



# Deconstructing the lost hope and memories in Radwa Ashour's Granada Trilo

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**Abstract:** This paper aims to reveal how Radwa Ashour links both past and present and makes use of memories and the lost glory of regaining Andalusia to deconstruct the Arabs' loss in releasing Palestine and restoring Jerusalem. It displays Derrida's deconstruction as a way to make a deeper reading of Ashour's masterpiece entitled *Granada* trilogy as a deconstructive text. Therefore, the author highlights the sentimental history of the Arabs' relationship with Andalusia and that of Palestine. Then, the author represents how both Andalusia and Palestine are lost and how Arabs feel great pain for their taking over due to the utmost recognition of both nations to the Arabs. The author observes how deconstruction gives hope for all Arabs to start all over by making an implied comparison between the similar conditions of both occupied nations after their glorious conquest. Furthermore, the research paper emphasizes the effect of the author as an Arab feminist in portraying her female characters in *the Granada* trilogy that consists of three novels entitled *Granada* (2003), *Maryama* (1995), and *w-al-Rahīl* (1995).

**Keywords:** Deconstruction, lost hope, memories, Radwa Ashour, Granada Trilogy

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## Introduction

Deconstruction is a philosophical approach for criticizing texts that emerged in the late 1960's aiming to show how texts deconstruct or contradict themselves instead of showing how they are represented in a hierarchical structure. It is largely based on the work of the French philosopher Derrida. Deconstruction seeks to expose and subvert the various binary oppositions, including nature/culture, white /black, god/man, faith/reason, presence/absence, and speech/writing. It is a poststructuralist theory directed towards reading philosophical writings. Its impact on literature depends on two facts. First, writing is seen as a complex historical and cultural relation. Second, human knowledge is not either controllable or convincing, and language operates in contradictory ways.

The key subject of deconstructive analysis is

- a) The connection between words and objects
- b) Whether the truth is sure or not
- c) Whether or not texts are more than what the reader reads
- d) Whether interpretation is an individual thing or what the author has in mind when he or she writes (Ayebanoah, 2014, pp.5-6).

Derrida (1930-2004) is a French philosopher who is generally considered the founder of deconstruction in the mid-1960s as a critique of the Western philosophical tradition. He is one of the most influential and prolific twentieth-century philosophers. He observes his deconstructive strategies in literary criticism in his book *Of Grammatology* (1967). He wrote an essay entitled *Structure, Sign, and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences* upon which the widely known theory of deconstruction is initiated. The term 'deconstruction' is derived from the German philosopher Heidegger's concept of destruction, which means the releasing of the old tradition of ontology that is the study of ultimate reality through the exposure of its interior paradoxes. Derrida wrote many books, including *Of Grammatology*, *Speech and Phenomena*, and *Writing Difference*. In an interview with Kearney, Derrida expresses that deconstruction is always deeply concerned with the 'other' of language (Kearney, 1984).

All critical theories have operational definitions that define a particular theory and contribute to an appreciation of the theory by readers. The critique of deconstruction has key terms, including:

1. Centre –literary text means that interpretation can change with time.
2. Transcendental signified means that in the literary text, a word, concept, or idea has no separate or superior meaning.
3. Flexible foreshadows how different readers/critics can achieve different meanings.
4. Fixed shows how literary text is an open ending.
5. Multiple - literary work has different meanings.
6. Closure –Further clarification of the text is not necessary.
7. Decentre – existing significance or order can shift the terrain.
8. Deconstruct- a concept can be split into pieces to produce a new version of the idea.
9. Layers – literary works of differing significances

10. Produced – meaning is produced by the reader.
11. Undecided ability – no single reader decides the meaning of a text.
12. Fragments – each interpretation is the original aspect.
13. Composition – literary work is a synthesis of ideas.
14. Arbitrary – literary text can be interpreted differently because words take on new significance.
15. Embed – Text with different meanings pregnant
16. Autonomous – no author has a specific meaning even of his own text.
17. Supplement –A supplement to previous information is highly significant to any literary composition.
18. Dynamic –literature is therefore flexible.
19. Transitory – literary significance does not last forever but is subject to change.
20. Illusive –literature is not realistic.
21. Imposition –no meaning is distinguished by its subjective interpretation.
22. Presupposition –in the literary text, no suppose or meaning already exists but is produced in the communication processes (Ayebanoah, 2014, pp. 3-4)

According to Tyson, deconstruction improves our ability to think critically and helps the critic get out of different meanings from texts. In this way, the work of art will be objective as it depends on meanings beyond the author's viewpoint. Derrida observes: "The very meaning and mission of deconstruction is to show how those things...exceed the boundaries they currently occupy" (Derrida, 1997).

