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10

HISTORIOGRAPHIC METAFICTION AND RENARRATING HISTORY

Nisreen T. Yousef

This chapter examines representations of Islamic cultures in two Pakistani anglophone historical novels: *The Book of Saladin* (1998) by Tariq Ali and *Shadow of the Swords* (2010) by Kamran Pasha. It considers Ali's and Pasha's deployment of historiographic metafiction as a means of complicating, refuting, or reinforcing established present-day ideas about Islam and the West. I argue that Ali, as a Pakistani-British novelist and writer, and Pasha, as a Pakistani-American novelist concerned with the postcolonial world, show a keen interest in rewriting Arab/Islamic history from a Muslim perspective. Ali and Pasha endeavour to present images of twelfth-century Islamic societies that challenge persistent stereotypes of Muslims as uncivilised and Muslim women as passive and oppressed. Drawing on theories of historiographic metafiction, I argue that both authors attempt to eliminate the boundaries between what is fictional and what is real in order to defy the ability of history to provide ultimate truth and thereby challenge historical narratives that are narrated from the standpoint of the West. In presenting fictional accounts of the Third Crusade, both Ali and Pasha reconstruct Islamic cultures as civilised and compatible with Western cultures in ways that defy their representations in Western media and complicate Samuel Huntington's thesis of 'Clash of Civilizations'. Furthermore, both authors grant a voice to Muslim women, who are absent from historical sources. Such representations, I contend, are meant to undermine ongoing political discourse on the necessity of Western military interference in Muslim-majority countries.

In his book *Orientalism* (2003), Edward Said argues that the West's 'structured archive' about the East was built up as early as the Middle Ages. He mentions the Crusades as one of the West's early sources of knowledge about the East. As Said points out, Islam was associated with 'terror, devastation, the demonic, hordes of hated barbarians' (2003: 58). He contends that this record of representations constructed the Orient as a 'great complementary opposite' to the Occident and served as a means of controlling it (1978: 59). In his book *Covering Islam: How the Media and the Experts Determine How We See the Rest of the World* (1997), Said demonstrates how Islam, Muslims, and Arabs have been portrayed in the Western media in recent decades, particularly in American media, and how they are often associated with violence, terrorism, and war. Islam, he argues, is portrayed as a religion of violence and trouble, a menace and a threat to the West (1997: xi–xxii).

Both Ali and Pasha, I argue, deploy historiographic metafiction to serve a postcolonial objective. The ability of history to present truth and the division between history and fiction

have been controversial in postmodern times. In her book *Metafiction* (1984), Patricia Waugh argues that postmodern fiction questions the relation between story and history; that the main assertions of postmodern novels are the plurality of truth and the difficulty of separating history from fiction, as history itself is a fictional construct. She maintains that 'Metafictional texts show that literary fiction can never imitate or "present" the world but always imitates or "represents" the discourses which in turn construct that world' (1984: 100–108). Accordingly, historiographic metafiction challenges the ability of history to provide ultimate truth. In a brief author's preface to *The Book of Saladin*, Ali explains his method of giving priority to historical evidence over the writing of a good story:

Any fictional reconstruction of the life of a historical figure poses a problem for the writer. Should actual historical evidence be disregarded in the interest of a good story? I think not. In fact the more one explores the imagined inner life of the characters, the more important it becomes to remain loyal to historical facts and events, even in the case of the Crusades, where Christian and Muslim chroniclers often provided different interpretations of what actually happened.

(1998: xiii)

Ali's statement indicates that his fictional account of the Third Crusade aims to provide his own version of the truth in which he contests the dichotomy between history and fiction. As we see, the novel is narrated by a Jewish character, Ibn Yakub, whom Saladin has entrusted to write his biography. Although he is the chief narrator, Ibn Yakub does not produce much direct commentary himself, leaving space for the characters to speak for themselves and about Saladin's life. The narrative constantly fluctuates between the present and the past, giving a detailed description of Saladin's life as well as Arab and Islamic communities during the Middle Ages. Questioned by Saladin about the heterogeneous nature of narratives about the Sultan's boyhood, the scribe replies: 'Your Majesty is talking about facts. I am talking about history' (1998: 12). The narrator problematises the ability of history to present a fixed reality. His statement implies that historical accounts do not convey ultimate truth as they combine the subjective and the objective, the real and the fictional. Thus, Ali eliminates the boundaries between what is historical and what is imaginary. I contend that this juxtaposition of the historical and the fictional in the narrative serves a revisionist purpose.

