Tariq Ali's *A Sultan in Palermo*: Historical Fiction and the "War on Terror"

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Abstract: *This paper investigates Tariq Ali's representations of Islamic civilization and the relationship between Islam and the West during the medieval times in his novel A Sultan in Palermo (2005). The paper argues that by means of resorting to history, Ali reflects on the current affairs between Islam and the West, particularly with regard to the ongoing "War on Terror". Making use of postcolonial approaches, particularly Edwards Said's views on the relationship between Islam and the West as well as Hayden White's ideas on history and historical fiction, the article contends that Ali renarrates history from the view point of the colonized to challenge ideas behind Samuel Huntington's theory of the "Clash of Civilizations" as well as contemporary Western media's depictions of Muslims and Islamic cultures as backward and violent. The article maintains that by providing horrendous depictions of war and by suggesting that military action breeds further violence, Ali undermines the ongoing political discourse that the "War on Terror" can defeat terrorism and contribute towards establishing peace worldwide.*
Keywords: historical fiction, postcolonialism, Tariq Ali, the "Clash of Civilizations", the "War on Terror", 9/11

1. Introduction
Tariq Ali is a British-Pakistani writer, novelist and filmmaker. He is also active in the media, establishing a reputation as a left-wing activist and journalist. Ali is the author of several books, including *Can Pakistan Survive?*: *The Death of a State* (1991), *Conversations with Edward Said* (2005), *Bush in Babylon* (2003), and *Clash of Fundamentalisms: Crusades, Jihads and Modernity* (2002), *A Banker for All Seasons*: *Crooks and Cheats Inc*. (2007), *The Duel* (2008), and *The Islam Quintet* (Subin 2010:1). Ali's *The Islam Quintet* series examines Islamic-Western encounters in different periods of history. The quintet consists of *Shadows of the Pomegranate Tree* (1992), set in fifteenth-century Moorish Spain, *The Book of Saladin* (1998), set in the twelfth century in Cairo, Damascus, and the Holy City of Jerusalem, *The Stone Woman* (2000), set in the declining period of the Ottoman Empire in Istanbul, *A Sultan in Palermo* (2005), set in the twelfth century in Palermo, and *Nights of the Golden Butterfly* (2010), set in the twenty-first century in Lahore, London, Paris and Beijing.

Ali's novels are timely as they are related to the context of Western military interventionism in Muslim-majority countries in general and the "War on Terror" in particular. Since it was declared in 2001, the "War on Terror" has been a debatable issue. A number of authors such as Ali, Kamran Pasha, Richard Warren Field, and David Eldridge have attempted through literature to deal with such an issue in their literary works. Significantly, Arab British novelist Leila Aboulela

has endeavoured to provide literary representations of the outcome of the "War on Terror" on Arabs and Muslims living in Western communities, particularly in the United Kingdom. In in an in-depth analysis of *The Kindness of Enemy* (2015), Awad (2018:71) argues that Aboulela depicts the hardships Muslims faced in the aftermath of counter-terrorism strategy, which was adopted by the consecutive British governments following the declaration of the "War on Terror". The mentioned examples indicate that there has been burgeoning interest in dealing with the matter of the "War on Terror" in the literary sphere. Whilst Ali's novels including *A Sultan in Palermo* are highly significant in this regard, they have not received enough critical attention and are still in need of adequate academic analysis. The main objective of this paper is to contribute towards the existing debate about the "War on Terror" and the "Clash of Civilization".