Deconstruction comes as a reaction to a wide range of theoretical and philosophical movements, such as phenomenology, structuralism, Russian formalism, Marxism, feminism, and psychoanalysis, to explore the essence of how the privileged item in a text's binary pair can be reversed and subverted. Johnson emphasizes that "deconstruction is ...much closer to the original meaning of the word 'analysis', which etymologically means 'to undo' (Johnson, 1982, p.5). Basically, for deconstruction:

1. Language is variable, ambiguous, and unstable;
2. There is no center, no stable significance, and there is no fixed basis for existence;

3. The people are the divisive battlefields for competing ideologies, of which we are only inventing and deciding to believe the "identity" (Ayebanoah, 2014, p.6).

From a semantic viewpoint, deconstruction may have resulted from the boundless series of generating meanings, such as its archaic meanings, modern connotations and denotations, and variable implications in different contexts. Binary oppositions mean that one term is central, and the other is marginal. Thus, as Norris (1987) observes, the deconstructive process will differentiate between what the text means to say and what it is 'constrained to mean' (Norris, 1987, p.19).

Deconstruction is critical as a theory because it allows us to think critically. It has a lot to offer us, according to Tyson, as it can improve our capacity to think more critically and see better how we have a certain ideology in our experience, which we do not know of. It is 'built' into our language. The critics can secondly derive a distinct significance from the text in the theory. It builds the reader's mind that the composition of the author can be interpreted differently and gives the reader the opportunity to empty his heart in order to bring out something unique. Thus, theory adds value to literature since every reader is his or her own author. This is so because whatever the reader or critic interprets is a new version of that text; it is written by the reader or critic. In addition, the text that has been investigated gives more life. For example, Shakespeare and Achebe's works would have been seen as dead or archaic unless theories such as those that revived them brought them to life by scholars daily in new interpretations. Similarly, the theory also kills the author's subjectivity and sees the book as purely objective literature, which gives room for creativity. Last but not least, it allows students to learn in depth. It argues that significances are hidden below but can only be accessed in-depth or line by line (Ayebanoah, 2014, p.5).

Deconstruction has certain procedures upon which it depends. First, it stresses the binary opposition and breaks the link between two opposite pairs. In his book, *Positions*, Derrida says: 'to deconstruct the opposition, first of all, is to overturn the hierarchy at a given moment' (Derrida, 1982). Second, it shows how these oppositions are either central or marginalized. Eventually, the opposition deconstructs the hierarchy to show what the text means. Finally, both the hierarchical elements and the binary oppositions are intertwined in an endless cycle of meanings. For deconstructionists, the text is far from the tranquility of any definite meaning. However, it consists of random signs leading to a relative meaning that is based on a systematic difference from other signs. This relation is what Derrida calls 'trace'. Derrida says: "The trace ... becomes the origin of the origin" (Derrida, 1976).

There are certain principles upon which deconstruction is based. First, the text does not have any singular meaning; however, it can be understood in various ways depending on three levels of analysis, i.e., verbal,

textual, and linguistic. As for the verbal level, deconstructionists shed light on the contradictions, paradoxes, and confusions of any given text. On the textual level, they emphasize the different breaks in the narrative, such as time, point of view, idea, words' meaning, and grammatical choices. Linguistically, deconstructionists try to find out the instances in which the author is unsure about the medium being used. Second, deconstructionists look for detached ideas to prove that text is not a single unit. On the contrary, it is made of different units of different kinds. Third, they recognize texts in terms of their undecidability, as there cannot be any permanent meaning. Fourth, they see texts as heterogeneous, meaning to consist of dissimilar elements. To emphasize the undecidability of all binary pairs, Derrida displays different terms, such as:

The pharmakon is neither remedy nor poison; ... the supplement is neither a plus nor a minus ... the hymen is neither confusion nor distinction...the gram is neither a signifier nor a signified...the incision is neither the incised integrity of a beginning nor simple secondarity (Derrida, 1982, p.43).

