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# ORIENTALISM IN JOHN UPDIKE'S TERRORIST

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## ABSTRACT

The goal of this research is to look at John Updike's "Terrorist" as a Neo-Orientalist depiction of Muslims, particularly Arabs. Indeed, since the Crusades, there has been a centuries-long conflict between the West and Islam. The crusaders' philosophy was centered on the duality of "we" versus "them.". Western monarchs, clergy, missionaries, businessmen, and authors tended to see Islam and Muslims through myopic lenses, creating an exotic, weird, and distorted image of Islam and Muslims in their stories. These tales had a profound impact on how the Muslim and Islamic worlds were portrayed in the scholarly subject of Orientalism. The study demonstrates that orientalist depictions of Muslims as barbarians, lethargic, unprogressive, and a potential threat to world peace are still prevalent in today's world. Neo-Orientalism is the post-colonial label for this reincarnation of orientalist ideology. This Neo-Orientalist thought is echoed in many literary works written in the aftermath of 9/11. The famous novel "Terrorist" by John Updike, released in 2006, has been chosen as a model work for this purpose. The use of the Critical Discourse Analysis approach to the critical analysis of the story, particularly the depiction of Muslim characters. Furthermore, Updike's portrayal of Islam is based on its flaws, such as its indifference for self-improvement and modernity. The Muslim other is framed as the flawed equivalent of the perfect non-Muslim American in this novel's orientalism and imperfection designs.

**KEYWORDS:** Orientalism, Neo-Orientalism, Identity, Stereotype.



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## INTRODUCTION

Human beings have always had a distinct way of life that was better suited to them based on the age they were living in since the dawn of time. There was a system that worked in the stone age, a system in which people either lived in dispersed settlements or were constantly on the move in search of favorable weather conditions. This community of people would gradually settle down and start large families, which would then spread out and start their own families. Culture developed as a result of a specific way of preparing food, dressing, speaking, and adhering to a specific religion and territorial order. In the sense of behaviorism, the behaviors developed in various cultures could be clarified. Behaviorism is a psychological approach that has its origins in John Locke's philosophy. Human beings are born with a blank slate that is gradually cluttered by their life experiences. External factors, according to this movement, are the most significant factors that influence humans. While behaviorists acknowledge the role of internal factors such as heredity in deciding behavior, they place a greater emphasis on environmental events.

Today, the word "terrorism" is commonly used. It and its consequences are depicted and debated in newspapers, movies, and television. Terrorism has inevitably made its way into literature, given that it tends to be prevalent in almost all forms of media. UPDIKE's terrorist is a novel that specifically focuses on a possible Muslim-Arab suicide bomber. It tells the story of Ahmad Ashmawy, an eighteen-year-old Egyptian American on the verge of graduating from high school who is attracted to Islam and then to the Islamic revolution to become a terrorist (HERMAN 691-712). The writer shows the readers how facts are used on one hand to achieve those political goals and on the other hand to persecute religious minorities. The story's protagonist is a Muslim, and his father is an Arab who abandoned his mother, Teresa when he was a teenager. Under the influence of Ahmad's spiritual counselor, Shaikh Rashid, Ahmad dropped out of high school and went to

work as a truck driver. Rashid is the central character in this book, and he is the one who causes Ahmad to become radicalized. As he considers Ahmad to be a fertile ground for planting radical seeds, he achieves radical indoctrination. At the age of eleven, he discovered Ahmad to be an Islamist. When Ahmad learns that his sexual impulses must be repressed as dictated by the Islamic faith, he chooses to redeem himself and become radicalized as a result of intensive events in his life. Ahmad discusses the fear of Islam in the West, but he connects the fear with a misconception of Islam in the West. Islam is regarded as a challenge in the Western world, not because of its true nature, but because it is seen as the key counterforce to Western civilization (Manqoush et al. 73-80). As a result, Ahmad's radicalization is the result of persuasions from the sinister cleric Shaikh Rashid, who may have links to the government in order to reach an ideology. Perhaps the government is using Ahmad as a pawn to portray terrorists and those who commit violent acts. Ahmad is revealed to be a hypnotized person who has been brainwashed by racial ideology (Banerjee 51-79). Theorizes the cultural significance that race can have. As a result, the paper examines the philosophy of Orientalism through the eyes of Updike's protagonist.

