

**The Portrayal of Female Characters in Radwa
Ashour's *Thulathyat Ghernata* and Tariq Ali's
*Shadows of the Pomegranate Tree***

تصوير الشخصيات النسائية في روايتي "ثلاثية غرنطة" لرضوى عاشور

و "ظلال شجرة الرمان" لطارق عليّ

إعداد

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Abstract

Literature is the outcome of the cultural background of its writer. Every writer's work reflects his viewpoint as well as his cultural and social beliefs. The present study is to explore the representation of female characters of two novel: from different cultural backgrounds. Radwa Ashour's *Thulathyat Ghernata* and Ali's *Shadow of the Pomegranate Tree*. The study has concluded that Ashour, as an Egyptian novelist in a patriarchal society, focuses more on representing female characters as protagonists who make decisions and save the legacy of the Arab Islamic civilization in al-Andalus. On the other hand, female characters in Ali's *Shadow of the Pomegranate Tree* seem to be models of the Orientalist view of women in the East; he depicts them as lustful, passive and dependent. Hence, the representation of female characters in the selected novels of the two novelists was affected by the prevailing image in the milieu they lived in.

Keywords: Radwa Ashour, Tariq Ali, *Thulathyat Ghernata*, *Shadow of the Pomegranate Tree*, Female Characters

إن الأدب مرآة المجتمع وهو نتاج الخلفية الثقافية لكاتبه، ومن هذا المنطلق فكل كاتب يعكس في أعماله معتقداته ومبادئه الثقافية والاجتماعية. وتتناول هذه الدراسة مقارنة بين كل من رواية "ثلاثية غرناطة" لرضوى عاشور ورواية "ظلال شجرة الرمان" لطارق علي، والتي تعكس الخلفية الثقافية المختلفة لكل منهما. و تتلخص نتائج هذه الدراسة في إتقان الروائية رضوى عاشور تصوير شخصياتها النسائية بشكل يتسم بالقدرة على إتخاذ القرارات بشكل صائب و أيضا على إنقاذ تراث الحضارة العربية الإسلامية في الأندلس، مما يدل على الصورة الذهنية للكاتبة و تأثرها الشديد في رغبة الكاتبة في محاولة إظهار الشخصيات النسائية بشكل يختلف عن واقع المرأة العربية في المجتمع الذكوري. و على النقيض فقد صوّر الكاتب طارق علي الشخصيات النسائية من خلال روايته بشكل ثانوي و سلبي و يستند فقط على الغرائز. و لهذا فإنه يتضح تأثر كلا الكاتبين بالثقافة التي نبعا منها و الذي ظهر واضحا في كلا الروائيتين.

الكلمات المفتاحية: رضوى عاشور ، طارق علي ، ثلاثية غرناطة، ظلال شجرة الرمان، شخصيات نسائية.

Female characters provide representation and visibility for women in literature. Both Radwa Ashour and Tariq Ali employ female characters in their novels *Thulathiyat Ghernata* and *Shadow of the Pomegranate Tree*. These two novels have a common ground for comparison since they both tackle the aftermath of Granada's fall and Inquisition, as well as forced conversion to Christianity. The two novelists reflect their ideas from different cultural backgrounds. Therefore, the major aim of the study is to explore how the cultural background of both of them has affected their views about female characters.

The first novelist is Radwa Ashour (1946-2014), the Egyptian novelist, critic and activist. She is one of the leading Arab women voices. Ashour got her B.A. in English literature at Cairo University, then she received her MA in comparative literature in 1972 from the same university. Ashour got her Ph.D. degree from the University of Massachusetts in 1978, writing her thesis on African-American literature, which was entitled *The Search for a Black Poetics: A Study of Afro-American Critical Writing*. Since that time, she declared herself as “a spokesperson for marginalized voices...giving voice to those who have been silenced” (Doré 3). Besides, Ashour was a political activist; especially in supporting woman empowerment and the Palestinian issue, which was confirmed by her marriage to the Palestinian poet Mourid al-Barghouthy.

