Islamophobia in John Updike's *Terrorist* (2006) and Pearl Abraham's *American Taliban* (2010)

Rashad Mokhtar Rashad Hamed*
rashadhamed55@gmail.com

Abstract

Islamophobia is the xenophobic, hatred, or prejudice against Islam and its followers. It has emerged as a significant social and political issue in contemporary society. This phenomenon manifests in various forms, from individual acts of discrimination and hate crimes to institutionalized policies that marginalize Muslim communities. This paper assumes that some Western writers link, in one way or another, between Islam and terrorism and therefore have common fear of Islam. Meanwhile, the study investigates the phenomenon of islamophobia in both Updike's *Terrorist* and Abraham's *American Taliban.* Besides, it sheds light on the misrepresentation of Islam, othering Muslims, and the cultural stereotyping of Muslims. Persumably, both Updike and Abraham are adopting Islamophobic attitudes that come as a result of the general influence of their Western anti-Islamic culture.

In fact, readers who lack firsthand knowledge of Islam may form their opinions based on these biased portrayals which, in turn, reinforce Islamophobic attitudes and prejudices. Additionally, the portrayals of Islam and Muslim characters in Updike's *Terrorist* and Abraham's *American Taliban* offer a subtle and one-dimensional perspective that focuses on simplistic stereotypes. Noticeably, Ahmed and John's paths to radicalization are depicted with complexity that highlight the personal, cultural, and ideological factors and influence their transformations .Updike's *Terrorist* sheds light on the role of religious authority and the alienation experienced by devout individuals in secular societies. While, Abraham's *American Taliban* spotlight the psychological and social dimensions of radicalization.

Keywords: Islamophobia, radicalization, stereotyping Muslims, misrepresentation of Islam, secularism, ostracization.

* Lecturer of English language and literature, English Department- Faculty of Arts- Damietta University

John Hoyer Updike, the American writer (1932- 2009), is well-known for his careful craftsmanship and prolific writing featured elegantly in his published twenty-two novels, especially his Rabbit series. John Updike is among the leading novelists of the late 20th century; hence, he twice won the Pulitzer Prize for his contribution with a dozen of short story collection as well as poetry, literary criticism and children's books. Updike graduated Harvard College in 1954 to the staff of the New Yorker, with whom he has worked ever since as a contributor and reviewer. His 22nd novel, *Terrorist* (2006), the story of a fervent young extremist Muslim in New Jersey, garnered media attention but little critical praise.

Pearl Abraham (born 1960 in Jerusalem, Israel) is an American novelist, essayist and short story writer. She was the third of nine children in a Hasidic family. Her father was a rabbi. She graduated from Hunter College and received her Masters of Fine Arts in Creative Writing from New York University. She is currently Assistant Professor in the English Department at Western New England University. Her renowned novel *American Taliban* (2010), tells the story of a young surfer/skater on an American spiritual journey that begins with Transcendentalism and countercultural impulses, entering into world mysticism, and finding its destination in Islam.

To begin with, both John Updike's *Terrorist* and Pearl Abraham's *American Taliban* tackle themes of Islamophobia and explore the experiences of young Muslim characters in post9/11 America. *Terrorist* by John Updike follows Ahmad Ashmawy Mulloy, a high school senior of Egyptian and Irish descent, who becomes increasingly radicalized under the influence of his local *imam*. The novel demonstrates Ahmad's internal struggles, his sense of alienation, and his perception of American society as morally bankrupt. Equally, *American Taliban* by Pearl Abraham is inspired

by the true story of John Walker Lindh, an American who converted to Islam and joined the Taliban. The protagonist, John Jude Parish, is a young man from a secular Jewish family who becomes drawn to Islam and eventually travels to Afghanistan, where he is captured by U.S. forces.

Consequently, this paper assumes that some Western writers link, in one way or another, between Islam and terrorism and therefore have common inner fear of Islam. Meanwhile, the study aims to investigate the phenomenon of islamophobia in both Updike's *Terrorist* and Abraham's *American Taliban* as it sheds light on the misrepresentation of Islam, othering Muslims, and the cultural stereotyping of Muslims.

On one hand, Updike portrays the fear and suspicion that Muslim characters face from the broader society. Ahmad's interactions with his peers and teachers often reflect underlying prejudices and assumptions about Muslims being predisposed to violence. Furthermore, the novel depicts the cultural and religious tensions between Ahmad's Muslim identity and the secular, consumer-driven American culture. This clash is a source of his internal conflict and a driving force behind his radicalization. Although, Updike's portrayal of Ahmad's radicalization can be seen as a reinforcement of certain stereotypes, the novel also attempts to provide a deeper understanding of Ahmad's perspective and exploring the complexities behind his choices.