In this vein, Avrom Fleishman argues that the major resemblance between the historian and the historical novelist lies in their use of imagination. Examining how real events are transformed into a narrative (1972: 6), White too problematises the ability of historical accounts to truthfully represent real events. For him, history is a type of literature that differs from other types in content rather than form, and thus claims for the ability of history to represent historical events truthfully become problematic. History, just like literature, is a kind of narrative. As Hayden White notes, a narrative is a form of discourse that is determined by the end it serves. For him, the term 'history' is rather ambiguous as it combines both the objective and the subjective (1995: 105, 107). Accordingly, the tasks of Ali as a historical-novel author and of Ibn Yakub as a historian have much in common. Both are free to exercise their imagination. In view of Fleishman's and White's arguments, I contend that Ali's fictional account of Islamic history in *The Book of Saladin* is connected to a postcolonial objective. In constructing his fictional account of the Third Crusade, Ali tries to renarrate history from a Muslim viewpoint, by challenging ongoing political discourses that support military interventionism in Muslim-majority countries.

Drawing on theories of historiographic metafiction, Ahmed Gamal argues that *The Book of Saladin* can be read as a postcolonial metafictional work as it aims to rewrite the discourse

of colonial history. He notes that metafiction is a 'postcolonial act of rewriting and hence recuperate[s] the history of the colonized' (2010: 27). Gamal explains that the novel contests the dichotomy between what is historical and what is fictional. He notes that the term 'post-colonial metafiction' was first used by Timothy Brennan to describe Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* (1981). Gamal indicates that postcolonial metafiction allows a space for the voice of the 'subaltern' to be heard, and that postcolonial metafiction has thus been utilised to rewrite the history of the Middle East. In light of this, Gamal argues, Ali's *The Book of Saladin* is a metafictional postcolonial narrative that re-narrates the history of the Western modernity and contests the Eurocentric narrative (2010: 1–5). My argument here expands on Gamal's work, particularly on representations of Saladin and the issue of Muslim women.

In an interview with Talat Ahmad, Ali states that his intention in writing the novel was to counteract the argument which claimed that 'the Arabs are people without political culture'. Ali points out that such claims were made by professors on TV during the first Gulf War in 1991. He adds that he wrote the novel to challenge the claims of the media and the political discourse that 'Islamic culture is backward and its politics are despotic' and 'Islam is a religion characterized by intolerance' (2006: n.p.). It is important to note that the novel's publication was followed by the release of Huntington's article 'A Clash of Civilizations?' in 1993, and later his book *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order* in 1996. In parts of this book, Huntington argues that Islamic cultures are incompatible with Western values, in particular with Western principles of democracy (1996: 29). Andrew Goldsmith and Colleen Lewis observe that, in the 1990s, democratising Arab and Islamic countries was seen as essential. They add that Islamic countries' political cultures were viewed as weak and lacking in harmony (2000: 313). Thus, the overall picture that we get of Islamic cultures as depicted in *The Book of Saladin* is one of political maturity.

In the novel, Saladin, the central character, is portrayed as a man with a solid political culture. As a political and a military leader, he is presented as a shrewd planner and a subtle strategist who concentrates all his energies and efforts on materialising clearly envisioned objectives. This is clearly manifested in his determined endeavours to recapture Jerusalem. The novel charts the rise of Saladin as Sultan of Egypt and Syria and follows him as he arranges to take back Jerusalem and other occupied cities from the Crusaders. Saladin appears to be a smart strategist: his move on Jerusalem comes late in his war agenda because he believes that coastal towns should be taken first. He guarantees that his soldiers arrive at Lake Tiberias in order to deprive the Crusaders' army of access to water sources, which will weaken them (Ali 1998: 273). Saladin's strategies reflect mature political and military planning.