Ashour adopted a literary project that focused mainly on issues of women and the marginalized and the silenced areas of the past, as well as engaging and reflecting the Arab history and present issues through a series of novels, memoirs and literary studies. She wrote seven novels: *Hajar Dafi'* (A Warm Stone) (1983), *Khadija and Sawsan* (1989), *Siraj* (1992), *Thulathiyat Ghernata* (Granada Trilogy) (1995), *Atyaf* (Spectres) (1998), *Qit'a Min Orouba* (A Piece from Europe) (2003), *Farag* (2008), and *Tantouria* (A woman from Tantoura) (2010). She wrote two short stories collections: *Ra'ayt al-Nakhl* (I saw the Date Palms) (1987) and *Taqarir al-Sayyida Ra* (Reports from Mrs. R) (2001).

She also wrote a travel memoir *al-Rihla : Ayam Taliba Masriya fi America* (The Journey: Memoirs of an Egyptian Student in America.) (1983) in which she recorded her memories as an Egyptian student in America. Her last work was an autobiography *Athkal mn Radwa* (Heavier than Radwa) (2013).

She published many critical studies and translations; she co-edited *The Encyclopedia of Arab Women Writers: 1873–1999* (2005) and supervised the translation into Arabic of volume nine of *The Cambridge History of Literary Criticism* (2006). She was awarded many prizes: she won the 2007 Constantine Cavafy Prize for Literature. Her novel *Thulathyat Ghernata* won first prize at the Cairo Arab Women's Book Fair in 1995 and was declared best book of the year by the General Egyptian Book Organization in 1994. She died in 2014.

The second novelist is Tariq Ali (1943 -), a British-Pakistani novelist, historian, filmmaker, political activist, and public intellectual. He was born in Lahore, Pakistan, then he was sent to Oxford University, where he studied philosophy, politics, and Economics. In 1965, he was elected the president of Oxford Student Union. His first novel *Redemption* (1990) was a political satire set in contemporary Europe and America. His fame as a novelist lay in *The Islam Quintet* that includes five historical novels: *Shadows of the Pomegranate Tree* (1992), *The Book of Saladin* (1998), *The Stone Woman* (2000), *A Sultan in Palermo* (2005), and *Night of the Golden Butterfly* (2010).

His *Islam Quintet* includes five historical novels addressing the long history of the clash between Islam and the West. They are not interlinked thematically; they don't follow chronological order. They present a part of a mosaic picture of the Islamic history; each book of *The Quintet* deals with a specific epoch. *Shadows of the Pomegranate Tree* deals with Spain of 1492 and the fall of Granada. *The Book of Saladin* deals with the struggle between Saladin and the Crusades. *The Stone Woman* tackles the end of nineteenth century Turkey and the Ottoman Empire. *A Sultan in Palermo* goes back to twelfth-century Sicily and the

island's Arabic population. *The Quintet* ends in the modern world in *Night of the Golden Butterfly*, moving from Lahore to London and from Paris to Beijing. *Shadows of the Pomegranate Tree* was awarded "The Archbishop San Clemente del Instituto Rosalia de Castro" prize for the best foreign language fiction published in Spain in 1994. In 2010, Ali's *Quintet* was awarded The Granadillo Prize--a prestigious literary prize in Spain.

Female Characters in Ashour's *Thulathyat Ghernata*

Ashour's *Thulathyat Ghernata* is a historical novel published between 1994 and 1995 in three parts: *Ghernata*, *Maryama* and *al-Raheel*. It tackles the last days of al-Andalus as seen by the people of Albaicin in 1491, right before the surrender of Granada after the declaration of the agreement between Boabdil, the last king of Granada, and Ferdinand and Isabella, the kings of Aragon and Castile. The novel extends to cover the period of the mass exodus of the Arabs in 1609 providing great deal of information about the age, generations, social classes and habits of inhabitants there. The novel also describes meticulously the measurements imposed by the Christian rulers on the inhabitants of Granada to eradicate their Arab and Islamic identity forcing them to adopt a new language and religion.

Throughout her literary career, Ashour adopted an approach that defended the women rights in her society. Most of Ashour's contemporaries focused on the feminist approach by attacking the patriarchal norms and depicting women as victims. Nevertheless, Ashour was aware of women issues, and she focused more on the solutions to defy the patriarchal dominance not on just debating, taking into her consideration that she is an Arab Egyptian woman. She believed that women's rights are part of the country's issues, thinking that "the social and political context is as important as the personal experience because it decides the framework through which the events will take place" (Kallaf, 233). Hence, she portrayed her female characters as dynamic characters who acted as guardians of the states' matters and issues. Her female characters were introduced as rational, intelligent, able to get things accomplished.

