

Powerful Contentions and Resistance in Tarik Ali's *Shadows of the Pomegranate Tree* (1992), and Radwa Ashour's *Granada: A Novel* (2001)

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Abstract

Contemporary discourse reflects an intensified desire for social and intellectual emancipation. The year 1492 may be understood as a pivotal historical juncture that precipitated profound transformations in Islamic Spain. Prior to this rupture, regions of the Iberian Peninsula under Islamic governance were often characterized albeit not without contestation by forms of coexistence among diverse religious communities. However, internal divisions and escalating hostilities culminated in its dissolution. Literary works such as Tariq Ali's *Shadows of the Pomegranate Tree* (1992), and Radwa Ashour's *Granada* (2003) engage in counterfactual reimagining, envisioning alternative historical trajectories in which interreligious conflict and mass displacement might have been avoided. These texts interrogate the conditions under which more inclusive societies could have emerged. In parallel, the transatlantic ventures associated with Christopher Columbus and Amerigo Vespucci, alongside the later political projects of the Founding Fathers, may be interpreted as attempts to transcend the limitations of an "Old World" in decline, contributing to new epistemological and institutional formations. However, Muslim subjects whether performers, poets, or dramatists are frequently positioned within structures of constraint that necessitate negotiation with entrenched power modalities. Traditional formalist approaches and rigid identity frameworks may therefore be insufficient. Alternative methodologies attentive to hybridity, historical contingency, and power dynamics are required, raising unresolved questions about the possibility of a more equitable world.

Keywords: 1492, Convivencia, Counterfactuals, Coloniality, Subjectivity, Power.

Introduction

Creative expression, critical thinking, or writing challenges dominant bureaucratic systems, such as those erected by the Spanish Inquisition, or the monologic, forceful uses of power. Theoretically speaking, people or subjects of the state are "embedded in webs of relations, whether of affection and solidarity, or power and rivalry, or some mixture of the two" (Ortner, 2006, p. 151). Hence, power according to Michel Foucault becomes "coextensive with resistance; productive, producing positive effects; ubiquitous, being found in every kind of relationship, as a condition of the possibility of any kind of relationship" (Kelly, 2009, p. 38). Foucault (1980, p. 98) argues that power should not be understood as something possessed, but as something which circulates by social relations. This conception challenges traditional juridical models of sovereignty and emphasizes the dispersed nature of power within institutional and everyday practices, which proves that power can become productive, as Foucault asserts, rather than merely being repressive, shaping every knowledge, all discourses, and subject formation (Foucault, 1980, p. 142).

The acknowledgment that any acquisition and exercise of power cannot be a unidimensional endeavor devoid of resistance arises from the understanding that power is inherently ensnared in a complex web of interactions, both formative and textual, and is inexorably intertwined

with acts of resistance(s). The interplay between power and resistance is not merely a theoretical abstraction but a palpable reality, exemplified through historical instances and contemporaneous realities. That power is never uncontested cannot hold because the dual nature of resistance, formative and textual, makes it tangible, liable to happen.

Formative resistance manifests in tangible actions, whether they be overt challenges to authority at large, or subtle subversions within societal norms (Ybema & Horvers, 2017). These acts, individualistic acts of defiance, embody a collective refusal to acquiesce to the dominant status quo. Simultaneously, textual resistance operates through the realm of discourse, where alternative narratives, family stories, counter-discourses, and critical perspectives emerge to contest prevailing power structures.

When resistance does emerge, it may take multiple forms. “Formative” resistance can be understood as embodied practices of dissent, ranging from direct confrontation to subtle acts of non-compliance within established norms. Such practices may disrupt or reconfigure dominant arrangements, though their political efficacy is often uneven and context-dependent (Milhorange et al., 2026; Grasso & Delatin, 2025; Omokaro et al., 2025) By contrast, “textual” resistance operates within discursive fields, where alternative narratives, interpretive frameworks, and counter-discourses challenge hegemonic representations and epistemic authority.

Nevertheless, it is important to avoid conflating the existence of resistance with its transformative capacity (Brighenti, 2011). While both formative and textual modes of opposition contribute to the pluralization of social meanings, their ability to effect structural change is contingent upon broader configurations of power. Consequently, the relationship between power and resistance should be understood as asymmetrical, variable, and historically specific rather than inherently balanced or reciprocal.

Foucault’s theory of knowledge and discourse conceives discourse as both a medium and instrument of power, but also a field of contestation, where resistance re-emerges. In this vein, knowledge is never neutral; it is entangled with power or “power/knowledge,” and is always implicated in the maintenance or disruption of social order (Foucault, 1972, p. 215). The Foucauldian recognition that discourse can be a potential stumbling block to power underscores its major role in impeding, and/or challenging the dominant power of White narratives (Phillips, 2023). Therefore, discourse should not be seen as a passive recipient to knowledge, but as an active force, capable of obstructing the smooth functioning of power, becoming a site where resistance takes shape, becoming a starting point for opposing strategies within which the realm of language and communication can uncover the potential of transforming action, thus change.

