
Quest for Identity and Individuality in Radaw Ashour's *Granada*

Ali Hussein Najm

Ph. D Scholar

Aligrah Muslim University

Aligarh, UP. India.

Dr. Md Sajidul Islam

Associate professor,

English Department,

Aligarh Muslim University,

Aligarh. UP. India.

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Abstract

This paper discusses the concept of identity in Radwa Ashour's novel *Granada*. Ashour in this novel explores the suppress potential of her female characters to maintain their cultural and national identity in time of crises. In this novel Ashour presents both of Saleema and Maryama as active figures. Despite the oppression and the marginalization, they capable to engage in the social life and get things accomplished. Ashour in this novel exposes the hidden stories of these female characters, whose daily activities are quiet important to the function of the society. In this regard, I have use Judith butler's theory of feminism and the subversion of identity with references to Julia Krestiva's notion of semiotic approach and Paula Moya's notion of identity to analyze the characters of Saleema and Maryama in Ashour's novel *Granada*.

Keywords- National identity, Islamic Cultural Heritage, Traumatic Experiences, Instable of Identity, Feminism

The Importance of Historical Narratives

Literature is the outcome of cultural memory. It is the question of acknowledgment and the strategy of remembering, since it carries components of the past. Literature functions as an agent of memory and a mean of remembering, because it comprises memories and written materials at the same time. Being a method of portraying the past, literature should be understood with its cultural structure in which it is made and contributes. In a post-colonial context, where society experienced occupation and other forms of neo-colonial dimensions, literary narratives record each and everything that happen in society. It represents a subject of discussion and rediscovery. In this regard, trauma narrative is presented as a method to peruse the historical narratives and chronicled past to expose the unhealed wounds and unresolved conflicts which left scars on human psyche. In this regard, this paper will discuss Radwa

Ashour novels *Granada* (2003). The novel discusses the Spanish conquest of Muslim Granada, while the latter discusses the Palestinian catastrophe. In her first novel, Ashour focuses on remembering the traumatic histories as a mean to overcoming the troubled present. Ashour portrays everyday-acts of life as a form of resistance in the face of domineering policies.

- Radwa Ashour The woman Behind the Novel

Radwa Ashour (26/6/1946 - 30/11/2014) is a recognizable Egyptian author. She was born in El- Manual, a district in Cario. Her literary works consist of 15 fictional works including novels, memories, autobiographical writings, and short stories. Ashour is so interested in African American culture, that provides her a model of social engagement relevant to Egypt. That's why her writings overcome national borders as she moves beyond Egypt to creates a literary continuum of solidarity and shared experiences among peoples. In the context her literary works are usually describe as unorthodox and revisionist. She employs the Arabic narrative traditions with the modern literary practice. In her writings, Ashour does not follow the classical historical approach to history. Her historical novels try to move forward with the help of the past, where the characters can reaffirm themselves through cultural and historical heritage. In her novel, Ashour reconsiders the philosophy of history. She clarifies that, literature and literary criticism work as an act of resistance in the face of oppression and domination, where the collective identity built around cultural and historical heritage. The novel shed the light on oppression and resistances. Ashour adopts a futuristic approach in her narrative techniques, where the resistance of the past is brought to the present. Ashour's novel different from other historical novels, because they provide a reductions view of history as a topic of ethics and moral values or as a subject of mourning, grieving and stop celebrating past glories. In her writings, Ashour adopts victims' viewpoint and their effective actions in a matter of clarifying that, history is not written by the victors only. The fallen too can write it form of their perspective.