### **Instrumentation**

The research paper tackles how Ashour deconstructs memories and lost glory to give hope to all the Arabs. It applies Derrida's deconstruction on Radwa Ashour's *Granada* trilogy by denoting how the trilogy is best fitted to represent the paradoxical flow of meanings resulted from the authorial portrayal of Granada's occupation by the Castilians and the suffering people endure as a result of being conquered. In this way, the author displays how *Granada* trilogy can be handled from a different point of view beyond the common themes of the inability to regain Granada, the acceptance of loss, and longing for memories of Granada's glory. Using Derrida's deconstruction, the author exemplifies some of the contradictions that underestimate the major themes of lost hope and memories in the trilogy and replaces them with another orientation of enhancing hope to regain both Andalusia and Palestine.

In this way, the essence of the appraised item in the binary pairs of the novel understudy are reversed. Thus, by applying deconstruction, *Granada* trilogy reveals the traditional binary opposition of fact and fiction that obscures the ability to distinguish clearly between textual representations of the external world and the world represented in texts. It also emphasizes the other binary oppositions of defeat/triumph, occupation/freedom, implicitness /explicitness, and forced Christianization/secret Islam.

The author applies deconstructive tactics to Ashour's novel to reflect on how the novel contradicts itself since a text cannot have a single totalitarian meaning. Whenever a signified arises, it resolves into another

signified as there is no central thing expressing those opposites. In this way, the author explores the subversion of oppositions in Ashour's *Granada* trilogy by showing the different meanings resulting from applying deconstruction's approach to *Granada* trilogy.

The research investigates Ashour's novel as a deconstructive text in which the author does not have an autonomous interpretation. This is in parallel with Ashour, who proclaims that the world we live in has " ...a disturbing anxious culture that has no self-trust" (Ashour, 2013). Thus, there are many challenges represented in Ashour's *Granada* trilogy through which the colonization of Andalusia will not kick out "...what remained of the small margin of freedom" (Al-Assal, 2008, p.184).

Consequently, the research tackles the following novels under the title *Granada* trilogy, which includes *Granada* (2003), *Maryama* (1995), and *w-al-Rahīl* (1995). It surveys how deconstruction contradicts the loss of Andalusia. Thus, in parallel with what Caputo says in illustrating deconstruction, the research cracks the idea of deconstructing the last hope in *the Granada* trilogy to open it and disturb its serenity.

## Method

### Granada Trilogy

Radwa Ashour was a feminist, a writer, a translator, a literary critic, and a university professor. She was born in 1946 to a family with a literary background. Her father was a lawyer who loved literature, her mother was a poet, and her grandfather was a literature professor. After her graduation, Ashour got her Master's degree. Then, she traveled to the US, where she received her Ph.D. from the University of Massachusetts Amherst in 1975. Her political standpoints were a fundamental part of her academic career. In Sadat's regime, Ashour supported the establishment of the National Committee against Zionism in Egyptian universities. Her works included *Siraaj*, *Granada* trilogy, *Heavier Than Radwa*, and *the woman from Tantoura*. She also wrote two short story collections and five criticism books. *Granada* was chosen as one of the best Arabic novels of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Ashour sustained her teacher, Latifa Al-Zayyat (1993), who said that "the liberation of the country came before the liberation of women"(Al-Zayyat, 1993, p.284). Ashour died on 30 November 2014.