Ashour noticed that in official history “women’s lives are dismantled and removed from their contexts, their experiences are overgeneralized in order to be compared to a common narrative of freedom and equality” (Batoool 48). Even in most of historical novels, events focused on the masculine activities on the altar of marginalizing feminine ones. Consequently, in most of her novels, she highlighted women’s struggle against dangers that threatened not only their families but also their communities. For this reason, Najm argues that Ashour tends to discuss the effect of war and catastrophes from the viewpoint of her female characters by placing them in “in a complex web of human relations, through which they can deconstruct sociopolitical environment and the constraints to which they are subjected” (7009). Therefore, they exert effort to change these effects, maintaining their identities and resisting attempts of eradication. In a word, Ashour’s female characters are portrayed not only as conquered but also as resistant characters.

In an interview, Ashour acknowledged that *Thulathyat Ghernata* is not mainly a feminist novel stating: “This book is not feminist in an orthodox sense, but it is in the sense that I show women taking things in hand. Women are always dealing with life and getting things accomplished, but often stories and histories don’t show this...” (Seymour-Jorn 140). Accordingly, in her novel, she focuses more on the strength of her female characters in spite of their sufferings. They are depicted as determined to continue their duty in life, looking after their families, and preserving their culture, heritage, identity, traditions and faith. From the very beginning of the novel, she affirmed the effective presence and important roles played by female characters in. Ashour introduced her female characters in very troubling situations which acted as a catalyst to generate their hidden energy.

The first example of Ashour's female characters is Saleema, she is one of the main prominent female characters in the novel, she is Abu Ja’afar’s granddaughter and Saad’s wife and Aisha’s mother. Since her early childhood, it was clear that Saleema was not an ordinary character; she was interested in knowledge and

keeping books. Unlike her peers, she was distinguished from the other girls in her family; she had a strong personality so that “when she was preoccupied with something, she would become so obsessed with it that no one nor the whole family could deviate her from it” (31). Umm Ja’afar repeatedly described her as “the queen of Sheba that wanted to order and be obeyed, and no one would give her orders” (31). Saleema was a very smart girl in spite of her young age; “her mind was as active as a mill that never stopped moving around, she was observing thinking and asking questions. She was only nine, but she had memorized a third of Quran, and could recite readily and write in a clear sound handwriting” (31).

From the very beginning of the novel, Ashour formed Saleema’s character as a character who is thirsty for knowledge and a learning-lover. Ashour prepared the reader for Saleema’s assigned task in preserving the Arab and Islamic heritage, and she took this knowledge and heritage as a weapon to resist the Castilian physical and intellectual occupation and assassination. In her book *Fi Al-Naqd Al-Tatbeki : Sayado Al-Zakera*, Ashour acknowledged that while she was writing *Thulathyat Ghernata*, “she was writing her own story” (242). In this sense, Saleema resembles Ashour in her thirst for knowledge and resistance through writing, as well as being rebellious over the present challenges. Saleema is one of Ashour’s feminist models who represent the feminist voices that Ashour was keen to highlight in her novels. She inherited her grandfather’s task of keeping and preserving books. Abu Ja’afar’s brought her up “to become like Aysha bint Ahmad, the crown jewel among cordovan ladies and gentlemen alike” (*Thulathyat Ghernata* 42).

Moreover, Saleema was a philosopher; she was contemplating and asking existential questions, it is clear after the death of Abu Ja’afar, Umm Ja’afar and her baby. Saleema “didn’t participate in cooking nor in women’s mourning, rather she withdrew to her room. She was thinking about death that suppresses and humiliates, and about human beings that stand powerless before it” (148). Saleema went further; “she was also

thinking about God in the highest heaven, is He watching everything in silence and indifference? Isn't He who takes life away? Why does he take it away and why does He put it in the heart for a while then He calls it to pass away leaving its warm nest looks like a desert?" (148). All these questions refer to Saleema's active mind that tends to analyze every situation, and this leads to search for answers for these questions.

