation of the genre of science fiction[1] and the postmodernist obsession with pastiche are all premised upon the conviction that writing is compulsorily affiliated to rewriting. Although a great deal of research has been done on metafiction and the rewriting of culturally canonical texts,[2] very little has been written on other rewriting forms and effects. The rewriting of the native history of the colonized is one of these other forms that need further cogent critical reconsideration. What testifies to such urgent need is the consistent relegation of postcolonial texts that are self-conscious yet historically or culturally grounded in the problematic domain of the ahistorical "postmodern."[3] Such a monolithic approach to metafictional rewriting of native history and culture tends to unquestioningly undermine the political agendas and theories of agency that are recommended by Third World and minority writers through their self-reflexive texts.

This article therefore aims 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, and the colonial language. Metafiction is hypothesized to function as an efficacious postcolonial act of rewriting and hence recuperate the history of the colonized. Postcolonial metafiction is hence defined as a narrative mode that accommodates the self-questioning ambiance of the postmodern and the politicized stance of the postcolonial. To demonstrate this, two particular historiographic narratives sharing the same context will be analyzed: Tariq Ali's *Shadows of the Pomegranate Tree* (*SPT*) (1992) and *The Book of Saladin* (*BS*) (1998), both set during the time of the historical encounters of Arabs and Europeans in the final years of the Reconquest in Moorish Spain and the Third Crusade. Some of these rewriting strategies will be also read in relation to the poetics of classical Islamic historiography. What distinguishes postcolonial historical metafiction from other forms of cultural mimicry and rewriting is that it consists of a particularized and conscientious attachment to the patterns and ideologies of native history and texts. Ali's adoption of the strategies and ideologies of medieval chronicles of Mediterranean and Middle Eastern history brings such attachment to the fore.

What is Postcolonial Metafiction?

Any discussion of postcolonial metafiction today must pay attention to what has become known globally as the postmodernist and postcolonial debate. Metafiction, the most self-reflexive mode of the postmodern novel, is markedly criticized for its turn toward textuality and 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). Aijaz Ahmad's critical response seems, however, to disregard the satiric impulse of such self-referential and auto-representational fiction. In opposition to the Western analytico-referential paradigm of scientific objectivity and novelistic realism, typically dominant since the seventeenth century, metafiction shifts the focus of the representational process from the level of product to that of process.[4] In other words, the focus here is not on the reader and writer or on the text singly, but on the whole process involved in the production and reception of the text. Metafiction, in a sense, seems to rewrite the formalist modes of realist and mimetic representation that ignored the process and agents of the actual enunciation.

Postcolonial metafiction can similarly contest the historical-fictional dichotomy, as advocated by formalist and anti-Romantic trends, by attempting to rewrite the textual constructions of native subjectivity as grounded in its historical and cultural locations. Such postcolonial attitude is prompted by the reconfiguration of the problem 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 explains that

> [r]ecent 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. Hutcheon notes that "[p]aradoxically this emphasis on what at first may appear to be a kind of discursive narcissism is actually what connects the fictional to the historical in a more material sense" (*Poetics of Postmodernism* 142). This postmodernist interrogation of the factuality and centrality of meaning and reference was matched by new developments in postcolonial 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, 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, postcolonial metafiction, therefore, shares the interrogative rhetoric of the postmodern and the historically revisionist mode of the postcolonial.

Like Latin American historically located magic realism,[5] postcolonial metafiction is a mode of perception grounded in the political and historical formation of the Third World. Conceptualized as a nationalist, Third-Worldist genre, postcolonial 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 "postcolonial metafiction" is used by Timothy Brennan to describe Rushdie's *Midnight's 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*.[6] 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 postcolonial metafiction is thereby entitled to articulate the polarized categories of postcolonial 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 postcolonial theory and writing, the historical context of literary works must be highlighted. The particularity of historical contexts helps reaffirm the postcolonial project's agency as a recuperation of lost histories and identities. To

avoid essentializing Third World history, Gyan 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 postcolonial writer, Tariq Ali (1943-) is representative of the New Leftist migrant intellectual who is a British-Pakistani historian and novelist. From within the context of the condition of migrancy and liminality, Ali is, in a sense, rewriting the history of Western modernity by proposing an alternative version of modernity that is planetary and able to blend the normative resources of Western rationalism and Eastern communitarianism. 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). Such rewritten accounts 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, so that the cult of Saladin and Arab solidarity might be read according to modern Pan-Arabist ideologies and Nasser's dream of united Arab republics. Similarly, the narrative foregrounding of gender should be contextualized within the twentieth-century women's emancipation movements in the Arab world and South Asia.