Critical Review on *Granada*

Radwa Ashour novel *Granada* was first published in Arabic in 1994, and translated into English in 2003 by William Gernara. This novel won the 'best book of the year award ' in 1994. Ashour portrays the story of Castilian's invasion on Granada. The novel depicts the life of Abo Jaafar, the bookbinder and his family, and how their lives are affected by the collapse of civilization. The events of the novel move parallel to the family members, where each one takes a different path to follow. Some decide to stay in Granada till their death, others join the resistances in the mountains, some leave the city seeking decent life in other cities and others start a new life by leaving the country. Abo Jaafar's family consists of his wife, his widow daughter in law with her, children Hassan and Saleema, and his two apprentices Saad and Na'eem. Ashour does not use the liner follow of the events in this novel. The novel begins with the death of Abo Jaafar, his sudden death sets the scene for what likely come. His death represents the begging of unending traumas. The lives of the family are always redirected and recharged, when the new oppressive rules are circulated by the Castilian ruler. Saad and

Saleema get married. later on, Saad joins the resistance, while Saleema busies herself seeking knowledge and books. Na'eem after the death of his master moves along with his pastor to the new world. Hassan gets married to Maryama, the female character who represents the Andalusian's attempt to redefine her existence and adapt to the new crucial circumstances. Saleema and Maremma play a very important role in preserving whatever remains of the cultural heritage. The first one busies herself reading books and acquiring knowledge, while the latter focuses more on resuming life in every possible way. The novel ends with the execution of Saleema. She is falsely convicted of heresy and witchcraft, because of her insistence on reading books and seeking knowledge in order to understand the issues of illness and death. On the other hand, Maryama takes up the role of preserving whatever remain of the cultural heritage.

Critical Review on Saleema's Character

Saleema is the main female character in the novel. Ashour portrays her in a way that, showing the importance of the female characters in all walks of life. Ashour always stress on the importance of female character and her effective role in society. Saleema is totally different from other girls of her age, since her childhood. She does not like to help her mother, as she likes to give orders and strongly wants to be obeyed. Her sharp mind and continuous questions makes her grandfather aware that, her laziness is completely compensated by something else. Initially, She is so obsessed with the idea of the new world, which was discovered by Christopher Columbus. She wonders "I thought that God created it only recently and I imagined its tree and all the creatures in it were tiny newborns" (Ashour .P26). Finally, she disappoints and upset when she finds that, "it's not new world ... it's just a different world, and that's all there is to"(Ashour. P 28). Later on, the idea of death, heaven and hell occupy her mind, especially after the death of her father. She is informed that, God chooses her father to be next to him in heaven. She pictures in her mind that, God specially chooses her father to be next to him, on a big throne in heaven. Where there beautiful gardens and fountains with water spouting. She wonders if God will choose her and family members together. Later on, Saleema discusses with her grandfather about the lizard, scorpion, and other reptiles. She wonders, whether they will go heaven or hell after death. She remains dissatisfied with the answer that, she gets from her grandfather" to hell ... because they cause harm to people, they go hell" (Ashour. P47). Saleema is not convinced by what she is told. She thinks that, scorpions and others are created by God, they did not choose to be so. Therefore, it is unjust that they would be punished by sending to hell. The way she thinks and talks makes her different from the girls and the boys of her age. She is not like other girls who like to play, talk, and help their mothers in daily chores.

With the passage of time, Saleema cannot comprehend the idea of God, who is the most generous and merciful. She keeps thinking about this issue more, especially when she lost both of her gazelle and her two weeks old baby. The gazelle is Saad's gift to her in their engagement, which becomes part of Saleema's daily life. She wonders: "Was it God who killed her? what could the Height and Almighty possibly wants with a gazelle that was like a

star in the firmament that caressed the heart and delighted the soul ? But God is not a tyrant, so perhaps it was the devil! But who was the devil and who created him and unleashed him onto God's creature?" (Ashour .P111). Saleema is consumed by many questions about God. When her grandmother dies, Saleema does not behave like other women. Instead of crying and mourning, she spends time thinking about the issue of creation and death. She believes that, God is a tyrant who burdened his servants with unbearable things:" Is he (God) watching all of this in silence and indifferent? Isn't it He who takes life away? why does he take it away and why does he place it in the heart only to recall it after a while, leaving its warm nest a wasteland ?" (Ashour .P137). As I explained earlier, Saleema's sharp mind and her curiosity to comprehend things make her look at God as mysterious and incomprehensible. She generally attempts to find an answer to her inquiries concerning God, death, and life. That turns to be the motive to start her quest for knowledge and books.