However, this dual characterization requires critical qualification. The assumption that discourse inherently contains both productive and subversive capacities risks overgeneralizing the possibilities of resistance embedded within it. In practice, discursive formations are often structured by asymmetries of power that determine which statements become authoritative and which are marginalized or rendered unintelligible. Consequently, the capacity of discourse to “undermine” power may be significantly constrained by institutional, epistemic, and material conditions that regulate its circulation. Foucault himself acknowledges this ambivalence, noting that discourse is implicated in a “complex and unstable process” whereby it may function as an instrument of power while also constituting a potential point of resistance and strategic reversal (Foucault, 1978, p. 215).

Nevertheless, it remains necessary to interrogate the extent to which such reversibility is structurally available, or whether it is unevenly distributed across different regimes of

discourse. Thus, while discourse may indeed transmit and reproduce power, its capacity to subvert it should be understood as contingent, partial, and context-dependent rather than intrinsic or guaranteed.

Literature Review

Tariq Ali's *Shadows of the Pomegranate Tree* (1992) is an anti-colonial narrative par excellence that reconstructs the history of the Moors in the Iberian Peninsula, while foregrounding cultural practices of resistance such as reason, chess, intellectual, and expressive freedom situated within a Christian religious dominated zeal.

Alongside the works of Radwa Ashour and Rebekah Scott, the novel interrogates dominant Western historiographical and literary representations by engaging with shifting identities and alternative narrative formations, a strategy also evident in texts such as *Leo the African* (1986), which re-constructs identity through first-person narration.

In Ali's novel, resistance is primarily articulated through cultural forms including music, poetry, and storytelling, rather than direct military confrontation, with the character Zahra exemplifying intellectual defiance, and emotional autonomy, through the strategic use of dissimulation (*taqiyya*), as a means of preserving Muslim identity in Inquisitorial Spain.

The text of Ali advances a pragmatic conception of resistance using survival, memory preservation, and narrative reclamation, whereby fiction operates as a counter-historical space that contests erasure, and reclaims marginalized cultural histories. Within this framework, the notion of *Convivencia* is reconfigured as a critical lens through which historical power relations and possibilities of intercultural coexistence could be reconsidered.

Methods

This study adopts a relational and critically interpretive methodology grounded in postcolonial theory, treating discourse not as a fixed textual property but as a dynamic field of cultural production in which power and resistance are continuously negotiated. Drawing on Foucault's conception of discourse as a network of historically contingent statements, the analysis approaches literary texts as sites, where meaning is produced through latent cultural forms, silences, and everyday practices. These forms often overlooked by formalist approaches such as New Criticism are examined as subtle yet significant articulations of resistance embedded within narrative structure, characterization, and symbolic representation. Accordingly, discourse is read relationally, not as an isolated textual feature, but as something constituted through interactions between authorial intention, historical context, and the sociopolitical conditions of colonial domination.

Central to this methodology is the operationalization of power as an elusive, diffuse, and productive force, rather than a monolithic structure. Power is traced through its manifestations in institutional authority, ideological imposition, and cultural regulation, particularly within the framework of the Spanish Inquisition. Instantaneously, the analysis is equally attentive to forms of resistance that emerge in response to such structures. These resistances are not limited to overt acts of defiance, but include quotidian practices such as storytelling, linguistic preservation, memory, and cultural rituals that challenge hegemonic narratives. By mapping both domination and resistance simultaneously, the methodology foregrounds the co-constitutive nature of these forces, revealing how power generates the very conditions for its contestation.

The study further employs two key postcolonial strategies. First, it engages in the rewriting of colonial narratives, a method associated with theorists such as Edward Said and Homi K. Bhabha, wherein dominant historical accounts are critically re-examined and re-narrated from

the perspective of the colonized, which involves interrogating Eurocentric historiography and exposing its silences, distortions, and exclusions, as well as seeking to dismantle/erode negative stereotypes historically attached to marginalized peoples, cultures, and nations. Through close reading, this research paper identifies moments in which the texts subvert reductive colonial representations, instead presenting complex, agentive subjects whose identities resist essentialization.