Ali's *Shadows of the Pomegranate Tree* (hereafter *SPT*) tells the story of the Arab family of Banu Hudayl after the fall of Granada to Ferdinand and Isabella. At this critical historical juncture the Banu Hudayls must choose either to convert to Christianity or to leave the Iberian Peninsula. Umar, the head of the family, is pressed by his brother Miguel, a Christian convert and now Bishop of Cordoba, to convert and thus save the family's property and also to give his young daughter, Hind, in marriage to Miguel's son. Hind, however, is determined to marry the man of her choice. Most of the family members are tragically annihilated by Cortés, who goes on to plunder America. In the epilogue, twenty years after the story ends, Cortes arrives in the city of Tenochtitlan where Montezuma is king. The death of Muslim Spain is thus linked to the birth of America. Conversely, Ali's *The Book of Saladin* (hereafter *BS*) describes the fall of Jerusalem to Muslim forces in 1187 and thus rewrites Eurocentric history by focusing on the historical figure Salah al-Din (better known as Saladin), the Kurdish warrior who used his position as Sultan of Egypt and Syria to retake the Holy City from Crusaders. Saladin's story is told to a Jewish scribe named Ibn Yakub, who also interviews

other members of Salah al-Din's court, including his foresighted wife, Jamila, and his loyal follower, Shadhi.

Methodologically, the rewriting of colonial texts and histories is idiosyncratic to postcolonial metafiction and other forms of postcolonial writing. Stephen Slemon writes that "reiterative textual responses" are a fundamental oppositional strategy of postcolonial 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 postcolonial writers rewrite their marginalised history and engage the heterogeneous non-linear forms of historical representation. In Ali's narratives, an open, circular, repetitive structure replaces the enclosed, linear pattern of realist fiction. Yet, what distinguishes postcolonial metafiction from the merely deconstructive modes of the postmodern historiographic metafiction is the potential of recuperating the culture-specific context of the colonized. Slemon argues that postcolonial 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 reversal 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). Postcolonial 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 article, 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 postcolonial metafiction. Both historiographic metafiction and postcolonial 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, postcolonial metafiction is that type of self-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 postcolonial history. Postcolonial metafiction could be said to have two major characteristics: 1) the deconstructive interrogation of the factuality of colonial history, document, and otherness; and 2) the reconstructive mode of recuperation of native 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 oppositional agency of postcolonial language. However, the category of postcolonial metafiction cannot be exhaustive, as any prescriptive understanding of postcolonial literature risks radically reducing its heterogeneity.

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 1: 4). One point of departure for the rewriting of Western documentary historical texts in Ali is Ibn Khaldun's[7] 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 expected to apply the hermeneutic acts of selection, explanation, judgment and interpretation. Islamic historiography valorizes fully the exegetic narrativity of history and scrutinizes historical writing as a kind of revision of a narrative, especially on the basis of the critical examination of the text and the sources used. The principle of the narrativity of history is basic to medieval historiography in Arab-Islamic culture, according to which "historical writing is not a transcription of fact but the recension of a narrative" (Al-Azmeh, *Ibn Khaldun: An Essay* 16). Similarly, according to postmodern historiography, the documentary is intertwined with the literary or meta-textual. Whereas documentary discourse is linked to a factual and empirical taxonomy, the "worklike" or meta-textual "involves dimensions of the text not reducible to the documentary, prominently including the roles of commitment, interpretation, and imagination" (LaCapra 30). This indeterminate stance towards the factual is reflected in Ali's postcolonial metafiction, which attempts to problematize the assumed factuality of colonial history by implicitly juxtaposing the factual with the narrative, and the documentary with the meta/fictional. Strictly speaking, the questioning of factuality acts as a gauge against which narratives inherited from the colonial past could be weighed with a view to ascertaining their plausibility or implausibility.

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 documentary illustration of the Banu Hudayl family tree 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 in early December 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" (*SPT* 1-2).

In *BS*, the documentary frame of the narrative structure is similarly demonstrated 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 on the part of the writer himself: "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" (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, as in "The Sultan visits the new citadel in Cairo but is called back to meet Bertrand of Toulouse, a Christian heretic fleeing Jerusalem to escape the wrath of the Templars" (108). 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 scribe's dominant subjective rewriting of chapter headings through the narrative strategies of ordering, assorting, varying, and qualifying, is simultaneously contrasted to 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: whereas Don Inigo asserts Cisneros' Jewish origin, Cisneros himself denies it. 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 nature of history and fiction and negates the true-or-false criterion in both.