Being fond of books and learning, Saleema was one of the characters who were afflicted severely by book burning. She shouted saying to Abu Ja'afar: "they won't burn books, grandfather, will they? They can't do that" (51). After this accident, she felt as if "she was suffocating in the prison of the miserable time in which keeping books is a punishable crime, and studying required caution, secrecy and being hidden not only from the watching eyes of the strangers, but also from acquaintances" (150). She was interested in books of medicine such as Avicenna's *Qanun*. She learned to make drugs and medicine; "her pots, jars, vials, and trunks were full to the brim with fresh and dry herbs, mixtures, ointments, and medicines that sometimes cured and sometimes failed" (152).

Besides, Saleema was rebellious against the Castilian occupation and its laws, she refused to go to the mass at the church, she declared that "she would never go to the church even if they tied her hands and feet and dragged her" (160); she believed that disobedience is resistance. Saleema, or Gloria Alvarez after conversion, was the victim of preserving the Arab heritage after being accused of witchcraft and heresy and being "an instrument and servant of Satan, keeping his seeds and preparing satanic compositions that harm people and animals" (244). The inquisition committee, led by judge Antonio Agapida, declared her as "an unrepentant infidel, and sentenced her to death by fire" (245), to declare the end of Arabic Islamic presence in al-Andalus.

Maryama is another influential female character in *Thulathyat Ghernata*. She is the wife of Hassan, the grandson of Abu Ja'afar and Saleema's sister. She is one of the dynamic characters in the novel so, her name is the title of the second part of the novel. She raised Saleema's daughter, Aisha and then her son Ali. She earned her living by making cookies and selling them in the market. Maryama was admired among her neighbours for her natural intelligence and "quick thinking that changes the bitterness, the weak feeling by the powerful rule, into loud laughter" (*Thulathyat Ghernata* 153).

People loved her "simply because she is Maryama, and because her actions gave them moments of pure joy" (155). It was clear in her visit to a missionary school to solve the problem of one of her neighbours by convincing the school master that the Arab boys were born circumcised (153-5). Another situation that shows Maryama's intelligence is when she saw an eight-year-old boy "reciting merrily feast day prayers" that he might heard from the prayers that were performed secretly. Maryama noticed Castilian guards walking around she ran "like a threatened hawk" towards the boy and slapped him and shouted in Spanish: "didn't I warn you one thousand time not to play with the Arab children?" (156). Then she warned his mother to be more careful out of the house. In this way, Maryama was appreciated by her neighbours and acquaintances, and even those whom she hardly knew.

Maryama is an extension of Saleema since she became an icon of resistance after Saleema's death. Unlike Saleema who chose direct resistance and disobedience, Maryama chose to hide her resistance and allegedly accepted the Castilian measurements and conversion. When the family discussed departure from Granada she replied: "we won't leave, only God knows what hearts feel, and heart lives only within its body. I know who I am, Maryama, and this is my daughter, Ruqayya. Would it make a big difference if the rulers of the country forced me to change my name into Maria and my daughter into Anna? I will never leave because the tongue doesn't deny its own language nor the face its features" (122).

Maryama represents the guardian of values and identity; she was teaching children how to live in two identities by hiding the Arab Muslim Identity and showing allegedly the Castilian one. At home, “they spoke Arabic and lived their daily lives as their fathers and grandfathers had lived. But in the street and at school, they spoke Spanish, and they behaved as their Castilian authorities and Office of Inquisition ordered” (157). Maryama was very careful to raise her children on Arab and Islamic bases; she was instructing them the Arab values and the history of the fathers in order to be a shield to face the opposing fake cultural images they were facing at school and church by force. So, she taught them to have dual identity; she instructed her children saying: “whoever speaks Spanish at home or does what the Castilians do will turn into a monkey...Whoever speaks Arabic outside or gives away a word of what goes on inside the house will be lost in street and won’t be able to find his way home” (157).

Maryama seems to be a problem-solver that had a clue for every problem. That’s why she was a shelter whom many characters seek when they faced any problem. When the Castilian authorities issued a new decree that stated that all Arabic books would be “handed to be inspected”, Maryama told Saleema a plan to hide books by moving them secretly without arousing any suspicion in sacks from Ainadamar to Albaicin (201-02). Another situation is when Saleema was arrested and no one could know what happened to her, Maryama thought of a strategy to know what was happening to Saleema. Maryama made inquiries until she found a Castilian woman whose husband worked as a clerk at the office of Inquisition. She planned to meet her at the market as if it was a coincidence, and she befriended her, and they spent more time later, and they exchanged talks about cooking and recipes. Then after several weeks Maryama asked her about her husband’s work, the woman told her and that they tortured her for committing bad deed and witchcraft. Hence, Maryama knew all what was going on inside Saleema’s prison (225-27).