As noted in the novel, Saladin has various diplomatic relations with different leading figures. In addition to two major Western historical figures, King Richard of England and King Philip of France, several other Crusaders are introduced into the narrative, including Raymond of Tripoli, Bertrand of Toulouse, King Amalric of Jerusalem, Balian of Ibelin, and King Guy of Jerusalem. Raymond is shown as being on good terms with Saladin, who sometimes considers him an ally rather than an opponent. Saladin is ready to save Raymond's face by refraining from attacking Tripoli, where Raymond rules, because he does not want to insult his friend and he knows that any successful attack would require either taking Raymond prisoner or killing him: 'I still feel close to him. Friendship is a sacred trust' (1998: 293). This reflects Saladin's sincerity as well as his ability to keep his word and maintain diplomatic relations with the leaders of the Crusades. By the same token, Saladin has a diplomatic relationship with Bertrand of Toulouse, a member of the Knights Templar and a heretic who escaped from the Kingdom of Jerusalem, ruled by King Amalric, joined the Muslim camp, and was immediately 'taken on trust' (1998: 113). Though Bertrand's scepticism and blasphemous views extend to criticising both Christianity and Islam, Saladin listens to him with an open mind and a genuine humanistic

understanding (Ali 1998: 118). There is also a mention of al-Farabi in the novel. The choice of al-Farabi, I suggest, is significant. He is introduced as the founder of political philosophy within Islamic cultural traditions and being 'the second teacher' of philosophy after Aristotle (Al-Farabi 2004: ix). This indicates that Muslims in the medieval period were aware of political science, had their own views and theories on it, and made their own contributions to the field. Again, Ali seeks to challenge the persistent claims about Arab and Islamic communities lacking political culture.

As Peter Morey and Amina Yaqin argue, after 9/11, Western media endeavoured to create a dichotomy between Islamic and Western cultures. This supposed dichotomy was essential to promoting military action after the 9/11 attacks (2001: 1). According to Huntington, Islamic-Western relations have been problematic since the emergence of Islam:

Conflict along the fault line between Western and Islamic civilizations has been going on for 1,300 years. After the founding of Islam, the Arab and the Moorish surge west and north only ended at Tours in 732. From the eleventh to the thirteenth century the Crusaders attempted with temporary success to bring Christianity and Christian rule to the Holy Land.

(1993: 31)

In addition, in *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order* (1996), Huntington argues that the relationships between groups from different civilisations are usually aggressive. He maintains that relations between Islam and Christianity have often been hostile, despite the fact that there have been periods of peaceful coexistence (1996: 207, 209).

Ervand Abrahamian argues that American media have framed the 9/11 attacks in line with Huntington's 'Clash of Civilizations'. He goes on to argue that Huntington's thesis has triumphed: mainstream newspapers and journals that are read by the 'attentive public', such as the *New York Times*, *Wall Street Journal*, *Washington Post*, *Time*, and *Newsweek*, adopted Huntington's theory. Abrahamian also notes that this view was keenly embraced by television and radio networks, and that after the 9/11 attacks, Huntington's *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order* became a bestseller (2003: 529–530). Similarly, Fazal Rizvi argues that although Huntington's thesis has been demolished in the academic sphere, it is still influential in popular media; the 9/11 attacks were viewed by many Americans as the embodiment of a cultural and religious conflict between Islam and the West. He maintains that Huntington's frequently criticised thesis has become 'a successful political myth' which has become part of the 'social imaginary' (Rizvi 2011: 227–229). Hence, the American media played a significant role in propagating Huntington's theory, trying to present the 9/11 attacks as a civilisational clash between Islam and the West.

In his article 'The Clash of Ignorance', Said counter-argues that while Huntington succeeds in creating a binary opposition between Islam and the West, he fails to admit that the West is indebted to medieval Islamic civilisation in various disciplines of knowledge, such as humanism, science, philosophy, sociology, and historiography (2001: 197). As Jim Al-Khalili points out, in the Middle Ages, the Islamic world was at its peak in terms of scientific advancement and the period is referred to as the Golden Age of Islamic history. Europe, he clarifies, is indebted to Islamic advances in medicine. For instance, al Zakariya Razi's *al-Hawi* (925) and Avicenna's *Canon of Medicine* (1025) were translated into Latin and drawn upon in the medical field in Europe during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries (2012: 197).

As a Muslim-American author concerned about representations of the Islamic world in Western media, Pasha, like Ali, is keen to present Islamic cultures as sophisticated and enlightened.