Since childhood, Saleema has the qualities which make her different from others. Her laziness, sharp mind, the way of thinking and analyzing the events, and her skills in calligraphy. Her grandfather wants to refine these qualities, by providing her good education. He wants her to be like Aysha bint Ahmed or Aysha Al Qurtubiyya. She was a tenth-century poet and a calligrapher in Andalusia. They called her the jewel of Cordoba because of her knowledge, eloquence, and understanding. Saleema inherits her grandfather's love for books and knowledge. After her grandfather's death, there is a transfer of textual authority to his granddaughter Saleema. She wants to carry on his legacy, as he believes in her capacity to be as great as the poetess of Cordova. Saleema is totally different from other women, who busy themselves with their daily chores. Saleema dedicates her time to read different kinds of books chemistry, physics, and other fields. She intends to find cure for the diseases and illness, that afflict the body. Despite the inquisition and the banning of Arabic books, Saleema creates her own world to escape the real one. She uses to study at night, when everyone go to bed, she lights the candle and start reading. That helps her to develop an interest in herbology and medicine. Initially, these habits became the source of tension in the family, because it distracts her from her husband and the household duties.

At first it was the books that preoccupied her, she stayed up late at night underlining in the text and making notes in the text and making notes in the margins. Then, she became preoccupied with questioning local women who knew about such things. She inquires about the ancient remedies that they used to cure pain, and she went out and bought pots, vials, vessels and jars and went about making connections from both dried and fresh herbs. (Ashour.P54)

Her interests in books and herbs cause a lot of tension inside Saleema's family. Starting with her mother ending with her husband, who feels totally neglected and ignored by his wife .Then things go further, when Saleema starts asking women savants for ancient remedies used to cure different kinds of pains. That motivates her to collect and mix herbs both fresh and dry, making powders, infusions, and ointments. Women of the neighborhood

start asking her advice on curing illness. Despite the disagreement with her mother, grandmother and her husband on behavior, Saleema never gives up on her interest.

Saleema dedicates her time to acquire knowledge, in a time where Arabic books and language are banned by the government. Despite the disagreement with her family and the inquisition, she finds a way to reform herself by reading different kinds of books. Her quest for knowledge is a kind of struggle. Her interests in her books and herbology alienates her from the real world and its activities. She is never affected by the instructions and orders given by the Castilian government, like the prohibition of Muslim Arab's traditions, forcing the local people to baptize and prescribing the Catholic practices. Saleema have a great personality not like other women of her family and neighborhood. That's why she is the only person who decides not to go to church, even if it costs her life " Saleem, who had made up her mind years ago that she would never go to church, even if they bound her hands and feet and drag her with a team of horses"(Ashour.P149).

Saleema's interest in books and herbology distracts her from paying attention to herself. She looks so eccentric to the people who do not know her or have seen her for the first time. When Abdul-Kareem's mother saw her for the first time. She notices her strange appearance, her disheveled hair and distracted look. Later on, her suspicious about Saleema got confirmed. When she passes by Saleema's room and notices Saleema's jar, baskets, the books, and she gets a whiff of the strange smell. She runs away as quickly as possible, with mumbling some Quranic verses to protect her from the evil spirits, as she believes. When she gets sick, initially she rejects the idea of being examined by Saleema. Later on, when Saleema examines her, she faints. She feels blood coagulate in her arteries, whenever Saleema touches a part of her body. After recovery, Abdul-Kareem's mother is convinced that, she is cured because God gives her victory over that possessed women. Apparently mad or eccentric characters appear in contemporary Egyptian women's fiction like Salwa Bakr's *Golden Chariot*(1995), and *Thirty-one beautiful Green Trees*(1991).Saleema's eccentricity does not compromise her family's love and affection. Saleema's interests brings her in direct contact with people. They ask her advice and treatment. She wins the love and affection of people, since she has the power of healing both body and soul.