Maryama played an important role in supporting Alpujarra's rebellion through her grandson Ali, and she was the icon of the rebellion. Maryama died as she and her family were exiled to Cordova, she died on the way, and she was buried in the desert. Ashour made Maryama a reflection of her own resistant personality. Maryama's role didn't end by her death, she was mentioned and recalled until the end of the novel and her box, where she had hidden Abu Ja'afar's books in, was a symbol of the hidden heritage of Arab-Muslim culture. Ashour ended the novel with a statement that refers to Maryama's inspiring role on the tongue of her grandson: "Maryama's tomb is no longer alone" (502).

In Ashour's *Thulathyat Ghernata*, the main female protagonists are not subjective passive characters, rather their roles are vital in the course of events. In *Thulathyat Ghernata*, Ashour "criticized the nature of official histories by rewriting histories that are inclusive of female point of view" (Osman 104). In her novel, the main female characters, Saleema and Maryama contribute to preserve the identity and heritage of their nation. Moreover, history was rewritten from the viewpoint of these two female characters. These female characters face invasion and attempts to eradicate their identities and heritage. They defend their identities and heritage and teach their children to stick to them.

Saleema and Maryama represent Ashour herself. Their conditions seem to resemble Ashour's, being a wife of the Palestinian poet Mourid al-Barghouthi . She aimed at defying the patriarchal stereotypical image of women in Arab societies as well as the Western stereotypes about women set by Orientalists. Ashour's main protagonists are female characters who suffer from the calamities and the psychological influence of war, occupation, displacement and attempts of eradicating identity and culture. However, these female characters are not marginalized or helpless, they revolt against these destructive conditions and struggle to keep their identity and culture. So, they are not passive segments in history, rather they rewrite the history of their nations through preserving heritage and retelling the collective memory out of their feeling of responsibility and commitment.

All in all, Ashour's *Thulathyat Ghernata* is a self-defense attempt to invoke the voices of "the vanquished groups" who resist the attempts of "depriving them of their historical pasts, and consequently their identities as well" (White, "The Historical Event", 9). She acts as a national chronicler who is involved in recording the details of what happened foregrounding what had been dropped in the official history of the conqueror. She included female characters in her novel as leading characters to assert their active roles in history.

Tariq Ali's *Shadows of the Pomegranate Tree*

Ali is one of the writers who embrace two cultures striving within him he was born in Lahore, Pakistan, and he studies and lived the rest of his life in Britain. Moreover, he was born and raised by communist parents, and he was educated at a Catholic school. Yet, "It did nothing to shake his long-life atheism" (bbc.com/ tariq_ali). So, his view to Muslim community is controlled by two cultures: an Eastern Islamic and Western one.

Ali's *Islam Quintet* is written as a response to the Western stereotypical view about the Arab and Islamic civilization. In an interview with Talaat Ahmed, Ali criticizes the demonized stereotype of Muslims and Islam arguing: "The politicians and media have created a dominant image of Islam that is one of bearded terrorists", and Islamic culture is described as backward and its politics despotic". Ali continued that this view is adopted by many liberals and some on the left who used the language of "Islamic fascism". In the same interview, when Ali was asked about the reason behind writing *The Quintet*, he replied: "In 1991 during the first Gulf War, I heard some professors on TV say something that is now so common that nobody talks about. He said, 'The Arabs are a people without political culture.' This really angered me as I knew instinctively that this was not true". The present study focuses on analyzing the portrayal of female characters, who are mostly belong to the Arab-Muslim community, in his novel *Shadows of the Pomegranate Tree*.

Concerning Ali's *Shadows of the Pomegranate Tree* (1993), it is a postmodern historical novel and the first novel of *The Quintet*. As Ashour's *Thulathyat Ghernata*, Ali's *Shadows of the Pomegranate Tree* sets in al-Andalus or Muslim Spain in 1499, seven years after the fall of Granada by Ferdinand and Isabella. The novel traces the calamities and measurements that the Andalusian people and civilization were afflicted with, and the attempts to eradicate the Islamic culture and identity in al-Andalus by Queen Isabella and her confessor Ximenes de Cisneros. The novel traces the effect of the fall of Granada on a family in a small village near Granada. The novel traces the political, social and religious changes in this family.