In its application to *Shadows of the Pomegranate Tree* (1992), the methodology places particular emphasis on processes of cultural negotiation and the formation of subjectivity within a hybrid sociocultural space. Drawing on Bhabha's concept of hybridity, the analysis explores how identities are constructed through encounters between colonizer and colonized within an Islamic space/Spain. These encounters do not produce fixed identities; rather, they generate fluid and contingent subjectivities shaped by adaptation, resistance, and cultural exchange. The notion of a "third space" becomes crucial here, as it enables an understanding of how meaning and identity are negotiated beyond binary oppositions of domination and subordination.

To sum up, this research paper draws on the notion of discourse relationally, i.e. the analysis treats discourse as latent cultural forms, and burgeoning acts of resistance(s), which are probably taken for granted by New critics and scholars dealing with these texts. Methodologically, the elusive concept, power, is brought to light, its manifestations, and forms of resistance(s), uncovered, to detect and contest, simultaneously, its diffusion and resistance. The research paper relies on two postcolonial methods, namely rewriting colonial narratives, and the erosion of negative images attached to different kinds of people, culture(s), and nation(s). In the case of *Shadows of the Pomegranate Tree* (1992), cultural negotiation, and the "formation of human subjectivities," are underscored, touching down on the cultural encounters of that had happened/happening betwixt colonizer, people, and colonized, in the hybrid space, or rather, Islamic Spain, to be precise. This undermines colonial power" (Bhandari, n.d., p. 92). Consequently, the Inquisition becomes nullified, trumped.

Inversion in Tariq Ali's *Shadows of the Pomegranate Tree* (1992)

To invert Power Roles through chess, a Christian carpenter named Juan constructs a chess set for Yazid, the youngest family member of Banu Hudayl. Being a textual form of resistance par excellence, the chess set functions as a subtle textual form of resistance that transforms power roles, and challenges colonial binaries/pretexts.

Crafted by the Christian Carpenter for a Muslim child, the notion of Christianity itself as inherently good, and the Muslim faith/religion as uncivilized, is made symbolically at odds. Seen as a symbol of cultural hybridity, and mutual recognition, the chess set also reimagines power relations, and offers a quiet powerful counter-narrative-discursiveness to dominant imperial, racist and essentialist representations of self/other. In fine, this chess set is significant in as much as it reverses the traditional inter-cultural roles of the 'self' as being good; and the other, as all-evil, exotic, and violently dangerous.

In "Colonialist Pretexts and Rites of Reply," Hellen Tiffin states the following important comment: the strategy of reversing the colonial stereotypes and otherness is essential to achieve postcolonial "recovery." Ali, therefore, strives to remind readers of the intellectually, and culturally advanced Islamic civilization that was/is being massacred, by a culturally and intellectually inferior Christian colonizer (Tiffin, 1997). Treated as such, the Orientalist discourse about the Oriental, and the traditional notion of power that claims the power to be entirely in the hands of the ruler if He is savvy enough to wield and keep it, is thwarted through such counter discursive, and/or social practices.

Specifically, Ali strives to exhibit the carpenters' way of venting up his emotional anger over the loss of his dear, late father at the hands of Christian soldiers. By creating a simple but powerful representational wooden chess, Ali sets out to avenge the wronged, colonized peoples, exemplified in the father figure, by demonizing the responsible perpetrators (smearing them black), together with their negative, and/or gratuitous power.

The carpenter of Abu Hudayl resists the regressive discourse of the Christians tout court, showing readers what Spanish Christians were really about--debased forms. Hiding behind the hypocrisy of the 'holy' cows, and purporting to be an apolitical, awakening force, breach the capitulation terms, they commit cruel/heinous acts/crimes against humanity, backed up by a crooked faith/cross. These demonic acts are not only a stigma, and a disgrace that plunges Spanish nobility into what Joseph Conrad termed the "horror" in *Heart of Darkness* (1899), but also an act of annihilation of an entire civilized culture named Islamic Spain. Here where the technique of inversion is particularly important, to show that cruelty and the negative use/abuse of power by Castile and Aragon cannot be tolerated in such a vital milieu, between Islamic cultures/civilizations and Spanish ones.

Early on in the novel, Christian fanaticism is vested onto the historical character, Ximenes de Cisneros, who, after being given power by Isabella and Ferdinand to carry on with the Inquisition, one Spanish soldier rightfully testifies that Isabella has "entrusted the keys of the pigeon-house to a cat" (Ali, 1993, p. 1). Unlike what religiosity pertains to be, the aim of the holy Church was sheer political, driven by hate for Muslims.

Although he seems to be holy and apolitical in the world of the novel, "Ximenes understands the power of ideas" (Ali, 1993, p. 5). As can be seen, power entails oppressive forms of rule, one being the institution of the Inquisition, and its theocratic, one-sided discourse to police around and annihilate all other innocent forms of knowledge as heresy, and the other is to seek destruction or the application of power by ideas, by strategy, by cunning. Nevertheless, The Church is afraid of the power of enlightened ideas, which will eventually expose its malpractices regarding the Moors, the Muslims who lived in harmony with other ethnicities.