The aim of this work is to investigate how people create beliefs about the religion they practice. Due to the cultural aspects involved, the western people mentioned in Updike's book were a target for this paper. Human humans create whatever worldview they have as a result of the environment in which they were raised. This study will examine some of the elements that best explain the formation of such conceptions in relation to one another, as well as how they contribute to conceptualization development. Culture and religion, both of which are important aspects of life, are among these elements. Culture, as a significant aspect, will offer light on how and why people value various things as rites, particularly as expressed

in the literary work. And the outcomes will be instructive in an educational setting since it is a learning environment.

The study's goal is to examine how the term culture, in conjunction with other religious variables, shapes our thoughts and perceptions of the world. We would also look into how we acquire relevant cultural information early in life, how we use these pieces of information, and what constraints there are when it comes to employing these pieces of knowledge in this study. To test the aforementioned hypothesis, we chose John Updike's novel *Terrorist* as the source of evidence. The aim of Updike's writing is to demonstrate the impact of religion on the culture of Muslim Arabs. Ahmad, the novel's protagonist, prefers Islam as an identity or as a refuge and shelter to cope with his grief over his father's abandonment of his mother and himself. His father's absence has a huge effect on his life. It's a conundrum for him to look for a place to build his personality. This is accomplished by Sheikh Rashid, who tries to convince him that religion, rather than ethnicity, is more influential in defining identity. People would be better informed about the sensitive aspects of the stages of life as a human grows if more light was shed on the subject of early life experiences. The findings of this study will also be useful to people studying sociology, psychology, and other related fields, which are key human sciences that study the link between man and his environment, as well as the internal and external elements that aid the individual in having a successful interaction with his environment. This research focuses on the most fundamental and vulnerable phases of childhood. Schema and schemata are aspects of the human mind's processes that assist develop his thinking as he matures. Furthermore, this research demonstrates the critical role of human cognition. This research is useful not only for people studying human sciences but also for people in other professions who are unfamiliar with the connections between concepts. This research will be based on three main questions to be answered in this paper:

A. What is the stereotypical idea about Islam?

B. In which manners the Muslims were portrayed in the novel?

C. How does the writer show the concept of Orientalism in his novel?

### LITERATURE REVIEW

*Terrorist* was written by John Updike, a well-known author. He published a number of novels, as well as poetry and short tales. He was also an art and literary critic for *The New Yorker*, where he produced many of his short tales and poems even after he left the publication. Many studies have been conducted on this subject, and each researcher approached it from a position that benefited them. A few studies that are pertinent to my work are listed below. A book titled *Critical Theory Today*, written by Lois Tyson is one of the essential references. This publication on literary theories, which was first issued in 2006 and is now in its 2nd version, is related to my topic of cultural criticism and new historicism, which explores how culture evolves throughout time. As a consequence, the concept of culture was examined in David Carter's work *Literary Theory*, which was published in 2006 talks about the different perspectives about cultural criticism. Another book with a topic pertinent to my thesis is Homi K. Bhabha's *The Location of Culture*. In this book, the author discusses the mutual elements that exist between religion and culture, as well as the impacts of each component on the other. Both Michael Banton and Michael Ryan believe that persons are classified based on their appearance, namely their skin color. People, for example, categorize themselves and others into groups based on racial characteristics, according to the idea of signals (Banton 127). Ryan claims that "ethnicity remains a powerful category for organizing human experience" (178). Membership of these groupings, these categories, frequently have little in common with one another except their physical appearance; after all, the only thing they have in common is their or their relatives' place of origin. Various external looks are simply the product of various breeding patterns (178). The portrayal of Muslims and Islam as bad and the devil reflects the flaws that anti-Muslim

propaganda perceives in the faith and its adherents. Using the politics of orientalism and the psychology of perfectionism as a starting point, this paper examines Updike's methods for distinguishing Islam and Muslims in his novel. Updike does not appear to have foreseen the consequences of such depictions, which tend to add to the already common Western thinking on Islam and Muslims. When Said asserts that such biased representations are "imminently dangerous," he was well aware of the danger "to demonize and dehumanize a whole culture on the grounds that it is 'enraged' at modernity is to turn Muslims into the objects of a therapeutic, punitive attention" (Arif et al 554).