**Granada** trilogy was first published in 1994 in Arabic and translated into English in 2003 by William Granara. It included three novels entitled *Granada* (2003), *Maryama* (1995), and *w-al-Rahīl* (1995). It told the story of five generations of an Andalusian family living in Granada after its submission to King Ferdinand of Aragon and Queen Isabella of Castile in 1492. Conquered by the Castilians, they suffered from the new oppressive law of Castilian rule and ethnic and religious bonds. Thus, Ashour displayed the misfortunes of

Abu-Jaafar's family and the miserable fates of the people of Granada. The lives of Abu-Jaafar's family were always foreshadowed by misery. Sa'd married Salima, and they lost their child. Salima was unable to understand defeat and destruction. However, she studied medicine and learned the great tradition of Arab learning secretly. Furthermore, she tried to understand death by exploring the human body via books and manuscripts. By the end of the first part of *Granada*, Salima was convicted of witchcraft, and she was sentenced to public execution. Ashour (2003) displayed how humiliated she was by being put in a box like a rabbit. Ashour said that Salima "was carried out tied in a basket! Her laughter came out like weeping" (Ashour, 2003, p. 91)

Na'eem lost both his wife and his son after a terrible attack by the Castilian armies. Maryama resumed her life in the new era, hoping to adapt to the new circumstances. Hassan was Abu Ja'far's grandson and Salima's brother. He married Maryama, the heroine of the trilogy's second part. He was a conventional man who subjugated himself to satisfy the authorities. Maryama was banished from Granada and died during her journey to exile. After Maryama's death, Ali, Maryama's grandson, decided to escape from the expulsion convoy. Thus, he entered Granada again and regained his grandmother's house. However, he was humiliated and jailed for three and a half years, realizing his inability to stay in Granada anymore because of his nostalgia for his former acquaintances.

*The Departure* was the last part of the trilogy describing Ali's life after he departed from Granada. He traveled to a small village where Muslims were treated unfairly via illegal punishments, an unfair taxation system, and the feudality adopted by the Castilians. Ali got a place among them because of his knowledge of the Arabic language, which enabled him to read their old manuscripts. Thus, the trilogy ended where the trip to the other shore began.

The history of Granada's occupation and the misfortunes its people endure is similar to that of the Palestinians in the twentieth century. Like the Castilians, the Israelis subjugate the Palestinians and prohibit them from their fundamental demands of both equality and freedom in their state. Ashour succeeded in making an implied comparison between the past, which stands for Granada, and the present, which stands for Palestine. She manipulated the past of Granada's fall and all the suffering people felt as a result of their occupation to foreshadow the current state of Palestine, which is torn between its past glory under Islamic rule and its current fate as being occupied by the Israelis. Thus, by drawing Jerusalem, the novel seems to observe that Palestine will exist along with Granada despite all the misfortunes they experience.

The sentimental relation of the Arabs with the history of Al-Andalus reflects the agony they suffer from

as a result of its loss. Moreover, it reflects the current misery of losing Palestine. Granara describes Andalusia as the glorious and golden era of Islam in which tolerance spreads everywhere leading to peace, stability, and progress in different fields in the social, political, religious, and cultural life of Andalusia's people. Granara depicts Andalusia as "a chronology of exploration and discovery, of artistic innovation and intellectual expansion" (Ashour, 2003, p. 59).

The author applied the theory of Derrida's deconstruction to break down the literal meaning of the novel as being a symbol of depression over the historical inability to regain Andalusia. To emphasize the above-mentioned aim, the author demonstrated the following binary oppositions of fact/fiction, defeat/triumph, occupation/freedom, implicitness/explicitness, and forced Christianization/secret Islam.

First, deconstruction could be applied to *Granada* trilogy through the first opposition binary of fact/fiction. The novel is a fictional narrative of the real history of Granada's occupation. Historically, Granada was occupied by the Castilians after the submission of Granada to King Ferdinand of Aragon and Queen Isabella of Castile in 1492 during the era of Abu-'Abdullah Ibn Muhammad. In contrast, Ashour's *Granada* trilogy fictionally retold the story of the consequences of Granada's fall through the misfortunes of five generations of Abu-Jaafar's family. Then, the novel expressed how the characters either resorted to their memories trying to escape from the current state of colonialization or adapted to the new system of power. However, the novel showed the failure of both perspectives; as a result, the characters lost hope in escaping their misfortunes and restoring their past glory. From the perspective of deconstruction, this was the central theme of the novel that should be broken down. Thus, the author displayed how fiction as a third-hand copy of reality could not represent reality in its real depiction; however, fiction represented it in an exaggerated way to strengthen the crisis. In this way, what the characters fail in fiction is an exaggerated description that could be achieved through resistance and revolution.