On the other hand, Abraham's *American Taliban* explores John's existential search for identity and meaning, and how his conversion to Islam exacerbates his sense of alienation from his family and society. His journey reflects the broader challenges faced by converts who navigate a new religious identity in a post9/11 context. Besides, Abraham portrays the suspicion and fear that John's conversion elicits from those around him. His journey is marked by encounters with ignorance and hostility, highlighting the

Islamophobia that permeates American society. Moreover, Abraham's novel pertains the personal transformation that John undergoes, both spiritually and culturally. It presents a refined view of his motivations and the internal conflicts that arise from his new faith and the external pressures he faces.

To put this more accurately, both novels focus on young men who become radicalized, but while Updike's Ahmad is influenced by local factors and personal experiences in America, Abraham's John Jude Parish is pressured by his search for identity and purpose through a global journey. Also, both writers have their own unique style of portraying Islamophobia. For instance, Updike's *Terrorist* tends to show societal suspicion and prejudice against Muslims within an American setting, whereas Abraham's *American Taliban* includes the perspective of a convert facing both internal family dynamics and broader societal fears.In surface, both authors attempt to humanize their protagonists, offering insights into their motivations and internal struggles. But, in essence, as this paper hypothesizes, both novels address the theme of Islamophobia.The two writers are adopting Islamophobic attitudes and they express their Islamophobia through different narrative lenses and character experiences to offer a broader understanding of the complexities surrounding Muslim identities in a post9/11 world.

On one hand, Arin Keeble describes Updike's *Terrorist* as a work that has "very clear resonances with the social and political climate of the aftermath of the attacks" (92). Equally, Geoffery Nash postulates, "Updike failed to do justice to the magnitude of [his] topic. This is due to the clichéd way in which [he] represented the terrorists" (94).In a similar vein, Abd Saadoon and others contend that "Updike, in *Terrorist*, produces different fearful misrepresentation of Islam and Muslims depending on the concept of Islamophobia" (1559). On the other hand, Amal Sayyid shows that Abraham's novel *American Taliban* and those literary works that

follow its example may reinforce "the monolithic racist Islamophobic discourses that characterize Islam as a dangerous threat to the existence of non-Muslim cultures and peoples" (5). Moreover, Sayyid describes Abraham as a writer who adopts the principles of post-racial liberalism and explicates, "[…] Abraham's apparently post-racial liberalism, with its universalist pretensions of recognition, remains complicit with a covert form of racism against Muslims that feeds into Islamophobia" (7).

In this sense, Islamophobia is defined as the irrational fear, hatred, or prejudice against Islam and its followers. It has emerged as a significant social and political issue in contemporary society. This phenomenon manifests in various forms, from individual acts of discrimination and hate crimes to institutionalized policies that stereotype Muslim communities. According to Jackie Dreyer, the term Islamophobia has "been present in American society since the 1980s, coming into more frequent usage on and after 9/11." This concept means "prejudice against, or an irrational fear of Islam or Muslims" (n.p). Just like Dreyer, Peter Gottschalk and others allege that the "term Islamophobia […] makes the antagonism toward Islam and Muslims that is inherent in so much of American mainstream culture." This "fear" and "antagonism" is "particularly evident in the editorial choices of broadcasters and newspapers [especially after] the 9/11 attacks" (7). The origins of Islamophobia can be traced back to historical conflicts between the Christian West and the Islamic East, such as the Crusades and the Reconquista. These events fostered a perception of Muslims as the "other," a perception that was reinforced by colonialism and the subsequent political and economic dominance of Western powers. In the modern era, geopolitical conflicts, such as the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, the Iranian Revolution, and the rise of Islamist terrorism, have further fueled anti-Muslim sentiments. Relatedly, Irum Sheikh argues that since the advent of the Cold War and also since "the US foreign policy towards Israel after 1967, the American popular culture

portrays the Arabs and “Muslims as dangerous and terrorists." Implicitly, the image of the Arabs and Muslims as terrorists has come to light after the Arab-Israeli conflicts and in particular "after the 1967 Arab-Israeli war" (25-26).

Noticeably, Islamophobia today is evident in multiple spheres, including media, politics, and everyday social interactions. The media often plays a significant role in shaping public perceptions of Islam and Muslims, frequently portraying them through the lens of violence and extremism. This selective coverage can lead to a distorted view that equates Islam with terrorism, ignoring the diverse and peaceful experiences of the vast majority of Muslims.