Controlling power by said forces made the carpenter, Juan, more adamant on challenging its bad influences, and negative effects. Although artistic freedoms are clearly restricted under such Spanish rule (the penalty would be lethal) the chess pieces represent truth; that what the Spaniards were doing in the disintegration of Islamic Spain moment was evidently an act of terror against Muslims who helped build and enlighten Spain. Therefore, the disruption of the fanatic discourse of Archbishop Ximenes de Cisneros can only happen by replacing his dogma with great art, a counter-discursive strategy, to equalize the lopsided power relation.

Although the carpenter, Juan, risks burning at the stake, he iconoclastically carries on with his craftsmanship, even against the warning of his Arab employer, Umar. Juan is steadfast and incumbent on avenging his wronged father. Being a flat character with such a strong motive, power diminution from an insider's position, becomes at hand. Though Juan is a Christian, he does not condone the physical and epistemic violence levelled on Arabs. He actually reciprocates their patronage and kindness. Hence, not every Spaniard or Christian was approving of the Inquisition.

Like Juan the Carpenter, a powerful nobleman called Don Inigo, describes the burning of the books as a savage act, because Arabic "manuals on science and medicine [were] without equal in the civilized world". Both insiders resist the negative effects of power that is exerted upon them and the Other, one such act is done from within Spanish nobility close to the Spanish throne.

The technique of inversion can be located even further when a concession is made: Juan metamorphoses into a noble “savage,” an outsider domesticated for the purpose of acknowledging his peoples’ savagery, religious sobriety/dogmatism, and non-religious affiliation, disallowing freedoms, cultural goals, and hopes for a better reality.

On the one hand, the puritanical discourse of carriers of the Inquisition stifles, kills innocent victims as “collateral” damage, with no mercy, reason or truthfulness. On the other hand, the Arabic employer, Omar, gifts his employee, Juan, artful high-living and great cultural acknowledgement/esteem. Omar, as a lord, becomes a benefactor to his Christian page, who appreciates living peacefully, away from privy fanatics that rely on brute force, theocracy, and dogmatic control.

In fine, Ali creates notorious wood-pieces to detract the physical cruelty his father had sustained by the power of the cowl, who labelled him as an apostate, a heretic, prone to burning at the stake:

[the] Carpenter’s father had been charged with apostasy. ... while visiting relatives in Tulaytula. He had later died in prison. ... fingers had been snapped off each hand. The old carpenter had lost the urge to live. Young Juan was bent on revenge. The design of the chess set was only a beginning”.

Ali creates the form of the wooden-pieces to “outlast them all,” i.e. all other household artifacts (Ali, 1992, p.7) in what can be called as an artistic, passive kind of rebellion.

Formally, this critical artifact is one of the most important counter-discursive acts there is in this novel. Carved from wood, the chess-set serves as resistance to General De Cisneros. This critiquing from within is made double, because it was crafted a) by a Christian confessing Christianity, but working against its fortuitous cruelty, and narrowmindedness of his people; and b) by condemning them for it in the name of art. In fine, Juan functions as an apologist to the cruelty that indemnifies the Spanish people he is caught in between.

Thematically, the chess-set is fashioned to represent, symbolically, the Golden era of the Arabic culture, civilization, and bravery, honorable and prideful Men and Women. Tariq Bno Ziad, the Arabian leader of the Army at the time was heard saying to his Men, prior to invading the Iberian Peninsula: *The sea is behind you and the enemy is in front of you!* After the prologue, which is intended to re-narrativize Arabic history, and culture from a native’s perspective, *Shadows of the Pomegranate Tree* (1992) starts with Ama’s voice: “if things go on like this. ... nothing will be left of us except a fragrant memory.”

Her interlocutor, a young Yazid, is striving so hard to learn playing chess, so as to beat his sisters, Hind and Kulthum, in a match, when things would go south, later on. They come back from their journey to Granada, as if he is being prepared for war against De Cisneros, and his soldiery.

What is of immediate concern with the opening speech of Ama is that impressionistic, foreshadowing device it uses, indicating strife, and tense relationships between two groups of men; one dominant by military prowess, after the so-called reconquest; and the other, at the mercy of the former dogmatically. Culturally, however, he is the Revenant through his art, tapestry, and architecture, all incidentally forms that threaten the continuities of Spanish Neo-colonial power.