Second, deconstruction could be represented by the second binary opposition of defeat/triumph. The novel tackled the major theme of Granada's fall as a defeat of the social and political life of its people, who suffered from the injustice of the Castilians who deceived them in implementing the agreement that guaranteed freedom and equality to all people. They not only subjugated them but also assaulted their women and killed their youth. This was the dominating theme that should be reversed by deconstruction by emphasizing the resistance of people by killing the assailants and their call to carry out what the Castilians promised to achieve. The capacity to struggle against tyranny was another sort of hope that paved the way to a better dream of a future devoid of occupation. Furthermore, at the end of the trilogy, Ali's drawing of Jerusalem with its Al-Aqsa Mosque and Alqiyama Church was further evidence of the triumph that the

colonists could not damage in the psychology of their victims.

Third, deconstruction could be manifested through the third binary opposition of occupation/freedom. The novel stressed the occupation of Granada by the Castilians, who damaged the people's heritage by burning their books and manuscripts. The Castilians hoped to ruin the culture by destroying the knowledge of its people as a culmination of the entire nation's experience in a variety of fields. This was the underlying theme of the novel understudy and should be subverted by deconstruction. Thus, this major theme would not be valid anymore. According to deconstruction, the occupation's attempt to devastate the cultural and social life of Granada's people reflected the occupied's awareness of the assailants' plan of downgrading them. Thus, they hid the books and manuscripts in the mosques, and Maryama picked as many books as she could and put them in her private box, which dates back to her youth. Moreover, Salima not only hid the books, but she also read them and made use of them by curing the patients. When she was sentenced to death, she accepted her death as God's wish. As Ashour says:

"She does not scream in terror or fury; why? .... she will not humiliate herself by screaming and begging or looking scared like a trapped mouse? She will not add to her humiliation" (Ashour, 2003, p. 95).

At the end of the trilogy, when Ali decided to leave Granada, he dug a hole in which he put his grandmother's box of tremendous books. Despite all the attempts of the Castilians to underestimate people socially and politically because of their occupation of Granada, people would always be aware of their awkward plans of making them slaves; thus, they would be forcibly free even if the freedom would be only in their thought.

Fourth, deconstruction could be exemplified in *Granada* trilogy through the next binary opposition of both implicitness and explicitness. After Granada's fall, the Castilians imposed many restrictions upon the people of Granada, replacing their native language with that of the assailants' language. Thus, the dominant theme of imposing the enemy's language was another aim that would, in the long run, change the Arabian identity to that of its enemy. However, as deconstructs previously demonstrated, there was no singular idea of a text, and any idea could be approached from different points of view. Thus, the above-mentioned theme could be handled differently as follows: Despite the colonialists' attempts to humiliate their occupied people by using their language explicitly, Granada's people kept using their native language implicitly inside their homes. Thus, the homes of Granada's people became their real nation in which they used their native language to talk with each other and teach their kids. Thus, the native language of Andalusia was never forgotten despite the enemies' continuous attempts to damage it. In other terms, the Arabian identity of Granada's people

would always exist, and this identity was another form of hope to regain Andalusia and, in a broader way, Palestine.

Finally, deconstruction could be reflected through the last binary opposition of forced Christianization and secret Islam. Another form of injustice directed towards Andalusia's people was the colonialists' order of shifting their religion from Islam to that of Christianity. This is the idea that could be deconstructed from the perspective of deconstruction. Religion was holy for Andalusia's people not only because it was inspired by God but also because it shaped their identity. Changing religion was not easy for Andalusia's people to perform. Thus, they pretended explicitly to be Christians to escape from dictatorship and the cruelty of their enemies. On the other hand, they practiced implicitly the Islamic rituals inside their homes. Changing religion by force was not a defeat in itself, but it was another manifestation that clarified the internal resistance of Andalusia's people in the face of oppression.

In this way, Derrida's deconstruction gave the author another perspective from which Ashour's novel of *Granada* trilogy could be viewed. This novel was no longer about defeat, loss, Granada's fall, and memories of glory. By applying Derrida's deconstruction, the author displayed how *Granada* trilogy could be portrayed as a story of resisting power and occupation that told implicitly the story of Andalusia's people to restore their nation by keeping their Arabian identity free despite all the attempts of the colonizers to destruct it.