History is furthermore interpellated through a *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 a *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 at 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" (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 this 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[8] as well (Osman 69). In addition, 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 line, 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 postcolonial metafiction rewrites the Eurocentric notion of history as progress. The linearity of the colonial documentary archive is superseded by circularity and iteration. While discussing the tradition of the oppressed in Fanon, Homi Bhabha explains the agency of the oppressed as a struggle against Western notions of history: "The struggle against colonial oppression not only changes the direction of Western history, but challenges its historicist idea of time as a progressive, ordered whole" (41). The historical model congenial with the traumatic and turbulent history of the Third World abides by the theory of the cyclic rise-and-fall of civilizations founded in Ibn Khaldun, Gibbon and Toynbee's pessimistic realism. "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 Cortés and the military leaders of the Catholic kingdom of Spain. Repetition through progression and consummation 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). The urban civilization of Moorish Spain, epitomized by the Banu Hudayl family, must be consummated according to a

teleological view of the destiny of civilization in terms of rise and decline. Al-Azmeh explains the metaphysics of decline as that principle "which concretizes the movement of civilization to its inevitable doom" (*Ibn Khaldun: An Essay* 55). 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 conversely 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" (244).

Rewriting otherness disrupts the myths of national authenticity and imperial supremacy. In Ali's two novels the traditional alignment of colonial subjects into self and other is accordingly reconstructed in the new liminal interstices and contact zones of the divided worlds of Moorish Spain and Jerusalem. The social and political antagonism of the colonial relation is foregrounded against an underlying background of amicability and identification. Furthermore, the restoration of voice to the multiple native narrators in Ali's two novels marks the palpable empowerment of the marginalized. Rather than solidifying Eurocentric stereotypes of the periphery through authorial insertions,[9] Ali transforms the very colonial artifact of otherness by evoking the Orientalist stereotype and erasing it at the same time. Homi Bhabha defines such strategy as "shifting the frame of identity from the field of vision to the space of writing" and further asserts that "this space of reinscription must be thought outside of those metaphysical philosophies of self-doubt, where the otherness of identity is the anguished *presence* within the Self of an existentialist agony that emerges when you look perilously through a glass darkly" (48).

Contrary to the Western equation of Islam with danger or threat, it is the West that is associated with barbarity, doctrinairism and extremism. Simply put, the barbarity consists in burning books and exterminating 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 carves a chess set, mimicking Spanish historical figures. Generally, they are carved as "black" and "monsters;" Ferdinand is sarcastically carved with a tiny pair of horns and Isabella's lips are 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. In emphasizing the barbarity of the West, however, Ali seems to contravene Spivak's exhortation to displace rather than reverse oppositions.

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 *weltanschauung* that serves as a framework for generating rational systems and theories in all fields. In the intellectual domain, the Arab manuals of medicine, philosophy and astronomy that were exempted from burning by Cisneros traveled 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. He 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 an Eastern 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, consultation *(shura)* can function as equivalent to modern Western democracy.

In opposition to the Orientalist vision of the historical decay of Islamic culture and civilization as pre-destined, Ali defines such eclipse as emergent rather than as primordial. To Bhabha, "[t]he Other must be seen as the necessary negation of a primordial identity" (52). On the one hand, Orientalist discourse defines decadence as fated, 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 Ibn Khaldun's basic principle of '*asabiyyah*[10], is a typical modernistic principle that can empower communality and generate socio-political development of the state. Generally speaking, '*asabiyyah* has been usually taken for the prime characteristic of a social group or the vital energies which hold a community together. Al-Azmeh writes that the term has been split into four variables: "a social variable defined by the spirit of kinship, a natural variable based on consanguinity, a psychological variable defined as 'group passion,'

and a religious variable expressed in loyalty to certain affiliations" (*Ibn Khaldun in Modern* 170). 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). It is patently obvious that in Ibn Khaldun's *The Muqadimmah* and Ali's two novels solidarity or '*asabiyyah* is not exclusively consecrated to the pristine blood ties among kinsmen. It is rather attached to power groups that comprise a mixture of kinsmen, allies, and others. The dependence of the Hafsids on Castillian mercenaries in Ibn Khaldun and of the the Banu Hudayls and Saladin on alliances with tribal and religious groups totally unrelated to Arabs or Muslims in Ali confirm the irrelevance of the internal composition of '*asabiyyah*.