In *Shadow of the Swords*, Pasha provides an account that mixes the historical and the fictional in order to fulfil a postcolonial mission. This takes us to Linda Hutcheon's argument in *A Poetics of Postmodernism* (1988). Hutcheon contends that postmodernism questions the dichotomy between history and fiction and focuses on what they share rather on how they differ. For her, both history and fiction are linguistic constructs that 'derive their force [more] from verisimilitude than from any objective truth' (1988: 105). She points out that historiographic metafiction 'plays upon the truth and lies of the historical record' (1988: 114). As Hutcheon indicates, historiographic metafiction subverts the established views of history and fiction by challenging what the historical novel takes for granted. She indicates that postmodern fiction contests the ability of both history and fiction to convey truth; that it seeks to determine whose version of the truth is told (Hutcheon 1988: 105, 114, 120, 123).

In light of Hutcheon's argument, I contend that Pasha creates fictional characters such as Sir William and Miriam, who play major roles in Saladin's political and personal lives in order to contest the dichotomy between the historical and the fictional. Pasha offers his own version of the past. Pasha's fictional account of the Third Crusade constructs Islamic cultures as civilised and, furthermore, as compatible with Western cultures in ways that challenge the Western media's attempts to create an artificial division between a 'backward' Islamic world and a 'civilised' West, especially following the 9/11 attacks.

Pasha shows Saladin and Sir William establish a solid friendship. Sir William stays in Saladin's camp and develops an admiration for Islamic culture (Pasha 2010: 159). This fictionalised friendship between Saladin and Sir William, I argue, is an attempt to eliminate the boundaries between history and fiction. Pasha constructs a fictional account of Saladin's private life for postcolonial ends. In providing a mixture of the historical and the fictional, Pasha challenges the ability of history to present ultimate truth and offers a version of history that challenges historically established images of Islamic cultures as backward. To deconstruct the colonial discourse, he undermines the ideas behind Huntington's thesis of the 'Clash of Civilizations'. Ultimately, Pasha, like Ali, challenges political discourses that promote the war option in our present time.

In the novel, King Henry II is critical of his son Richard labelling Muslims as 'barbarians'. For him, 'a day in the school of Cordova would shame the greatest scholars of the Christian courts' (Pasha 2010: 56). Such a statement associates Islamic culture with knowledge and enlightenment. Moreover, after staying at the Muslims' camp and being exposed to Islamic civilisation, Sir William shows appreciation for Muslims' codes of chivalry and honour (2010: 356), and he points out that the Muslim army possesses more advanced arms than its European counterpart (2010: 106). According to the narrator, 'The soldiers knew that victory today meant triumph over the forces of barbarism and ignorance that threatened to plunge the civilized world back into the illiterate darkness that still covered Europe' (2010: 16). Through his narrator's voice, Pasha tries to put Europe and the Islamic world in sharp contrast.

Furthermore, the author suggests that Islam and the West had collaborated in trade in the past. As Ahmed Essa and Othman Ali indicate, when the Crusaders first arrived in Syria, they focused a great deal on trade. They also benefited from goods that were in high demand in Europe, such as sugar. He notes further that the Crusaders bought from Muslims icons and lapidaries that were used in churches. For Essa, trade with Muslims drew Europe's attention to the need to engage in trading activities beyond the continent, as Europe had nothing to export (2010: 57–58). In *Shadow of the Swords*, the narrator points out that Italian jewellery and French pots are available for purchase in the markets of Jerusalem; he also indicates that the Franks in the Holy Land are conducting trade with their homelands (Pasha 2010: 80–81). According to Miriam, this intercultural trade marked 'the beginnings of cultural awareness among the infidels' (2010: 81). This observation alludes to the contribution of Islamic cultures to the later rise of

the European Renaissance, as discussed earlier by Essa. Thus, Pasha, like Ali, seeks to defy the Western media's depictions of Muslims as backward and uncivilised.