Ali introduced many female characters in *Shadows of Pomegranate Tree*. Most of the female characters belong to the aristocratic family of al-Hudayl, and the other female characters work close to the aristocratic family. The first female character introduced to the novel is Ama, the maid in the palace of Umar ibn Farid. From the very beginning of the novel, she is introduced as a tradition-guard who reminds the members of the family of the outdated traditions that they no longer care to follow. However, no one listens to her reminder, that's why she is always complaining: "who listens to an old woman these days, Ibn Umar? I might as well be dead" (4). She opposes the new lifestyle that the family adopts believing that it damages the family. So, she is always criticizing Zubayda's way of bringing-up her children and her way of dealing with the peasants of the estate, like being over-generous to them (13). She represents the orthodox traditions who refuses any violation concerning long-held principles.

Ama is introduced in the novel as a social reformer and gatekeeper who criticizes and analyzes for the sake of reforming her society. Ama believes that every individual's deeds contributed to the collective weakness and defeat of Islam. That's why, she states: "it was precisely weakness of the order which had brought Islam to the sorry pass in which it now found itself in al-Andalus" (13-14). She is the most religious member of the

family following the traditional Islamic practices and rites. She always has nostalgia for the past which is better for her. Additionally, Ama is the only character that has the complete story and the whole truth about the family; she is aware of the past of the family. In a word, Ali depicted Ama as the only one who has the truth but no one cares to know or obey. Ama represents traditional Islam in al-Andalus which is not well-remembered nor practiced there.

A second female character in the novel is Zahra ibn Farid's daughter and Umar's aunt. She was not present from the very beginning of the novel, but the narrator prepared the reader for her presence by being mentioned and being mentioned by other characters. She was in love with ibn Zaydoun or Wajid al-Zindiq, and she indulged in sexual intercourse with him. When ibn Farid was informed, he decided to kill al-Zindiq who at once escaped and lived in a deserted cave for years. In turn, as revenge from her father as well as her lover's cowardice, Zahra made many relationships with "any caballero who wished to enter" (154). She justified her immoral acts saying: "I was burnt by love I devoured my insides till there was nothing left at all" (154). This led ibn Farid to send her to the *maristan* (psychiatric hospital) in Granada.

Besides being morally weak, Zahra was religiously weak; she abandoned Islam and embraced Christianity and wore a cross to save her life in as she was in the *maristan*. Zahra wanted to break the shackles set by her father and at the same time to revenge to him for refusing to marry al-Zindiq, but her decisions destroyed her life. Ali depicted Zahra as irresponsible women who used to be under her father's control, and therefore unable to think or make any right decision of her life. Contrastingly, this view opposes the reality about women in al-Andalus or Muslim Spain. Arab women in al-Andalus or Moorish Spain enjoyed a complete level of freedom and education, and that women shared in all the intellectual, scientific and literary movements of the day. There were women poets, surgeons and doctors, historians, philosophers, business leaders and in other disciplines and professions. Moreover, women operated educational institutions in some of the principal cities.

Furthermore, Zahra represents the dead civilization of Islam; she was torn between her love of al-Zindiq, who represents the wave of revolution over the traditional thinking and beliefs, and her family's traditions. After long years in the *maristan*, Zahra chose to return to the family, which is a symbol to the return of the family and the society to traditional and conventional Islam. Zahra's death is a symbol of the fading of the Islamic civilization.

Malik et al. comment on the representation of Zahra as a subjective and passive stating that this view "contrasts to that of what women of Spain were like at that time...Women in Moorish Spain enjoyed a full level of freedoms and educational pursuits" (177). In addition, Malik et al. continue commenting on the status of women in Moorish Spain arguing: "Women shared in all of the intellectual, scientific and literary movements of the day. There were women poets, surgeons and doctors, historians, philosophers, business leaders, and in other disciplines and professions" (177). It seems that Ali depended on the stereotypical Orientalist image about Arab women as ignorant, passive and subjugated.