A Sultan in Palermo is set in Medieval Palermo and narrates the story of the fifty-eight Idrisi, who is both a geographer and physician. Idrisi leaves for Palermo to become a mapmaker under the request of Rujari the Norman Sultan. The novelist evokes a period of history where Islamic and European cultures collaborated in the different scientific fields, had fruitful intercultural relationships, and established some peaceful relationships. It has been argued that although set in the past, one of historical literature's objectives is to reflect critically on the present. Fleishman (1917:15) argues that historical novels are able to deal with life's challenges by revisiting an earlier historical era. Put differently, historical literature is not meant to dwell on the past as much as to illuminate the present. In this regard, Lukács (1962:38) argues: "The purpose of revisiting of the past is to enable fictional characters to cast a new light on the complexities of modern life at a fictional and temporal remove from the present". Praising Sir Walter Scott's historical novel of the Third Crusade *The Talisman* (1825), Lukács writes that Scott: "discloses the actual conditions and crises of contemporary life by means of the historical crises he represents" (Lukács 1962:38). Moreover, highlighting the significance of history as a means of comprehending and developing the present, Scott writes: "Our eye is enabled to look back on the past to improve on our ancestors' improvements and avoid their errors. This can only be done by studying history and comparing it with passing events" (McMaster1981:130). Thus, according to these critics, historical literature is often written with the objective of tackling the present rather than exploring the past. Accordingly, historical fiction can provide explanations of present-day complications in ways that make them easier to comprehend and to be resolved. Considering these arguments about the characteristics of historical fiction, I argue that Ali provides in *A Sultan in Palermo* a fictional historical account of Islamic civilization in the Middle Ages as a means to reflect on contemporary relationships between Islam and the West, particularly with regard to the "War on Terror".

In this regard, it is essential to draw uponHayden White and Jerome De Groot's views on history. White (1995:105-107) argues that historical accounts are unable to truthfully present facts. For him, history is a type of literature that differs from other types of literature in content rather in form; thus, the ability of

history to provide historical happenings truthfully is problematic. White(1995:105-107) maintains that history resembles literature as both are kinds of narrative and that narrative is a form of discourse that is determined by the objective it serves. He adds that history is rather ambiguous as it combines both the objective and the subjective (White 1995:105-107). Hence, literature and history according to White are both fictional and subject to ideology.Drawing upon a thorough research on historical fiction, De Groot (2009:139) argues that a chief purpose of the historical novel is to "challenge history". For him, "the historical novel fundamentally challenges subjectivities, offering multiple identities and historical story lines. Far from being a rigid, ordering structure, history seems to provide a set of potentialities and possibilities"(De Groot 2009:159). De Groot contends that historical fiction can serve as a postcolonial tool as it aims "to concentrate on and respond to the cultural, political and social legacies and mechanism of empire and colony" (De Groot 2009:159). In light of White and De Groot's arguments, I contend that Ali as a postcolonial author concerned with colonized countries tries through his fictional account to renarrate history from a viewpoint that defies the Eurocentric version. Ultimately, heattempts to discourage military action as a method to restore peace. Alternatively, Ali urges for resorting to diplomacy and calls for supporting multiculturalism and tolerant coexistence.

In the aftermath of the 9/11 attacks, particularly on September 16, 2001, American President George W. Bush made a declaration that was entitled "Remarks by the President upon Arrival". In this announcement, Bush said: "This crusade, this war on terrorism is going to take a while. And the American people must be patient. I'm going to be patient". In his speech at the Labour Party Conference after the 9/11 attacks in October 2001, British Prime Minister Tony Blair indicated that the assaults were a "turning point" in history: "In retrospect, the Millennium marked only a moment in time. It was the events of September 11 that marked a turning point in history, where we confront the dangers of the future and assess the choices facing humankind. It was a tragedy. An act of evil" (part one). Kock and Villadsen (2012:187) argue that Blair used the discourse of the "turning point" in order to justify his involvement in the Middle East. For them, he constructed the 9/11 attacks as an "exceptional" threat that required an "exceptional" reaction (2012:187). Hollis (2010:1) contends that 9/11 actually marked a "turning point" in the British foreign policy in the Middle East. For Hollis, the Middle East was not a priority on Britain's agenda. Nevertheless, following the 9/11 attacks and the ensuing "War on Terror", it became one of Britain's main focuses. She maintains, "Britain's decision to take part in the "War on Terror" was "a bitter epilogue to Britain's imperial moment in the Middle East" (Hollis 2010:1). Taking the accounts above into consideration, the paper will analyse *A Sultan in Palermo* in the context of the "War on Terror" and the discussion will draw upon postcolonial theories.