When the Castilian government announces more restrictions added to the already existing ones. They forbid the Arabic language and titles, Arabic clothes, and jewelry. All books must be submitted for inspections, and those which contain nothing harmful will be returned. All families must leave their door open on Friday, Sunday, and the holy days to make sure that only sanctioned practices are followed. Saleema decides to bring the books that her grandfather hides them initially in Ainadamar's house. Despite inspection, she succeeds in hiding them with the help of her daughter in law Maryama. Saleema plays a very important role in keeping their tradition, despite the loss of country, family, and identity.

The unfortunate Saleema, likes other women witnesses the destruction of her national identity, traditions, and country. She is living in a very notorious Spanish inquisition, she is accused of practicing witchcraft and black magic. According to that, she is taken to the court,

which is governed by irrational and unjust people. The only evidence they have on her accusation are the pile jars, herbs, and the ointments. She uses them to cure the sick people and a sketch of her deer that she drew when she was a teenager. They treat Saleema in cruel and strange way at the same time. In the courtyard, Saleema shows no weakness or confusion during the session. She is so accurate in her answers. During the interrogation, the judge accuses her of worshipping the devil and copulating with him. Saleema is not satisfied with these irrational questions and stupid conclusions. Her calmness, self-control, and strong personality push them to believe that she is getting her power from the devil.

-Then you admit that this is your drawing ?

-I used to own a gazelle, I loved very much. I tried to draw a picture of it .

-This is a billy goat, not a gazelle.

- As I said, your Honor, I'm not very good at drawing .

-This is the billy goat with which you copulated and to which you travel by night

“(Ashour .P218).

Saleema is accused as a witch and according to that, she will be burned at the stake in the public square. At the same moment, the scene of burning the books comes to her mind. She remembers her grandfather, who encourages her to be educated , her husband who loves her, her brother who tries his best to protect the honor of his family and all the family members. At this moment she breaks down in tears, her body shook as she tries in vain to suppress her sobbing. Saleema does not cry because of fear of death. She submits her fate to God, like many of great martyrs who face death bravely. She does not want to humiliate herself by screaming or begging or even crying out for mercy. Being an intelligent woman, Saleema will not add insults to herself.

I'm Saleema bin Jaffar. I was born and raised by an honorable man who made books and whose heart fumed they day he witnessed the burning of the books and who walked away in silence and dignity . But I didn't cry my grandfather, when they tortured me, my mind and body collapsed, but for several moments, Grandfather I never said anything you would be ashamed off . I studied the books as you taught me to do, I eased people's pain as best as I could do. I even dreamed that one day I would dedicate to you , grandfather , a book I wrote from my own research and experiments .(Ashour .P227).

From these lines, Ashour delivers a message that, the intelligent women will never break down. They will actively engage in life and challenge the restriction which impose upon them. Ashour shows the importance of these female characters, whose daily activities although mundane, but they are equally important to the functioning of the society. Through the character of Saleema, Ashour challenges the stereotypical images of women. These noble characters, whether they are, mothers, housewives, or women in pursuit of formal and informal carriers.

- The Instability of Saleema's Identity

Saleema's identity is constantly shaped and reshaped through the different stages of her life. Being a granddaughter to Abu Jaffar the bookbinder, who wanted her to be to a Garnadian version of the Cordoban's model. Saleema inherits his legacy as a permanent seeker of knowledge. Therefore, her story is the best representation of knowledge and experience. Saleema's intellectual discourse ultimately shapes her identity and subjectivity, nevertheless social and political realities which Saleema experiences variably. From the beginning, Ashour shows how both nature and cultures play a very important role in constructing the character. Saleema inherits her grandfather's blue eyes, her father's bright, attentive look and intelligence is more inclined toward mental work. Since her childhood, Saleema is not like her brother Hassan, who is "sent to the town public ovens, carried the tray of fish and flat loaves of bread, who waited and paid the oven attendants and returned with cooked food" (Ashour.P27). That disassociates her from the traditional gender roles. These natural qualities are noticed in the Al-Andalusian intellectual history. Saleema's lack of traditional feminine identity is applied and improved by the account of her family's state.