The Arab cultural forms and ways dissimulate into this wooden chess-set. Young Yazid embodies the contingency of going back to his rightful home, a lord, a citizen, a King. But the desire to destroy his culture is also imminent through power and/or the Hobbesian ability of *forme* (archaic), because the Eurocentric mind think that the land is rightfully theirs. This

cannot hold, so they instill in their citizens the necessary cathartic, cleansing the Arab from European, memory, and existence: “from Henceforward you must accept the laws laid down by our King and Queen. All of them. Those of you who embrace my faith can keep your houses and your lands, wear your clothes, and speak your language, but those who continue to make converts to the sect of [Mahomet] will be punished” (Ali, 1992, p. 200).

The two groups are none other than Isabella’s Christians, driven by a zealot fanatic called Ximenes de Cisneros and the Moors respectively become locked down into a power relation made in tension by the former’s burning the latter’s books of learning, thus breaking asunder the entente/*Convivencia* that existed under Arab rule.

Ximenes de Cisneros makes it hard to live in coexistence, as he “had always believed that the heathen could only be eliminated as a force if their culture was completely erased. This meant the systematic destruction of all their books.” Nevertheless, closely read against the backdrop of Foucault’s notion of power, discourse, and resistance, the power relation that delineates these two cultures is at best, unstable. It is of a dynamism that keeps shifting between two opposing poles. Hence, this allows the contingency of contradicting power(s), contesting each other via another discourse informed by the symbolism of the inversion, and the meanings young Yazid’s chess-set attaches to them; because, when there is power, there is also resistance (Foucault, 1978, p. 95).

Yazid, a young war strategist, defeats both his sisters, and the convert, Miguel, who used to be an Arab, but became a monk. The wooden chess-set with its kings, queens, and pawns are attributions, sacrifice, signifying, representing the greatness of the Banu Hudayl House Hold. The history of the family, after the recapture of Granada, will not be a

“...fragrant memory” [but] resistance in the shape of a wooden chess-set, because the oppressor in this particular form is humiliatingly represented, to undermine [the] authority and version of what is right, or wrong” (Ali, 1992, p. 4).

The symbolism behind the chess set reveals that the counterpart cannot be unholy. Rather, he is challenged on moral and religious grounds, and is reduced to a *grotesque* representation. While the I is rendered as peaceful, highly cultured, and inviting in this form, the Other is dimmed down and discursively dismantled in comparison through the technique of inverting the traditional roles, and ways of living to show the adequacy and cultural superiority of the I, an Arab family, with its Christian Carpenter, high-culture, and to make the wooden chess-pieces an emblem of resistance, and a lasting piece of memorabilia that jibes down at zealots, monks, Kings, and queens, discoursing through, between, and beyond, the black Inquisition.

“The [Arabs] had been assigned the color white ... The knights were representations of Yazid’s great-grandfather, the warrior Ibn Farid, whose legendary adventures in love and war dominated (Ali, 1992, p. 7)”

Contrariwise, Christians are ridiculed, and reduced to flat characters, or ghastly misrepresentations, their images distorted, soul void, as if they were anything but demonic creatures, cast off by the winds of the Inquisition. The Inquisitors were

not merely black. ... [Their] eyes shone with evil. ... lips painted the color of blood. ... The king had been carved with a portable crown that could be easily lifted, and as if this symbolism was not sufficient, the iconoclastic carpenter had provided the monarch with a tiny pair of horns ... Ferdinand and Isabella (Ali, 1992, p. 7).

In short, the wooden chess-set can be viewed as a form of emancipation from the dominant, homogeneous discourse of the Inquisition, and its false assumptions on intercultural life. Understanding the power of ideas, the western reader is deeply put to mourn, question, and

apologize, and apologize he does, because all the writer, Tariq Ali, did was to remind them about the historical integrity of his novel, and the dark period of the Inquisition, which Spanish historiography tries inevitably to conceal.

Resistance in Radwa Ashour's *Granada*: A Novel

After submission, they'll teach us a lesson we'll never forget. The treaty is nothing but a worthless piece of paper. If we surrender Granada to them, they'll force us to drop to our knees, whenever a clerical procession passes by. They'll force us to live in separate quarters with only one gate, and they'll put the sword of expulsion to our throats. What will prevent them from doing all of this once they take control of our country (Ashour, 2003, p 16).

The historical is renewed and then problematized in Ashour's fiction. Her fiction is replete with remembrances, and resistances to those epistemic erasures, and past genocidal acts perpetrated against Arab peoples. The representations of violence and erasures of conquest after 1492 speaks to the reality of the present, especially in the representations of Muslims nowadays. Even the representations of the imagery of the Muslim, Arab Other, usually cast as the heavily perused object, the silent ally, the exotic ornament, the subaltern, is challenged in Ashour's prose, "for she reiterates the articulations of the selfhood of a community by using fiction as a malleable tool to rebuild the rich internal lives, the thoughts, the emotions, the private and intimate spaces which historiography could never fully take into account."