As argued earlier in this chapter, the juxtaposition of the historical and the fictional in Ali's *The Book of Saladin* serves a revisionist purpose. By presenting the fictionalised private life of Saladin, Ali brings to light the issue of Muslim women, who are marginalised, if not completely absent from history. Ali imagines alternative historical narratives of medieval Muslim women and his fictional construct of this history serves an ideological end. This brings us to Jerome de Groot's argument about the functions of historical fiction. De Groot contends that the historical novel can challenge the subjectivity of history by providing multiple possibilities and narratives. Moreover, it functions as a postcolonial tool as it rewrites Eurocentric versions of history (2009: 139, 159). Ali, I argue, attempts to rewrite history in a way that defies assumptions that Islam is a patriarchal religion. He finds a voice for Muslim women and gives an important postcolonial revisionist impetus to the task of writing historical fiction. As Ali writes in his preface, 'Women are a subject on which medieval history is usually silent. Salah al-Din, we are told, had sixteen sons, but nothing has been written about their sisters or mothers' (1998: xiv, xvii–xviii). It is also easily observed that all the women depicted in the novel are fictional, as opposed to the men, who are a mixture of historical and fictional figures. This indicates the lack of historical evidence of women's affairs in Saladin's time. Amira el-Azhary Sonbol argues that women's status in Islamic societies is still not comprehensive and that thorough research is still required to uncover the realities of Muslim women's histories. This lack of knowledge about women in the Islamic world has resulted in exotic stereotypes (2005: xvii–xviii).

However, Gavin Hambly provides instances of real pivotal Muslim women in the medieval period who had great influence on public life in Islamicate communities, including queens, poets, and patrons. In addition, he offers instances of significant characters in Arabic, Persian, and Turkish literature and art. For him, the West has misrepresented medieval Muslim women by instantly associating them with the veil and the harem. Hambly explains that nineteenth- and twentieth-century European travellers made a significant contribution to viewing Muslim women as submissive, and maintains that these explorers only had contact with servant and slave women, and thereby drew generalised pictures of oppressed Muslim women (1998: 4).

As concluded from these works, some Muslim women in the medieval period were not submissive but rather took part in public life and played influential roles. Through representations of his two fictional female characters, Jamila and Halima, Ali presents a complex reality about living in 'harems' and royal courts. They are often portrayed in *The Book of Saladin* as enjoying a social life of their own, one that is highly developed on both intellectual and cultural levels. For example, Jamila, one of Saladin's wives, is a free, open-minded and secular-oriented woman. She is a sceptic who is intelligent enough to understand the philosophical ideas and concepts of the famous Islamic philosopher Ibn Rushd, who favoured reason over mysteries, and to teach her ideology to other women (Ali 1998: 152, 184). Jamila also adheres to al-Farabi's view that 'human reason is superior to all religious faiths' (Ali 1998: 221–222).

As the novel is a fictionalised version of a possible past reality, Jamila's interest in al-Farabi and Ibn Rushd suggests that Muslim harem women in the medieval period were sophisticated enough to understand such complicated philosophies: they were philosophically dissident and opposed to the religious mainstream. However, these women are only shown as influential, free, and strong-willed behind the scenes. Although Jamila is aware of existing political theories, she is unable to take part in public political affairs. In this regard, Ibn Yakub is critical of the fact that Jamila is prevented from participating in the public sphere, particularly in commerce and state affairs (Ali 1998: 189).

Jamila's interest in Ibn Rushd's philosophy is highly significant. Ali's mention of it is meant to suggest that there was a keen interest in gender perspectives in the twelfth century. This submits that, in contrast to clear signs of gender bias in Islamicate communities manifested in the exclusion of women from the public sphere, there was also a philosophical probing of such gender inequality. Ibn Rushd argues that women are equal to men in intellectual capacity and that if women were granted the same education and opportunities to engage in the public sphere, they would perform their roles as skilfully as men. For him, women's exclusion from the public domain is what makes them inferior to men (Sonneborn 2006: 632–661). The philosophical views of Ibn Rushd indicate that there was gender inequality after the rule of Prophet Mohammad and the Rashidun Caliphs. According to Ibn Rushd, the reign of the Arabs under the rule of the Prophet Mohammad and the Rashidun Caliphs, his immediate successors, was an imitation of Plato's republic, and that the start of the Umayyad Dynasty marked the end of it (Ali 1998: 121).

Ali reinforces a more gender-balanced approach to women in the Islamic past through Saladin's explanation that Islam permits women to learn, work, and even fight:

There are some who argued this during the time of the Caliph Omar. They told him that our Prophet's first wife, Khadija, was a trader in her own right and she hired the Prophet to work for her, some time before she wed him. After the Prophet departed, his wife Aisha took up arms and fought, and this was accepted at the time.