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 this 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 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 forbidding every possible pastime in which Muslim nobles indulged. Her stance is deeply informed by veneration for rational thought which is undercut by traditional theology; she affirms that "[t]he 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 in Ali's work, 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. In *SPT* 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 her death. Furthermore, 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 and identity.

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. In *BS* Halima is accordingly conceived as just 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. As Halima confirms, "[i]t is Jamila who keeps our minds alive" (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" (94-5). From within such exclusively female space, women are portrayed as capable of developing their intellectual and creative 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" (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 (2: 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, is positively represented as defying such a 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 in *BS*. *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 than 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). In *BS* 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, "[t]he 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 Colonial Language

In opposition to colonial scenarios that homogenize culture, identity and language as one whole and attempt to prioritize the written over the oral, postcolonial 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, postcolonial 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 postcolonial 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 postcolonial text is located the Other in the form of an author's explanatory note or glossary. The cultural 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 in 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). Allusions to Arabic mythical figures are thus explained in detail to spotlight authorial intrusion and metafictional glossing.

Orality is broad and elastic, ranging from legends and 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 deemed to survive in the minds and hearts of the colonized. In *SPT* 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).

In order to fully characterize the new postcolonial self-conscious reinscription method, we do well to distinguish between two variants of rewriting: a textual one (best represented by the rewriting of canonical texts such as William Shakespeare's *The Tempest* and Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe*) and a historical one (of which Salman Rushdie and Tariq Ali's writings serve as a supreme example). While the first type of rewriting consists of a particularized attachment to a single textual precedent, the second involves the revision of both

colonial notions of history and strategies of historiography. Tariq Ali has thus developed his own brand of postcolonialism, an option inspired by the need to present possible alternative realities of Third-World history. Broadly speaking, all forms and modes of postcolonial writing partly engage the rewriting of colonial texts and histories. Postcolonial reinscription generally falls under the umbrella of symbolic resistance. Such self-reflexive fiction goes beyond the postmodernist and post-structuralist limits of deconstructing existing orthodoxies and partakes in the realms of social and political action. While it has been proposed that both postcolonial and postmodern metafiction share the stance of revisionism and the paradoxical identification of the historical and the personal, the sublime and the grotesque, postcolonial metafiction nevertheless betrays a penchant for political oppositionality.

To sum up, the study of the vast range of rewriting strategies in postcolonial 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. Finally, inserting the indigenous oral culture and language of the postcolonial writer in the English text rewrites the oral-literary binarism and translates difference into similarity.

Notes
1. See, for instance, Ursula K. Le Guin's *The Left Hand of Darkness* (1969) and Joanna Russ' *The Female Man* (1970).

2. To name a few, here are some texts: Jean Rhys's reworking of *Jane Eyre* (1847) in her *Wide Sargasso Sea* (1966), Marianne Wiggins's rewriting of William Golding's *Lord of the Flies* (1954) in her *John Dollar* (1989) and J.M. Coetzee's rewriting of Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* (1719) in his *Foe* (1987).

3. Hena Maes-Jelinek, for instance, argues that "there are no postcolonial post-modernists from the anglophone Third World, even though writers like Harris, Soyinka and Armah have used techniques that may resemble post-modernism" 146. The fiction of writers like Salman Rushdie and Toni Morrison might provide examples that counter such a hypothesis.

4. For a fuller explanation, see "Process and Product: The Implications of Metafiction for the Theory of the Novel as a Mimetic Genre," in Hutcheon's *Narcissistic Narrative: The Metafictional Paradox* 36-47.

5. By explaining reality in ways that are not typical in Western texts, magic realist texts are associated with non-Western cultures and histories.

6. *The Thousand and One Nights* might be considered an Arabic rewriting of the Indian *Panchatantra*. For details, see Katharine S. Gittes' *Framing the Canterbury Tales: Chaucer and the Medieval Frame Narrative Tradition* 1-20.

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

8. 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*).

9. Some critics read Rushdie and Naipaul's representation of the Third World as a kind of unsentimental concretization of the Eurocentric stereotypes of the periphery, especially since such knowledge is offered as an authorial insertion, a critical assertion that presupposes the role of the author as a cultural insider. Though aptly put, such reading does not take into account the shifts in the writers' intellectual schema. See, for example, the end of Naipaul's autobiographical novel *The Enigma of Arrival* (1987) and his three non-fictional works about India.

10. It is important to note that the term '*asabiyyah* in usage now, at least in Arabic, Persian and Urdu, is laden with negative connotations and is used primarily to refer to "fanatical solidarity" and ethnic and national exclusivism.

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