### **THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

Since my main focus is culture and religion and how they develop over time, this research will follow the idea of culture and religion in a historical context to see how culture alongside religion can influence human attitudes and judgments. This reality is traced in this study through interpersonal relationships and social circumstances. Hussain shows that from a Western perspective, Oriental culture serves as an example of how to see Islamic and Arabic countries as diasporic. Post colonialism includes Orientalism as one of its components. This is an anti-Islamic movement. Muslims and Arabic are two languages that are often used together. The concept of territorial enclosure is central to postcolonial theory. Muslims and Arabs as subjects are exploited by post colonialism (65). The terrorist of UPDIKE gives a good picture of how Arabs and Muslims, as well as their views, are depicted by Westerners. Ahmad, the protagonist, avoids women to stifle his impulses, and he is also affected by his father's abandonment of his mother when he was a teenager. The novel's adage depicted citizens of the Islamic faith, Muslims in a Muslim culture, and Muslims on the Arabic creed from an Islamic and Arabic post-colonial perspective. Regardless, the novel advances toward a post-colonial diagram, but one in which Islamic and Arabic people subordinate women, in its constructive delineation of a moderate and the perceived to be unessential Islamic and Arabic

people in America. My thesis will be organized into five sections: an introduction, three chapters, and a conclusion. The thesis will begin with an introduction that introduces the reader to the major concepts of the issue as well as the background information that is relevant to my topic. Then, it goes to chapter one where I am going to explain the idea of how the stereotypical ideas that people have about something or somebody are important to shape their minds. The second chapter is going to explain the ways by which the Muslims were portrayed in this literary text. In the third chapter, the thesis is going to talk about how the writer showed the concept of orientalism. The final part is about the findings of the whole work.

The current situations which the world experiences because of the virus of Corona are one of the main problems to face us as academic students. Another thing to mention is that Finding suitable sources was a constrained issue. Another constraint was the lack of time management. Living changes and time management are often difficult for a foreign student. Another constraint is the thesis's format, which forces the researcher to consider a limited number of sources due to the university's imposed page limit.

### **DISCUSSION**

#### **4.1 Stereotypical idea of Islam**

After reading the story, we get the idea that Ahmad is a misled and de-tracked adolescent. His inflexible view is due to his religious convictions, which are incompatible with contemporary thinking in the modern world. We also sympathize with Ahmad, whose Islamic beliefs are used to justify terrorist acts. We despise his tutor, Shaikh Rashid, who is exploiting Ahmad to further his malicious plans. Similarly, we have an unfavorable opinion of Ahmad's father, who abandoned his family when Ahmad was only three years old. In contrast, despite his extramarital involvement with Ahmad's mother, Jack Levy gets our compassion when he persuades Ahmad to quit his suicide mission. With few exceptions, all of the Muslim characters in the story are shown as

bigoted, anarchic, and unfriendly to democratic ideas when examined closely. They've been reduced to stereotypes and monolithic entities. Despite their differences in looks and ethnicity, they share theological similarities: they are naive, fanatical, zealots, and incompatible with the contemporary world. They are not speaking for themselves; rather, the storyteller is speaking for them in front of the audience. They are devoid of substance. They're puppets whose strings are in Updike's hands. Their tongues are packed with tantalizing words that convey the worldview of American media, such as,

“True believers believe in Jihad... they believe... in action. They believe that something can be done... they believe that a billion followers of Islam need not have their eyes and ears and souls corrupted by the poisonous entertainments of Hollywood and a ruthless economic imperialism whose Christian-Jewish God is a decrepit idol, a mere mask concealing the despair of atheists.” (Updike 69).

The tragic events of 9/11 not only left the whole American nation in shock, but they also sparked discussions on the incident's numerous ramifications. Because the characters in this tragedy were Muslims, all of the publications, talks, and reviews focused on Islam and Muslims, accusing them of being responsible for the occurrence and a potential threat to the contemporary world and civilization. If the incident was pre-planned or hatched and carried out by Muslims remains a mystery, and it has yet to be conclusively established that they were carried out by Muslims, despite the fact that the Western media – both electronic and print – is adamant and propagating that the Muslims are solely to blame. There is no denying that religious matters are extremely important. All of the people participating in the 9/11 attack were Arab Muslims. However, Updike's attempts to base all of his conclusions only on religious and ideological differences were unsuccessful. Simply put, he was ignorant of the true origins of

Arab and Muslim wrath against current imperialism, of which the United States is the solitary leader and torch bearer. The terrorist crimes of September 11th, 2001, cannot be justified in any context and must be thoroughly explored and explained; Updike foregoes such an attempt well before publishing his book.