Initially, her grandmother Um Gaffer frequently laughs and compares Saleema to the queen of Sheba. She likes to give orders and be obeyed, and not take orders from anyone else. Furthermore, mother always compares her like a gnat "she has the qualities of a gnat, constantly droning, and useless in the house" (Ashour. P25). Apparently, her grandfather is delighted by her mental predisposition. He intends to provide her an equal education with her brother, despite the hardship and the lack of finance. The depiction of Saleema's childhood not only explains the progressive culture constituency of her identity, but the unessential of gender identity which makes her totally different from other women in the novel. Saleema's mother and grandmother are a bit worry about Saleema's lack of traditional femininity, but they never impose it on her. There is no doubt, that Saleema's character is the embodiment of what Patricia Waugh calls "self in relations". Patricia Waugh in her book *Metafiction: The Theory and Practice of Self-Conscious Fiction* (1984) clarifies that, material existence and history of self in actual human relationships, beginning crucially with those between the infant and the caretakers at the start of life. In other words, Saleema's character is totally affected by her grandfather, who is influenced by the history of Andalusian women, who are nurtures and complements their intelligence. Furthermore, Saleema's mother and grandmother confirm her identity through their indecisive position. In this sense, her identity is shaped in both social reality and her cognitive involvement with the interpretation of the daily experience. Saleema's conversation with her grandfather about the discovery of the new world is the best example. She asks her grandfather about the meaning of the new world, as he said it is discovered recently, before now they did not know about the existence of it. This answer pushes her back to rethink and reflect on her own explanation, in comparison with her grandfather's one. She said " I thought that God created it only recently, and I imagined its trees were little trees and that all the creators in it were tiny newborns, How stupid of me"(Ashour.P26). Her grandfather's answer makes Saleema reflect on the knowledge of the

new world, and about her yet to develop mind. Paula Moya in her book *Identity Politics Reconsidered* (2006) asserts that, identities both condition and conditioned by kind of interpretations people give to the experience they have.

Ashour's description of Saleema's trip to Christopher Columbus' parade showing the important role of social location in her experience, and emphasizing the ultimate significance of the knowledge regarding meaning and identity. The parade scene shows Saleema as a mentally active young girl, both inside and outside the home. It is upon her desire, her brother Hassan attend Christopher Columbus' parade of. In which, the treasure from the new world are displayed. Nevertheless, her perilous social location as a young Muslim girl within the newly usurper informs and shapes this experience. Therefore, it is not without Saad and Naem, Abu Jaffar's apprentices, she is not allowed to go. Saleema's identity as a female Muslim puts her in such a position in facing the large Christian society "watch out your sister. There might be Castilian boys who don't respect girls from good families don't take your eyes off of her for one second"(Ashour.P 26). Here, Ashour wants to show the importance of the cognitive elements in forming the identity of the characters. Through the cognitive elements of the experience Saleema gains knowledge about the world and self. Through life, knowledge creates mental reflections that continue to show our prescriptive about the world, people, and ourselves. As for Saleema, her knowledge increases, since she is very fond of the Arab philosophical and scientific legacy, that makes her produce even subversive knowledge and identity.

Within Paula Moya's notion about the importance of life experience and knowledge in shaping identity. Ashour stresses the instability of the identity, by showing that natural qualities and tendencies can either confirm our experiences or determine them. However, experiences and knowledge may reduce the impact of these natural qualities. In this novel Ashour wants to emphasize that, not only emotion and intelligence ,but pre-oedipal forces can disrupt the identity. Julia Kristeva in her book *Desire in language*(1969) draws the significance of these forces. She calls the semiotic, in preserving the heterogeneity of meaning, signification, and signifying subject. By portraying these forces, the novel repeats the conflict of the essential identities, especially gender. Kristeva confirms that, these impulsive drives accompany significance regardless of the sexual or gender identity of the subject. They precede any social formation of identity.