Granada "re-occupy time because the year 1492 is not an ending, and the Arabs of Spain do not simply vanish" (Rowther, 2020, pp. 9-10). Their presence is accentuated, and are reintroduced to the limelight of history. People, the world over, or citizens of the world, need to step into perspectives of difference a religious Other, ethnic Other, racial Other. Through fiction, a "productive space to remember and reimagine what *might have been*," or *what could have been is at reach* to decolonize not only the land, or mind, but the imagination also, and bring forth a springboard towards the future, full of entente, mutual understanding, and coexistence.

Ashour tries to show readers that "reframing the past speaks to the need to reflect on our present" (Rowther, 2020, pp.9-10). As well as drawing a minute observation on the notion of fiction, which furnishes readers with an "intimate space as a means to return to the critical moment of 1492, giving space to "problematize the representation of colonized bodies, spaces, and histories in the images and narratives of 1492, and the years following." The aim being an "investigation into the dynamic ways the historical imagination has been formed, reformed, and challenged through language and imagery." The dynamics of the fictionalized, historical representations investigated here are bidirectional as images and narratives of the past constantly projected into the present and future and are, in turn, projected upon as well (Rowther, 2020, pp. 9-10).

Ashour re-frames the story, events, and experiences through the point of view of the besieged, occupied community of Granada. The conquest of Granada in 1492 was not simply an undertaking of a physical siege, or the brute violence of warfare. It was rather a source of epistemic violence engendered by Christian fanatics to destroy specific markers of the identity of an entire community/race.

Instead of focusing on the history of Spain in its so-called *siglo de oro*, Ashour starts with the moment of loss and continues to delve into the experiences of a Arab family. As conditions of this family worsen, Ashour does not show her protagonists solely as victims, but as strong individuals, fighting, adapting, and coping with hard days, death, destruction, and oppression with creativity, defiance, and hope (Rowther, 2020, pp. 9-10).

Ashour's *Granada: A Novel* deals in intimate, hidden spaces by showing readers personal relationships, and internal struggles of main, round characters. The space of Granada itself also figures predominantly within the novel as the family life of Abu Jaafar, taken actions and decisions cope with the increasing pressures and persecutions from Castilian forces together with their vigilant surveillance by the unholy Inquisition. This make Naeem, Saad, and Hasan grow up as brothers in arms, although taking divergent paths later on, on how make unique choices in the face of growing pressures, and oppressive sanctions against the Arabs of his community in Granada. Alas, they are given the ultimatum, either forced conversion or exodus towards unknown destinations. Despite so, Hasan marries Maryama, the daughter of a musician, Abu Ibrahim, and Maryama and Saleema become like sisters to each other. Umm Jaafar and Umm Hasan guide the household after the death of Abu Jaafar, but Maryama and Saleema are both symbols of the dual nature of the cultural inheritance of Granada a system of knowledge transmitted both orally and in writing (Rowther, 2020, pp. 9-10).

Ashour reframes the erasures through Arab eyes gazing onto Western darkness. Shifting critical focus and the narrative space to problematize three moments of possession, destruction, and violence within the public space, Ashour and her characters collapse the spectacle of imperial possession over to bodies of indigenous Amerindians and Granadans bodies of land, bodies of knowledge, and the physical conceptions of their bodies and natures. Ashour depicts the family's experience with the spectacles of violence (Rowther, 2020, pp. 120).

First, there is the procession of Columbus on his way to Barcelona as he is displaying his newly seized possessions through what is called Andalusia. This is the first spectacle we witness in the novel, and the sense of wonder and awe quickly shifts into melancholy when children identify with the other figure of oppression the Amerindians they see walking in shackles on display as bodies possessed (Rowther, 2020, pp. 120-121)

The second spectacle of violence is when Abu Jaafar witnesses the burning of Arabic books in 1501 by order of Cardinal Francisco Jiménez de Cisneros. Soon after witnessing the burning of the books, Abu Jaafar dies, and the death of her grandfather creates in Saleema an obsessive zeal to absorb knowledge to try and understand the causes of death, healing and disease. Ashour depicts this moment, which takes place in the public plaza of Bib Rambla through the eyes of Abu Jaafar and young Saleema. By making the reader see it through their eyes, she makes witnesses of all the readers in the spectacle of cultural destruction.