2. Discussion

It is significant that Ali's *A Sultan in Palermo* was published in 2005. This period witnessed excessive media attempts to promote Samuel Huntington's thesis of the "Clash of Civilizations" following Bush's announcement of the "War on Terror". According to Morey and Yaqin (2011:1-2), the Western media played a major role in stressing existing stereotypes of Muslims such as "the bearded Muslim fanatic, the oppressed veiled woman and the duplicitous terrorist." For them, reemphasizing such images aimed to contribute towards creating an artificial dichotomy between a civilised Western civilization and a backward Islamic world. They maintain that these depictions were not new and were carefully constructed and shaped with the objective to present Muslims as the "Other", implying that they pose a threat to peace and stability (Morey and Yaqin 2011:19-21). Thus, according to Morey and Yaqin, Western media promoted Huntington's thesis of the "Clash of Civilizations". Examining Western media portrayals of Muslims, Said (1997: xi-xxii) argues in his book *Covering Islam*: *How the Media and the Experts Determine How We See the Rest of the World* that Islam and Muslims have been often associated with violence, terrorism and war in Western media, particularly in the American media. Islam, he maintains, is shown as a religion of violence and as a threat to the West. For Said, these stereotypical images have encouraged people in the West to form negative opinions of Islam and Muslims even before being given the chance to know them (Said 1997: xi-xxii). Said's study indicates, as argued by Morey and Yaqin, that violent images of Muslims in Western media were established earlier than the 9/11 attacks. As a postcolonial author keen to defy colonial discourse, Ali presents in *A Sultanin Palermo* Islamic civilization as advanced and progressive with the objective of defying contemporary Western media's representations of Muslims as backward and violent. Ultimately, Ali tries to discourage the "War on Terror".

For Huntington (1993:31), 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". In addition, in his book *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order*, Huntington (1996:207) argues that the relationships between groups from different civilisations will be usually aggressive. He maintains that the relations between Islam and Christianity have been often hostile, despite the fact that there have been times of peaceful coexistence (Huntington 1996:209). Hence, Huntington frames the relationship between Islam and the West within cultural and religious conflicts that are rooted in the past, particularly since the emergence of Islam in the eighth century.

However, Said (2003:2) argues in *Orientalism* that a large number of writers accepted and further contributed to establishing an "oncological and an epistemological" division between the Orient and the Occident. Said argues: "the relationship between Occident and Orient is a relationship of power, of dominance, of varying degrees of a complex hegemony…" (Said 2003:5). For him, the West's "structured archive" about the East was built up as early as the middle ages. As Said points out, Islam was associated with "terror, devastation,

the demonic, hordes of hated barbarians". This built record of representations constructed the Orient as a "great complementary opposite" to the Occident and served as a means of controlling it (Said 2003:58-59). Accordingly, this artificial dichotomy between Islam/East and Christianity/West, which has been clearly reprised in contemporary context by Huntington, served as an essential colonial discourse in earlier centuries. Hence, Said's views of the relationship between the East and the West undermine those of Huntington, which correspond to the discourse of Orientalism. While Huntington argues that the relationship between Islam and the West is a mere civilizational clash, Said contends that the relationship is one of control. Taking Huntington and Said's arguments into consideration, I argue that Ali endeavours to complicate Huntington's thesis of the "Clash of Civilizations", which creates an artificial division between Islamic and European cultures. By means of providing such a construct, Ali undermines Huntington's views and ultimately challenges ongoing colonial discourse of the "War on Terror".

In an attempt to establish more complex images about the relationship between Islam and the West than those Huntington's theory offers, Ali presents healthy and peaceful relationships between Islamic and European cultures in some instances in the novel. As we see in the novel, under the rule of Rujari, Muslims are allowed to practice their religion and to speak their own language. Interestingly enough although the city is under Christian rule, Rujari's court is dominated by Muslim scholars who have flourished in his court such as Idrisi. Moreover, Rujari and Idrisi, the two main characters in the novel, establish a solid friendship that is based on trust and respect. Historically speaking, Idrisi is a real rather than a fictional character. As Elsie (2003:21) notes, Muhammad al-Idrisi was an Arab geographer who studied in Cordova, Andalusia. He stayed with King Roger II of Sicily (who is known in the novel as Rujari) and compiled an account of the geography of the world. Idrisi functions in the novel not only as Rujari's friend but also as his trusted advisor. Ali's attempt to stress such historical facts in his fictional account is meant to make use of historical incidents in ways that serves his revisionist task of history. Ali tries to show that during the Middle Ages, Muslims and Europeans were able to coexist harmoniously for a unified purpose. Although the historical record mentions that Idrisi spent considerable span of time at King Roger's court, it does not mention that the two men established a friendship as suggested in the novel. Hence, Ali manipulates the historical record with the objective of presenting his own version of history; he presents peaceful human relationships between Muslims and Christians in Medieval Palermo. Furthermore, Rujari's son appears to be very sympathetic to Muslims and seems to have developed admiration for Islam as well as for Arabic language. At an early stage of his life, the boy tries to master the Quran and decides to convert to Islam (Ali: 2006:53). In addition, we learn that Younis al-Shami is Rujari's old tutor, who had taught him Arabic, astronomy and algebra, was treated with respect and admiration at the court (Ali 2006:12). Through establishing such connections between his characters, Ali draws images of harmonious affairs between Muslims and Christians in Palermo.