Ashour describes Saleema's marriage story, which shows neither her social location, thoughts or mindset. According to these factors, Saleema may refuse Saad's marriage proposal. Saleema's renouncement to her mother, who herself rejects the idea of marriage due to selfish reason, and because of Saad's social statue. Saleema announces that she "would never find a husband like Saad"(Ashour .P62). Saleem's approval does not only shocks her mother but Saleema herself. It is not because of class social differences but, Saleema herself is not interested in the idea of marriage at all. That's why Saleema cannot sleep that night, trying to find a reason for her response. This is to be considered as a semiotic impulse. She lies wide awake, asking herself what makes her respond so readily. The thought of marrying

Saad never comes to her before, nor marrying anyone else. She is startled by his proposal, which she does not expect or understand. Saleema even thinks on going back in her decision, concluding that, it is only meant to challenge her mother's domination. Saleema's response is nothing else but a slip of tongue. It is an aspect of the semiotic which underlines that, there is a resistance to identity at the very heart of physis life. Basically, Andalusian women are not interested in marriage and prefer single life. They would rather prefer a single life and the preoccupation with different disciplines of knowledge and art over marriage. Among the various name of women is Aisha Bint Ahmed From Cordoba. The one whom Saleema's grandfather wants Saleema to be like. Aisha Bint Ahmed is a poet and intellectual woman. She devoted her life to gain access to a different kind of knowledge and never married.

By accepting Saad's proposal, Saleema opposes the norm of unmarried intellectual women and going back to the old norm of a wife. Despite her marriage, Saleema does not adopt the role of a wife who " have babies and , serve and bear his children "(Ashour.P63). She continues her life to be independent. She insists on having things in her own way, and take a familiar path of many Andalusian women, who had great job within the marriage life. Maria Viguera in her *book Biographical Dictionary of the History of Andalusia*(2000) explained that, Andalusian women were known for their power and influence. Mothers and wives were particularly influential. They contribute to the prestige and social status through their intelligence. Saleema, becomes a public figure, and a source of her family pride and honor. Playing the role of a traditional wife is incompatible with Saleema's identity. Ashour conveys that, this incompatibility not only in Saleema's response to the notion of marriage, but in her discomfort reaction to the rituals which is before the married life. Saleema's lacking this experimental of women's culture makes her feel different from women's various acts. They are pampering and celebrating her, as the bride to be "she remain seated without moving a muscle as her arms and legs were stretched out to let the henna dry. She glanced all around her and thought about herself and how little she understood of all this" (Ashour.P72). In the bathhouse, Saleema is the center in which all the women are in charge of washing and pampering her remarks, "I swear to God your groom is indeed a fortunate man" (Ashour .P70). Saleema's detachment during this occasion clarifies that, gender identity is a natural thing and other social identity by implication does not exist before the practices of making up identity.

Ashour in this novel shows the significance of the neutral body. Whereas Saleema turns to study medicine regardless of her sex and gender. In the traditional Arab community the physician, the doctor and the healer are usually a man. After marriage, Saleema's experiences repeat the controversial relationship between the body and the mind or signifier and signified. Her marriage proves not to be a physical union merely but, it becomes another aspect of knowledgeable based. For the first few days of her marriage, Saleema sets out their relationship as one that fulfills her desire to seek knowledge. Under Saleem's persistence, Saad tells her about the bad days of his life, and the story of death, dispossession, and enslavement of people in Malaga. Even after marriage, Saleema looks at herself as a seeker

of knowledge, not only a wife. That's so clear, when she is not satisfied with the shortlist of books she has "whose reading list includes a handful of books ?" (Ashour. P140).

Saleema is preoccupied with gaining books, despite the strict rules which are imposed on the people at that time. Whereas having books became a crime punishable by law. Despite her brother's rejection, Saleema asks Naeem to get her the books she needs that she needs. Reading books becomes essential for Saleema, which is not different from the pleasure and the satisfaction, that the Andalusian intellectuals found in seeking different kinds of knowledge. When her husband complains about her preoccupation with these jars, medicine, potions, and brews, she begs him "if you want, I'll move them somewhere else, Saad, I beg you not to ask me to give it up. I need to do this, and I need the books you're making a fuss about. I must have them (Ashour .P118). Regarding the issue of identity, Paula Moya in her book *Reclaiming Identities* (2000) argues that, it is in the process of verification, identities can be contested, and they can change. Therefore, Saleema's identity as a physician is the result of the requisitioning and reinterpretation of religious and philosophical knowledge, after dealing with the most difficult events in her life, such as the death of her grandfather, her first newborn and her Ghazal.