The last scene of violence, which marks the end of the first novel in the trilogy, is the death of Saleema, accused of witchcraft by the Tribunal of the Inquisition. Not only does Imperial Colonialism seek to destroy culture and annihilate its people, but also humiliate them. However, Ashour redresses the silences, absences, and erasures created within the colonial vision and narrative. Standing witness, her readers experience the lives lived under Castilian occupation in Granada. Her narrative does not focus on anything before 1491. On the contrary, she focuses on the period when Muslim sovereignty existed on the Iberian Peninsula, by shifting critical focus to the period immediately after to understand the true moment of defeat.

Ashour does not return to the "golden age" of Al-Andalus, which is lauded and idealized for its cultural innovation and tolerance, but describes Granada as a community that kept fighting, adapting, and resisting the measures taken against their history, culture, and identity—Ashour's narrative becomes more valuable for reimagining a marginalized experience of history, and for asserting a sense of self-determination in this retelling of events. Her fiction sounds real as characters gestating in its parameters are less than ideal.

Because language is power and to write is to possess, colonial chroniclers of the Iberian conquest managed to come up with their own accounts of encounter. Following the imposed

act of possession over peoples and landscapes they encountered, these chroniclers produced accounts which were laden with their own perspectives, manuscripts and even maps. In the process of writing these accounts, they imposed an act of possession over the peoples and landscapes they interpreted. The visual representations and narrative texts they produced were seen as “faithful, transparent, objective accounts.” Therefore, “imperial knowledge ultimately served to create an imperial reality,” and a textual universe in Edward Said’s terms. With insufficient information, however, these chroniclers of the empire managed to convey the “systems of knowledge, sights and sounds, and the people they encountered through their narrow cultural framework to make those bodies legible to an imperial enterprise” (Rowther, 2020, pp. 1-2)

Postcolonial readings of *Granada: A Novel* should be informed by the work of Edward Said’s *Orientalism* (1978). The inclusion of Spain’s unique colonial history contrasts the British and French imperial enterprises in this novel as the analysis is cast within the mold of how the work of Ashour “reinforces or challenges the representation of non-European, non-Christian, non-white Other” as it is informed by *Orientalism*, and as the novel recreates the binary opposition of Orient versus Occident, European Self versus non-European Other (Rowther, 20220, p. 1). Said takes into account Spain and its relationship with Islam, but *Orientalism* as such is seen as giving big attention to the “particular closeness” of Britain and France with the Orient (Said, 2003, p. 4).

Spain and Latin America “are not in the scope of Said’s work.” However, Said’s framework should hold in any postcolonial novel analysis like Ashour’s, or as a starting point, at least, in the study of Arab-Andalucian-Islamic forms and acts of resistances. Precisely, the “non-European, non-Christian, non-white Other exist as a creation within “an accepted grid of filtering [...] Western consciousness where the Western self is constantly in a central, superior position in comparison to his non-Western counterpart (Rowther, 2020, p. 2).

Saleema Bint Jaafar is a representation of the family as it relates to respective identities in written knowledge, and the Arab-Islamic epistemic framework of the family, which constantly “views nature and nonhuman animals, plants, even stones as witnesses, allies, and sources of inspiration, which can embody and mirror their emotional and intellectual conditions,” correlating with to the aura and immortality of Granada. Saleema, a clandestine autodidact, smuggles Arabic manuscripts to protect her cultural inheritance/lore from the Inquisitorial hellfire. The first book of Ashour’s trilogy ends with the death of Saleema at the stake of the infamous Inquisition for possessing Arabic, banned manuscripts. Granada the home to the family of Abu Jaafar as it was, dies with Saleema, and there is no possibility for a real return except in fiction, memory and imagination (Rowther, 2020, pp.5-6).

Ashour challenges dominant colonial narratives by reconstructing the inner lives, emotions, and agency of marginalized Arab-Muslim communities, thereby countering their reduction to silent or exoticized “Others.” Through intimate family narratives and symbolic characters like Saleema, Ashour highlights the preservation of knowledge, memory, and identity despite systemic erasure. The novel also exposes how colonial discourse, as theorized by Edward Said in *Orientalism*, constructs and legitimizes imperial dominance by producing biased representations of non-European peoples. As a last note, Ashour’s work uses fiction as a space to critically revisit the past, interrogate present injustices, and imagine more inclusive futures grounded in coexistence, empathy, and the recovery of silenced histories

Results and Discussion

The argument that power in postcolonial narratives operates through fluid and contested relations rather than fixed domination can be productively illuminated through *Shadows of the Pomegranate Tree* by Tariq Ali and *Granada: A Novel* by Radwa Ashour. Both texts are set in the aftermath of 1492, when the fall of Granada marked the end of Muslim rule in Iberia and initiated systematic efforts most notably through the Inquisition—to erase Arab-Islamic identity.