Rujari considers Muslims in Palermo as his allies rather than his enemies. As the third-person narrator informs us: "Rujari's sympathies were not concealed. Like his father, he preferred to ignore the Pope and rely, instead, on the loyalty of his Muslim subjects. They knew that left to himself, Sultan Rujari would not harm them" (Ali 2006:11). According to the narrator, Rujari and his Muslim advisors are able to establish strong and peaceful bonds despite the tension that is taking place on the Island between Muslims and Christians. Unlike the Barons and the Bishops, Rujari is inclined to trusting his Muslim advisors rather than the Christian ones. Ali, furthermore, presents characters that are able to establish sacred bonds regardless of the difference in faith. As we learn, Thawdor ibn Ghafur is a Muslim who is married to a Christian woman: "I believe in Allah and his Prophet, but my wife is a Nazarene" (Ali 2006:24). As we learn, Thawdor's mother is a Greek Christian while his father is a Muslim. She, as Thawdor informs Idrisi, converted to Islam (Ali 2006:24). On hearing this news, Idrisi asks Rujari to establish a register of all the mixed marriages in Palermo, which indicates that there is a considerable number of intercultural marriages on the island (Ali 2006:24). Hence, Ali drawds a picture of a multicultural and mutifaith Palermo where both Muslims and Christians are able to coexist peacefuly. By means of such representation, Ali tries to present Islamic and European cultures as campatible in ways that complicate ideas behind Huntington's thesis of the "Clash of Civilizations." While Huntington's thesis is based on the assumption that Islamic and European civilizations have been on an ongoing religious and cultural tension, Ali providesmore complex images of the relationship between the two civilizations both in the past and the present. Morover, Ali calls for further intercultural understanding and cooperation and for rejecting violence at our present time.

Moreover, the novel draws a picture of a fruitful intercultural communication between Islamic and European cultures in the different scientific fields. In his article "The Clash of Ignorance", Said (2001:197) argues that Huntington succeeds in creating a binary opposition between Islam and the West but fails to confess the fact that the West is indebted to medieval Islamic civilisation in the different disciplines of knowledge. In the novel, commenting on the relationship between Islamic and European cultures, Idrisi says: "My people have brought fruits of every description and cotton and silkworm and the papyrus and made Palermo a city that cannot be surpassed. You inherited all this, but you too have contributed to the riches of the island" (Ali 2006:148). Idrisi goes on to say: "We do have much in common. Your people mastered the sea, my people the desert. You became great boat-builders, we learnt how to ride the camel and the horse" (Ali 2006: 149). Idrisi, who is constructed in the novel as a learned and virtuous character, can be seen as a reliable commentator on the events of the story. Thus, Ali's account of the relationships between Muslims and Europeans in the novel is meant to present images of productive and successful cultural interactions between the two civilizations in ways that are akin to Said's views about the relationship between Islam and the West.

Ali's representations of the relationships between Islamic and European civilizations in *A Sultan in Palermo* correspond to his depictions of the matter in his other novels in *Islam Quintet*. On this subject, Robyn Creswell (201:2) argues that in order to challenge images about Muslims as regressive and fierce, Ali "evokes the most cosmopolitan eras in history" in the series of novels. Similarly, Ali, Pervez and Malik (2014:68) argue that Ali's *Islam Quintet* presents the Islamic civilisation and Christian Europe as two contrasting counterparts; unlike Europeans, Muslims appear as civilised, rational, secular and non-violent. By the same token, Yousef (2018:120) argues that in *The Book of Saladin* Ali deploys historiographic metafiction for a postcolonial end. He mixes the historical and the fictional in order to fulfill a revisionist task. For Yousef, the novelist constructs Islamic civilization as progressive and enlightened and depicts the relationship between Islamic and European cultures in some instances in the novel as a kind of intercultural communication (Yousef 2018:120). Taking into account the critics' arguments about Ali's novels, I contend that Ali makes vigorous attempts through his historical fictional account to undermine contemporary discourse that Islamic cultures are in need of civilizing.