Moreover, Zuhair's sister, Hind is one of the female characters that represent the Orientalist view of women in the East. She is "iconoclast who is temperamentally wild and exuberant" (Gamal 12) ; she had a love affair with ibn Daud, the Egyptian student of ibn Khaldun's philosophy, so that she seduced him twice; the first time in the palace's garden and she offered to go to his room, but he resisted saying: "I am your father's guest. Please don't even suggest that I abuse his hospitality and betray his trust" (153-4). The second time is when Hind seduced him inside his room in her father's palace and had a complete love intercourse together (204-5).

Hind represents the liberal Muslim woman who tries to break the stereotype of a Muslim woman in Harem, not to be “constrained by the patriarchal normality” (Batool 51), unlike her elder sister, Kalthoum, who preferred to be submissive to the traditions of the family. Hind was driven by her passion and lust with her relationship with Ibn Daud. She represents the Orientalist myth about Arab women as lustful and sexual.

The novel also entails many queer sexual relationships, such as the incestuous relationship between Miguel and his mother Asma. Moreover, there is ibn Hanif, the religious scholar from Ishbiliya, was the result of the relationship between his mother and his mother’s father (156). The novel also introduced a homosexual relationship between Ibn Daud and his roommate Mansour (188-9). In short, many of the male characters in the novel had immoral relationships, though most of them belonged to aristocratic noble families.

Ali, a non-Western writer located in the West, is familiar with the way “Western representations might have been received, accepted, modified, challenged, overthrown or reproduced by the intelligentsia of the colonized countries” (Ahmad 172). However, Ali fell into the same Orientalist trap as some Western historians did; Ali used the same Western stereotypes of Arab and Muslim characters. The Arab are described in Ali’s *Shadows of Pomegranate Tree* as sensual and erotic following the footsteps of the Western Orientalists texts about the East. Most of Arab Muslim characters are depicted as “unreasonable, if not stupid, primitive, sex-crazed, aggressive and violent. The women are seen as uneducated, oppressed and docile” (Suleiman 33). This view was clear in describing the lifestyle of Umar ibn Abdallah’s palace and the luxurious way of living and sexual love affairs there which resembles the Orientalist paintings about the East. Umar’s palace was described as a place of pleasure and sexual love affairs with household and concubines.

Ali's Orientalist view of Arab characters in *Shadows of Pomegranate Tree* extended to include female Arab characters. Ali depicted most of Arab female characters as sensual, and some of them are immorally degraded, and this tendency led some of them to indulge in immoral acts. This depiction resembles the fixed stereotypes of Orientalists about women in the East as sensual and sexual addicts. In this way, he contradicts his main goal of introducing a different image from the Western biased stereotypes about women in the East.

The role of women in Ali's selected novels seems to go with the orientalist view of women. In *Shadows of Pomegranate Tree*, the two main women characters are Asma and Zahra, Asma had an incestuous relationship with her son Miguel. Zahra had a love affair with ibn Zaydoun or al-Zindiq, and she was sent to an asylum to prevent her from making sexual relationships with Castilian soldiers to revenge at her father's refusal of her marriage to al-Zindiq.

Women in *Shadows of the Pomegranate Tree* play a very important role in the course of events; however, they are silenced. For example, Ama "knows a great deal" (9), and she brought Umar fully acquainted with the history of the family. Similarly, Zahra was introduced into the novel as "the only person who could tell everything" (64). They both know everything, but they are hushed up and they died silently with secrets in their chests. Shamim comments on Zahra's status: "Zahra doesn't materialize the idea of making her life public by writing it though she partially communicates her past to the inquisitive youth of al-Hudayl family" (52). Zahra thinks that "her life was not of any great interest to anyone except herself and she was about to die" (*Shadows of the Pomegranate Tree* 140). She wasn't aware of her power and influence though she knew everything about the history of the family.

In conclusion, the way female characters were portrayed in the chosen novels *Thulathyat Ghernata* and *Shadows of the Pomegranate Tree*, by the two novelists Ashour and Ali, was influenced by the dominant perception within the environment they lived in. Therefore, Ashour's female characters are in a position of responsibility not only for their families, but also for their nations, cultures and identities. She aims at depicting an image that opposes the stereotypical one about women in the patriarchal societies. On the Other hand, the role of women in Ali's selected novel is not as effective as Ashour's novels. Moreover, He was influenced by the Orientalist lustful image about women in the East. Even the perfect women in his two selected novels, they are not in the front, rather their roles are secondary, pale, and not as strong as in Ashour's selected novels.

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