Being in prison, Saleema experiences a new aspect in analyzing the experience and forming identity. Being accused of witchcraft and heresy for illogical reasons, such as worshipping the devil and copulates with him. Saleema finds her imprisonment illogical and unbearable, not because of the severe pain that she goes through, but it's out of logic. According to her logical interpretation of her medical practice, witchcraft intends to cause harm and damage not to cure and heal. When the court's accusations are read to her, Saleema cannot comprehend them, since they are illogical and contradict her thinking. She is overwhelmed in the state of disbelief and confusion" Was this a nightmare? Saleema thought. That shoved her into an absurd game directed by three strange demented men" (Ashour. P 218).

she read books, treated the sick and deliberately disregarded the injustice of Castilian. When she walk through the markets. She didn't concern herself with shops like other women did, but rather with the face of women she prescribe a remedy for but did not heal , and she would examine the face and symptoms, and run them through her mind and think for treatment (Ashour. P224).

-The Role of Suffering In Creating the Instability of Identity.

Radwa Ashour always targets women's struggle in her literary works. She gives voice to the marginalized and silences. In her works, She discusses the psychological effects of the war and occupation from the female characters' points of view. She places them in a complex web of human relations, through which they can deconstruct sociopolitical environment and the constraints to which they are subjected. They can change the effects of the cultural annihilation and community degeneration into the much-needed community and life-sustaining elements.

Saleema can transform her personal losses (her grandfather, her gazelle, and her first newborn) into life and community sustaining elements. Saleema's questions and reinterprets the philosophical and religious knowledge, producing a new perception of herself and the world. The new knowledge finally results in her new identity as a physician. Paula Moya's in her book *Reclaiming the Identity* (2000) identified the notion of that identity that, identities can be a contest and change in the process of verification. Saleema's intellectual engagement with her losses set to be helpful, by looking at the death of her newborn, Saleema "forgets her own sadness, which disappeared behind a curtain of question seething with indignation and denial" (Ashour. p111). Her behavior is opposite to her husband "who resigned himself bitterly to the loose of his son, grew more and more depressed each day "(Ashour. P113). The whole house turns upside down except Saleema. She is consumed by bringing questions. Her reflections are more important, since it paves the way to her new role in life as a physician. Saleema's withdrawal from both of her husband and her family turns out to be the cornerstone toward her new intellectual maturity as a physician. She dedicates to help people " the women of the neighborhood came asking her advice about curing one illness of another "(Ashour.P115). This new identity turns out to be what her community needs most. Saleema's loss of her beloved motivates her to reshape her new identity. She starts to suspect and question upon their death. That motivates her to navigate different elements of Arab culture. She starts combining women's medical knowledge with the distinguished male scholars and philosophers, such as Avicenna and others. According to that, Saleema's eventual identity turns to be a community supporting source. Her response to loss does not stop at the psychological and intellectual levels, but transforms and remakes the emotional and the mental dilemma into new knowledge and new identity.

Another important female character who challenges the expectation of her family and society is Maryama, Saleema's sister-in-law. Ashour describes Maryama's character as born out of a desire to demonstrate the profound impact of the female character in all aspects of social life. Ashour says "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... I even give prominence to Maryama, for surviving and carrying on day to day" (Ashour interview, Cairo, March 22, 2007). Maryama has the ability to create new relations across gender, age, and religious boundaries by using her wit. She makes a new relationship and alliances, that sustain her as an individual and a part of the community. Unlike Saleema, Maryama belongs to a lower-class social family. She is not fully trained to adapt to the role of the traditional wife. Despite it, she manages to makes up her loses, transform them into community sustaining knowledge. Her wit and intelligence safeguards the community physically and psychologically. She frequently uses her wit and knowledge to challenge the oppressive system. She makes what is described as identity's performativity, by mixing up the performance and knowledge.