However, rather than depicting power as monolithic and unchallengeable, these novels foreground its instability and the ways it is continually negotiated in everyday life. In both works, institutional power embodied in the Inquisition, forced conversions, and censorship seeks to regulate not only public behavior but also private belief, language, and memory. The banning of Arabic books, the renaming of individuals, and the imposition of Christian practices represent attempts to reconfigure identity at its core.

Yet, these mechanisms reveal an anxiety within power itself: the need to constantly enforce, surveil, and punish indicates that domination is never fully secured. Power, in this sense, is not a static possession but a dynamic process that depends on compliance, which is never total.

Resistance, therefore, emerges not only through overt rebellion but through subtler, quotidian acts that preserve cultural continuity. In *Shadows of the Pomegranate Tree*, characters resist through intellectual and cultural practices reading forbidden texts, engaging in philosophical discussions, and maintaining Islamic traditions within the domestic sphere. The act of remembering becomes political: memory functions as a counter-discourse to official histories that seek to erase Arabic presence. Storytelling, in particular, operates as a form of resistance, transmitting knowledge across generations and safeguarding identity against institutional erasure.

Similarly, *Granada: A Novel* places strong emphasis on communal memory and the persistence of everyday life as a site of defiance. The household of Abu Jaafar becomes emblematic of this resistance. Despite increasing restrictions, the family continues to cook traditional food, speak Arabic in private, and pass down stories of their past. These practices may appear minor, yet they constitute a profound refusal to assimilate fully into the imposed order. By centering such acts, Ashour challenges conventional understandings of resistance as solely violent or revolutionary, instead presenting it as embedded within the rhythms of daily existence.

Female voices play a particularly crucial role in both narratives, complicating patriarchal and colonial frameworks simultaneously. Characters such as Saleema in *Shadows of the Pomegranate Tree*, and the women of Abu Jaafar's family in *Granada: A Novel* act as custodians of memory and culture. Their roles in storytelling, education, and the preservation of traditions position them as central agents of resistance. Importantly, this resistance often occurs within the domestic sphere, which colonial and patriarchal discourses tend to marginalize. By foregrounding these spaces, the novels revalue them as critical sites where power is contested and identity is maintained.

Artistic expression and the preservation of knowledge further underscore the fluidity of power relations. The destruction of books and manuscripts by the Inquisition is countered by clandestine efforts to hide, copy, and transmit them. Knowledge becomes both a target of repression and a tool of resistance. In this context, intellectual activity is not merely abstract but deeply political. It challenges the epistemic violence of colonial authority, which seeks to monopolize truth and rewrite history from a Eurocentric perspective.

Crucially, both novels engage in a broader project of historiographical revision. By narrating the experiences of marginalized Arab communities, they contest dominant historical narratives that often portray the Reconquista as a triumph of civilization over barbarism. Instead, these texts reveal the violence, displacement, and cultural loss that accompanied this period. At the same time, they resist reducing Arab identity to victimhood. Through their depiction of resilience, adaptability, and creativity, they reclaim agency for these communities. The concept of power that emerges from these works aligns with poststructuralist understandings, particularly the idea that power is diffuse and relational rather than centralized and absolute. It operates through networks of discourse, practice, and belief, and is therefore always open to resistance. The Inquisition may impose laws and punish transgressions, but it cannot fully control thought, memory, or cultural expression. This gap between enforcement and internalization becomes the space in which resistance flourishes.

Conclusion

This research paper argues that power in the selected post-colonial novels operate through fluid/contested relations, rather than fixed domination. Institutions such as the Inquisition attempted to suppress Arab identity; yet, characters resisted through everyday cultural practices, memory, and storytelling. For example, in *Shadows of the Pomegranate Tree* (1992), and *Granada: A Novel* (2003), resistance emerges both in subtle and overt ways—through female voices, artistic expression, preservation of knowledge, and communal memory—challenging Eurocentric and colonial narratives of yore. Figures like Saleema, and Abu Jaafar’s family embody a defiance so great that reclaim the Arab presence, in post-1492 Granada.

Ultimately, while power remains real and constraining, these texts demonstrate that it is never absolute; but continually negotiated and undermined through cultural resilience, enabling the reimagining of marginalized histories and identities from historical oblivion. In conclusion, *Shadows of the Pomegranate Tree* (1992), and *Granada: A Novel* (2001), offer multi-layered portrayals of power, fluidity, contestation, and the instability of power. By highlighting forms of resistance embedded in daily life, they move beyond binary oppositions of domination and subjugation. Instead, they reveal a complex interplay in which marginalized communities assert their presence and agency, ensuring that their histories and identities endure, despite systematic attempts at erasure. Through this lens, the past is not a closed narrative but a site of ongoing struggle and reinterpretation, where voices once silenced can be heard again.

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