#### 4.2 The Depiction of Muslims in the Novel

Updike also has a habit of stereotyping Muslims and using their negative reductionism in his stories. His presentation of Muslim characters is skewed and superficial, which is unworthy of a professional artist. Most of the time, the dialogue between these individuals appears to be a rehash of media propaganda. Other characters, such as Teresa, an Irish-American with a Catholic heritage, Levy, a Jew for whom "religion meant nothing," Tylenol, and Joryleen, both African-Americans, are given important presence despite their religions and ethnicity. This unequal treatment is due to the fact that Updike had firsthand experience of these personalities, whereas his knowledge of Muslim characters was based on information collected from other sources. Because he lacked proper knowledge and exposure to the people and culture he was writing about, he was unable to accurately portray them, and we are left with stereotyping and negative reductionism. The ramifications of such a representation. Palmer in his words said that “such images become dangerous when they materialize in the complex social narrative and foreign policies enacted simultaneously on the world stage in the human mind and heart.” (144). On the religious and domestic fronts, Muslim leadership is also portrayed as dishonest and untrustworthy. Ahmad's mentor, Shaikh Rashid, the imam of a New Jersey mosque, is to blame for instilling in Ahmad a great animosity for non-believers and turning him into an intolerant individual. Omar Mulloy, Ahmad's father, is also depicted as an untrustworthy individual who abandoned his family when they were in desperate need of help. It's worth noting that Omar Mulloy is never heard speaking for himself in the story. Other characters just speak about him, shedding light on various parts of his personality. He is shown as a sloppy, irresponsible, opportunistic, and



escapist spouse. His pessimistic narrative conjures up a gloomy picture of Muslim husbands abandoning their families to the whims of fate. Ahmad idolizes Shaikh Rashid and Omar Mulloy, both of whom have a profound influence on his personality. Shaikh Rashid's teachings have become so embedded in Ahmad's head that he is willing to risk his life in a suicide mission.

#### 4.3 Orientalism Concept in the Novel

As for Said "Everyone who writes about the Orient must locate himself vis-à-vis the Orient... this location includes the kind of narrative voice he adopts... to deliberate ways of addressing the reader, containing the Orient, and finally, representing it or speaking in its behalf." (67). Updike stands in the opposite corner of the room from Ahmad and speaks to his readers on behalf of Ahmad and other Muslim characters. Such representation becomes misrepresentation when it is based on preconceived preconceptions about the subject. In the story, Updike creates a number of binary oppositions. There is a dichotomy of Satan vs God, for example. The Americans, according to Ahmad, are "devils" who are attempting to take away his God. The binary reverberates throughout the story until the Eurocentric viewpoint triumphs when Ahmad finally realizes that the devils have snatched his God away. As a result, Updike wishes to demonstrate the superiority of Western secular ideals over Islamic principles. The story also has a prominent duality, namely, the pragmatic and progressive West versus the static Islam. Ahmad refuses to enter a "imperialist economic system structured in favor of wealthy Christians." Ahmad is unable to finish his study in that system due to his adamant religious views and restricted outlook. Updike's underlying message is that Islam is the only thing standing in the way of Muslims achieving intellectual and cultural growth in the modern world. It only argues for education that will enable them to defeat their foes. Orientalism is a scientific field that focuses on the study and artistic representation of the Orient. From a Post-Colonial Studies standpoint. The study demonstrates that orientalist depictions of Muslims as barbarians, lethargic,

unprogressive, and a potential threat to world peace are still prevalent in today's world. Neo-Orientalism is the post-colonial label for this reincarnation of orientalist ideology.

#### CONCLUSION

The neo-orientalist narrative of the Arabo-Islamic world that Updike's *Terrorist* demonstrates is the apex of the entire issue. He adopts the Neo Orientalists' view of Arabs as new barbarians whose culture, above all, promotes violence and whose civilizations, more than anything else, foster bloodshed. Terrorism is a worldwide phenomenon that involves agents from all walks of life, not just Muslims. Any reader with a balanced perspective would benefit from understanding the multi-dimensions of terrorism around the world. Only a greater and more accurate awareness of this subject will enable people to deal with the threat that is splitting them into factions. Both Islam and Muslims have been depicted in *Terrorist* within a framework of distinction. Throughout the novel, the novel depicts a constant contrast between Islam, Christianity, and Judaism in order to portray Islam as the only religion with a strong passive influence on its adherents. Islam has been depicted in a parochial light and given a distinct position. Male Muslims have been shown with their gendered and exotic traits in addition to being socially othered in *Terrorist*. Despite the inclusion of several sympathetically represented Muslim characters in *Terrorist*, these Muslims are allocated an American-like lifestyle and values. Because they do not conform to mainstream society, Americans with different ideas and ways of life are regarded through a myopic lens within this literary world. When compared to other religions, Islam is clearly revealed to be a flawed religion. In the same way, the Muslim American is portrayed as a flawed version of non-Muslim Americans.

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