On one occasion, she uses wit and sharp-minded to save the child from the oppression of Castilian law. She impersonates the identity and the language of a Christian

mother "she runs toward the boy and slapped him across his face.... Grabbed him.... And started to scream at him in Spanish, Didn't I warn you about playing with the Arab children? now you are learning sinful things from them" (Ashour.P145). Maryam's act is not exclusively used to spare individuals' lives yet to make new connections. That strengthens a feeling of solidarity and identity in a general endangered society. This is an inescapable result of the favors she does to all strange people, who are feeling obligated to her for bailing them or their kids out of trouble. Maryam's demonstrations acts have significantly great effects on individuals, as these acts represent a source of humor, laughter and storytelling.

Her natural intelligence always comes to her rescue with good, quick thinking that transforms the bitterness the weak feel when subjected by powerful into uproars laughter... why not, since every story about her fill them with joy and entertainment that filled the drudgery of their lives with humor and laughter .(Ashour.P142).

Ashour in this novel does not distinguish between the constructed and the essentialist elements of identity, since both of them grant mobility and various significations rather than being specified in the time of crisis. Therefore, the path of these two female characters is similar. Saleema uses her knowledge and education to change her identity, while Maryamma uses her intelligence and wit. She is famous in their neighborhood by her amazing surprises. Maryamma's strategies become forms of religion on one hand, and the complete dissolution of identities on the other. This plan proves to be practical and instrumental for the others, especially after the country had shrunk into the city-kingdom of Granada.

It is Maryama who comes with a plan to save Saleema's books from confiscation, when Saleema fails. Maryama spends the whole night thinking, until she comes up with a plan to save Saleema's banned Arab books. Furthermore, she uses her skills to find out the accusation which directed to Saleema. When she is taken away by the office of inquisition for no reason. She uses her skills to adopt a different identity to find out what's happening with her sister in law. She fabricates a story about Saleema's mistreatment to her, to make the Castilian women pity her and manage to inquire about her "If I knew exactly what she did so that I could tell my husband and he will know the truth about his sister. And then he will realize that in my quarrels with her I was the victim and she was the trouble maker" (Ashour .P211). Maryama's idea about history is nothing, but a passive acceptance. That's why she uses her strategies to change its effect on her community and family as well. She manages to divert Saleema's daughter whenever she asks about her mother "whenever Aysha asked for her mother, Um Hassan bursts into tears. Maryama, on the other hand, thought up ways to keep the little girl occupied. She would tell her a story or invent a new game" (Ashour. P209). Apart from that, Maryama becomes a symbolic custodian of Arabic legacy at some level. She insists on speaking Arabic with her children at home, even though the Castilian outlaws the use of Arabic language in public.

Conclusion

Being an Egyptian writer, Radwa Ashour is recognized as an essential part of Cultural heritage in which women have been marginalized and silenced. In her writings, she tries to explore the suppressed potential in her female characters. She clarifies that women's problem is not widely regarded as the first priority for social change in the middle east. However, she suggests that talented women writers may contribute to women's position by exploring aspects of female experiences that have remained unexplored for multiple reasons. In this sense, Ashour and other writers try to expose the hidden stories of women whose daily life activities, although mundane are equally important to the function of society. In her novel Granada Ashour uses both of Saleema and Maryama as a representation of the intelligent Muslim women. They both have a great role in preserving their communities' cultural and religious identities. Ashour's female characters can actively engage their world and challenge the expectations of both their family and community. Ashour describes both Maryama and Saleema as examples of women's ambition and creativity. Through these characters, Ashour wants to highlight the important role of women in every walks of life. She exposes women's hidden histories and daily activities, despite being worldly and simple, but they are equally important to the functioning of a society as the public and historically recorded actions of men.

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