## Results

The demonstration of the findings ended with how Derrida's deconstruction as a political approach observed that any text does not have any central idea upon which the whole work of art depends. However, it means that there is always a perspective of any text that can be handled differently by the reader or the critic behind any authorized meaning of the text. In this way, the traditional viewpoint of the autonomous meaning of the text is destructed. In contrast, many ideas can challenge the major theme of the novel and reverse it in a way to get the opposite of its common meaning.

Traditionally, the novel could be seen as a representative of the lost hope of retaining Andalusia and the memories of the Arab's glory in Granada. Similarly, it reflected Palestine and the Arab's inability to restore it because both Andalusia and Palestine are occupied. While the former was conquered by the Castilians, the latter was occupied by the Israelis. Both Andalusia's people and the Palestinians experienced the misfortunes and sufferings resulting from their occupation. Ashour extended her identification of the Moriscos of Andalusia to include that of the Arabs of Palestine, Egypt, and Iraq to increase the community of the oppressed. However, this traditional view was reversed by the application of Derrida's deconstruction to the

novel understudy.

The author used a novel entitled *Granada* trilogy consisting of *Granada* (2003), *Maryama* (1995), and *w-al-Rahīl* (1995). By applying Derrida's deconstruction on Radwa Ashour's *Granada* trilogy, the author emphasized a new perspective of reading the text as not just a masterpiece about Granada's fall and the suffering of its people in the personal, social, and political aspects of life. It was not a novel that sheds light on the similarity of occupation between Andalusia and Palestine nor portrayed how both assistants imposed restrictions on Andalusia's people and the Palestinians.

Thus, deconstruction did not analyze the past for traces of a future that are never realized. In contrast, it recognized the novel as a manifestation of hope in restoring both Andalusia and Palestine by deconstructing the traditional view of the novel as a portrayal of lost hope and memories. In sum, there was not a single sign that could produce meaning by itself without depending on the binary oppositions with other signs.

In this way, the author made use of the different binary oppositions of fact/fiction, defeat/triumph, occupation/freedom, implicitness/explicitness, and forced Christianization/secret Islam to perpetuate the argumentation of the novel as a representation of hope. First, the author showed how the fictional representation of *Granada* trilogy was an exaggerating form of reality; thus, what the characters concluded was just a fictional view that could not be generalized. Moreover, the work of art, as Aristotle says, is a third-hand copy of reality, namely that it is quite far from the factual and historical events of Granada's fall. Second, the author illustrated how defeat was falsely detected as a representation of loss and failure. In contrast, external defeat was an internal triumph. Although the Castilians exerted all their efforts to make Granada's people deprived of their rights of equality and freedom, the people of Granada depended on their resistance to fight against the injustice of the Castilians. In this way, resistance became the measure upon which defeat turned into triumph.

Third, the author expanded the manifestation of how Ashour's novel deconstructed memories by using the binary opposition of occupation and freedom. Ashour's novel showed that Andalusia's people suffered from the tyranny of the Castilians as they damaged it by burning their books. Using deconstruction, the author manifested how people showed their awareness of this plan and hid their books. The author gave many examples of how the characters hid these books as representative of cumulative experience. In the novel, as a feminist, Ashour portrayed the general features of her female characters: stubbornness, smartness, and full awareness of their personal, social, and political crises. Salima used the books she hid to cure the patients, Maryama put the books in the box she had in her youth, and Ali hid the books in a hole beneath the earth that could be a symbol of hope and resistance.

The author made use of two binary oppositions, namely explicitness/implicitness and forced Christianization/secret Islam. The research explored how oppression exercised against Granada's people made them explicitly submit to their colonialists. However, they were internally not changed at all, and they kept all the features of either their Arabian identity or their religious rituals at heart. In this way, the research exemplified how Derrida's deconstruction broke down the traditional view of the novel as a political novel of Granada's fall and the suffering as a result of that. However, the novel proclaimed the hope of the Arabs to restore both Granada and Palestine as long as they stuck to resistance and kept their cultural and social identity.

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