There is a mention of Ibn Sina (Avicenna) and al-Kindi in the novel (Ali 2006:103), which is highly significant. By referring to these two scholars and their achievements in the variable scientific fields, Ali underscores Muslim scholars' contributions towards the rise of the European Renaissance. In this regard, Al-Khalili (2012:197) points out that in the Middle Ages, Islamic civilization excelled its European counterpart in terms of scientific innovations and thereby the period was labeled as the Golden Age. As Al-Khalili indicates, European civilization was indebted to the Islamic achievements in the field of medicine. For example, the translations of al Razi's *al-Hawi* (925) and Avicenna's *Canon of Medicine* (1025) into Latin Language were used as major sources in the medical field in Europe during the fifteenth and the sixteenth centuries (Al-Khalili 2012:197). Furthermore, Ali underscores the significant value of Baghdad's library and its role in the progress of knowledge and sciences in the medieval times. Talking about Baghdad library, the narrator says: "Twelve men were entrusted with the task. The most skilled translators of the ancient Greek, they had translated the works of Galen and Pythagoras, Hippocrates and Aristotle, Socrates ad Plato, and even the plays of Aristophanes. All these works were in Baghdad library" (Ali 2006:6). Thus, Ali's narrator underscores the important value of maintaining classical scholarly heritage upon which European Renaissance was built later on. Through such fictional account about the life in medieval Palermo, the narrator associates Islamic cultures with civilization and scientific advancement while presenting European cultures as less advanced. Such attempts of connecting Islamic cultures with knowledge and enlightenment, I contend, are meant to defy contemporary Western media's portrayal of Muslims and Islamic cultures as backward. Moreover, through emphasizing this historical fact about Islam's-West relations in his fictional account, Ali tries to defy the artificial dichotomy between Islam and the West as suggested by Huntington's thesis and reemphasized by contemporary Western media.

In the novel, Ali goes beyond essentialist views of Islamic cultures. He tries to present conflicting political views on the part of Muslims. According to Phillip, "The followers of the Prophet were divided…. The sun would grow dark and the oceans boil before Believers would ever unite against an enemy of the faith and then it would be too late" (Ali 2006:65). Through this commentary, we are informed that there are multiple political points of view carried out by Muslim characters. Such an attempt by Ali, I argue, is intended to complicate Huntington's essentialist notions of Islamic civilization and Muslims. Huntington (1996:217) argues: "The fundamental problem for the West is not Islamic fundamentalism. It is Islam, a different civilization whose people are convinced of the superiority of their culture and are obsessed with the inferiority of their power". Hence, Huntington essentializes Islamic civilization. Nevertheless, Said (2003:71) argues that the West endeavours to stereotype the Orient, particularly Islamic civilization, is crucial to create a justifying discourse of power and thereby to sustain Empire. Taking Said and Huntington's conflicting views about Islamic civilization, I argue that by presenting multiplicity in Muslims' political standpoints, Ali attempts to challenge essentialist views of Islamic civilization, which is meant to undermine contemporary Western media's consistent representations of Muslims and Islamic civilization.

In *A Sultan in Palermo*, Ali draws a grim picture of war. The novel presents horrible images of the invasion of Palermo. As we learn, the invasion caused the death of so many people including Lady Mayya, Idrisi's wife (Ali 2006:230). Describing the ugly scene that follows the attack, Ibn Fityan says: "When I returned, Master, there was blood on the stairs and my heart began to race. I rushed in and saw the bodies of the servants littered on the floor. They had been disemboweled and their throats were slit. There was only one survivor" (Ali 2006:230). Ibn Fityan wiped his tears and continued: "The boy who survived told me the men were in their cups, shouting obscenities and destroying everything. Some of your books were thrown out of the window. The rest were on the floor where these animals defecated and urinated on them" (Ali 2006:230). Thus, we are informed that the act of invasion of Palermo only helped kill a large number of people and destroy the cultural and scientific heritage of the city. By describing the horrible consequences of the assault in medieval Palermo, the novel provides historical parallels to the situation in some cities in our modern times such as Baghdad where Western military invasion of the city led to terrible loss of human life and cultural legacy.