(1998: 127)

As can be noted, women here play a significant role in public life and nothing in Islam stops them from engaging in the social, economic, and military domains. Ibn Rushd's standpoint on gender inequality, which dates back to the twelfth century, still has resonance in contemporary Islamicate communities. Mehrunisha Suleman and Afaaf Rajbee note that women played a major role in sustaining and developing Islamic learning after the emergence of Islam in the seventh century. They indicate that women were jurists, trusty narrators of *hadith*, and teachers of *hadith*, philosophy, logic, and calligraphy. In light of this, they explain that the teachings of Islam did not lead to the subjugation of Muslim women in Islamicate societies. They argue that some Muslim men's tendency to 'overprotect' Muslim women and eliminate them from public life led to Islamicate communities losing much of their potential (Suleman and Rajbee 2017: n.p.). Ali's revisionist history has an ideological end. He provides a multifaceted image of women in the harem and challenges assumptions that Islam is backward and deprives women of the right to participate in the public sphere. He implies that the teachings of Islam allow women to participate in public life and blames communities dominated by patriarchal ideologies and values for disqualifying women from taking part, in both the past and the present. Ultimately, I argue that Ali suggests that Islamicate communities could be more just to women, similar to the way things were during the rule of the Prophet Mohammad and the Rashidun Caliphs, and tries to undermine political discourse that Western interventionism is essential to enabling women's participation in the public domain.

By presenting an account of the past that mixes history with fiction and by means of creating historical analogies between the Third Crusade and the ongoing Western military interference in Muslim-majority countries, Pasha highlights the terrible consequences of war on women. He establishes this notion as crucial in the opening episode of the novel. The narrative begins with the story of the fictional Miriam. The third-person narrator informs us that Miriam and her mother have both been raped by Crusaders and that her mother was then killed (Ali 1998: 3–5). Miriam is later captured by Richard's army on her way to Cairo (1998: 278). As Sadia Abbas

argues, the emancipation of Muslim women in Islamic cultures has been used as a pretext for the ongoing 'War on Terror' (2014: 44). Morey and Yaqin observe that wives of prominent politicians in the West, including Laura Bush and Cherie Blair, used the discourse of protecting Muslim women in Afghanistan to justify the moral objectives of the 'War on Terror' (2011: 178). Nevertheless, in her paper 'Sexualized Violence Against Iraqi Women by US Occupying Forces', McNutt reported incidents of rape and sexual violence by US military personnel in a presentation made to the United Nations Commission on Human Rights 2005 Session in Geneva. She referred to a letter smuggled from inside Abu Ghraib Prison by an Iraqi woman in December 2003 who reported that women detainees were raped by American guards. Kristen McNutt further noted that President Bush had insisted that these actions could not be said to be the outcome of military action and were only perpetrated by a few recruits (2005: n.p.). Accordingly, I argue that Pasha deploys representations of the Third Crusade to reinforce the notion that the 'War on Terror' has had a negative impact on women in Muslim-majority countries, although the objective of protecting Arab and Muslim women was among the supposed objectives of the mission. Ultimately, Pasha tries to undermine the political discourse that Western military interventionism aims to save women in Muslim-majority countries.

Ali and Pasha both endeavour to discourage the ongoing political discourse proclaiming the necessity of Western military interventionism. They seek to challenge the Western media's representations of Muslims and to undermine Huntington's thesis of the 'Clash of Civilizations'. With his fictionalised account of the Third Crusade, Ali presents nuanced depictions of life under Islam. He depicts Muslims as enjoying a sophisticated political culture in ways that defy their image in the Western imaginary. Moreover, by creating Muslim female characters who are intellectually sophisticated, Ali performs a revision of colonial history and complicates the ongoing Western discourse that Muslim women are passive and thus in need of emancipation. Ultimately, Ali presents a solid anti-war stance. In a similar fashion, in *Shadow of the Swords* Pasha provides alternative images of Islamic and European civilisations, in contrast to those routinely presented by Western media following the 9/11 attacks. As opposed to media attempts to create a presumed dichotomy between 'backward' Islamic and 'advanced' Western civilisation, Pasha presents Islamic cultures as more advanced in different scientific fields. He also depicts Islamic and European cultures as enjoying a healthy relationship based on fruitful scientific and cultural interaction when Europe drew on the advances of Islamic civilisation in various domains. Pasha presents characters who are interested in building intercultural relations and mutual understanding, and notes the negative impact of war on women. Through such representations, he undermines political discourses arguing for the necessity of Western intervention in Muslim-majority countries.

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