According to Martin (2003:1): "The looting of Iraq's museums and National Library, with the destruction of much of Iraq's cultural heritage, is a historic crime for which the Bush administration is responsible". He states that following the military invasion of Baghdad, a number of antiquities in the National Museum of antiquities in Baghdad were stolen or ruined. He maintains that such actions aimed at "destroying their national identity" (Martin 2003:1). Martin contends that the ultimate end of the assault on the city was to take control of the oil resources in the country and to achieve materialistic objectives (Martin 2003:1). By the same token, Ali (2003:222) argues in his book *Bush in Babylon*

that the military action in Iraq has led to destructive ends. He maintains that the war broke up the Iraqi army, created a state of chaos, and imposed hardships on Iraqis. Ali supports his argument by presenting a set of pictures to show how Western media was selective about the war images. He includes a photo of an Iraqi boy kissing Tony Blair (Ali 2003:15). Nonetheless, Ali offers many other pictures that reflect a more inclusive image about military invasion. For instance, he includes a picture of an Iraqi woman mourning the death of her child (Ali 2003:209). In addition, he provides a photo displaying a heap of dead Iraqis at Abu Ghraib prison (Ali 2003:223). According to news report that was entitled "Iraq Wars in Figures" and broadcast on the BBC News Website in December 2011, in 2003 the US-led invasion of Iraq with the coalition of the UK and other nations was called "Operation Iraqi Freedom." Eventually, on the Iraqi part, there have been between 97,461 and 106,348 deaths of Iraqi civilians. Given these accounts of the assault on Baghdad, I argue that the catastrophic images of war that Ali presents in the novel are meant to suggest that contemporary Western military interventionism in Muslim-majority countries is connected with destructive consequences. Ali endeavours to undermine ongoing political discourse that military action in the Arab and Muslim world is essential and would defy terrorism and violence. Thus, it can be said that through *A Sultan in Palermo*, Ali contributes to the existing debate about the "War on Terror" by showing a solid anti-war stance. Ali's portrayals of the negative consequences of war, I contend, are meant to show that violence breeds nothing but further violence and that Western military interventionism in Muslim-majority countries would not defy terrorism. Ali's stand on violence in the novel is akin to his views on this issue in his book *The Clash of Fundamentalisms* (2002). Ali's book argues that the Islam-West clash, more particularly the 9/11 attacks, stems from the violence that has been practised by the Western countries, especially the United States, in the different Arab and Islamic countries such as Afghanistan, Pakistan, Iraq, Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Palestine and Chechnya. Accordingly, I argue that Ali calls Western countries to avoid using military action as a way of defying terrorism and to resort to diplomacy.

3. Conclusion

As I have argued, in *A Sultan in Palermo*, Ali deploys historical fiction in order to reflect on the present. He makes use of the unique qualities of historical fiction for postcolonial ends; through providing a fictional account of Islamic civilization in the Middle Ages, Ali renarrates history from the standpoint of the colonized with the objective of discouraging ongoing "War on Terror". For this end, Ali endeavours to complicate Samuel Huntington's theory of the "Clash of Civilizations", which draws an artificial dichotomy between Islamic and European cultures. Thereby, he presents Islamic cultures as civilised while presenting European cultures as less advanced in a way that defies contemporary Western media's attempt to establish a division between a backward Islamic world and an advanced European civilization. Thus, Ali establishes inverted images about Islamic and European cultures as suggested by the Western media and dominant

political discourse. In addition, the novelist provokes a period of time when Islamic and European cultures collaborated in the different scientific domains and had healthy human relationships. Such depictions aim to present Islamic and European cultures as complementary and compatible rather than framing them within cultural and religious conflict as suggested by Huntington. Furthermore, Ali calls for further intercultural interactions between Islamic and European civilizations in our present time. Moreover, Ali presents grim images of war, which suggests that conducting a Western military action in Arab and Islamic countries would lead to destructive consequences including the death of people and the destruction of cultural and scientific heritage. Ultimately, through *A Sultan in Palermo*, Ali endeavours to discourage the "War on Terror" and calls for resorting to diplomacy.

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