Politically, Islamophobia has been leveraged by some leaders and parties to gain support, particularly in times of economic or social uncertainty. Policies such as the travel bans targeting predominantly Muslim countries, increased surveillance of Muslim communities, and restrictions on religious practices (e.g., banning the hijab) are examples of institutionalized Islamophobia that reinforce negative stereotypes and contribute to the marginalization of Muslims.In social contexts, Islamophobia can manifest in hate crimes, verbal abuse, and discrimination in various settings, including workplaces, educational institutions, and public spaces. Todd H. Green argues that Islamophobia is "the fear of and hostility toward Muslims and Islam that is rooted in racism and that results in individual and systemic discrimination, exclusion and violence targeting Muslims and those perceived as Muslim" (9).These acts of intolerance not only harm individuals but also create a climate of fear and exclusion within Muslim communities.

As a matter of fact, the psychological impact of Islamophobia on Muslims is profound, affecting their mental health, sense of belonging, and overall well-being. Experiences of discrimination and hostility can lead to anxiety, depression, and a sense of

alienation. Moreover, Islamophobia undermines social cohesion by fostering mistrust and division between communities, hindering efforts to build inclusive and harmonious societies.

Significantly, all the aforementioned manifestations of Islamophobia; such as, alienation, stereotyping, and othering of Muslims, are evidently represented in both Updike's *Terrorist* and Abraham's *American Taliban*. Indeed, the post 9/11 era has seen a surge in literature that grapples with themes of terrorism, identity, and religious extremism. Among these, John Updike's *Terrorist* and Pearl Abraham's *American Taliban* stand out for their subtle portrayal of young Muslim characters. Both novels delve into the complexities of Islamophobia and its impact on individuals and society. In this sense, Updike and Abraham address Islamophobia, depict radicalization, and shed light on their broader cultural and societal implications. For example, Ahmad's journey into radicalization is influenced by his local *imam* and his disillusionment with American society. Updike's portrayal of Ahmad is deeply intertwined with themes of Islamophobia, which manifest in various forms throughout the novel.

Moreover, Updike highlights the pervasive stereotypes and prejudices faced by Ahmad. His teachers, peers, and even government officials view him through a lens of suspicion. This is particularly evident in the character of Jack Levy, the high school guidance counselor, who initially approaches Ahmad with a mix of concern and wariness. The novel underscores how these stereotypes contribute to Ahmad's sense of isolation and his gravitation towards radical ideologies.The cultural and religious tensions between Ahmad's Muslim identity and the secular, consumer-driven American culture are central to the novel. Updike paints a picture of a society that is both morally bankrupt and hostile towards those who do not conform to its norms. Ahmad's internal conflict is a

reflection of this broader cultural clash, which exacerbates his feelings of alienation and resentment.

Likewise, Abraham's novel explores Islamophobia through John's journey of self-discovery and his interactions with a post9/11 American society.John's conversion to Islam intensifies his sense of alienation from his family and society. Abraham portrays the difficulties faced by converts who must navigate a new religious identity amidst widespread fear and suspicion. John's quest for meaning and belonging is complicated by the societal Islamophobia that marks him as an outsider. Additionally, Abraham vividly depicts the ignorance and hostility that John's conversion elicits. His family and friends struggle to understand his new faith, often reacting with fear and prejudice. This reflects the broader societal dynamics where Muslims, particularly converts, are viewed with suspicion. The novel captures the emotional and psychological toll of these reactions on individuals like John.Abraham presents a nice view of his motivations, exploring his spiritual journey and the internal conflicts that arise from his new faith. This portrayal challenges simplistic narratives of radicalization and offers a more complex understanding of the individual's experience.

More to the point, both *Terrorist* and *American Taliban* address the theme of Islamophobia, albeit through different narrative approaches and character experiences.While *Terrorist* shows societal suspicion and prejudice within an American setting, *American Taliban* includes the perspective of a convert facing both internal family dynamics and broader societal fears. Both novels depict the pervasive nature of Islamophobia but from different angles, enriching the discourse on this critical issue. Obviously, both novels offer valuable contributions to the understanding of Islamophobia in contemporary literature. Through their cute portrayal of young Muslim characters and the exploration of themes such as identity, alienation, and societal prejudice, both novels

provide a deeper understanding of the complexities surrounding Muslim identities in a post9/11 world.

Interestingly enough, literature has the power to shape perceptions and influence societal attitudes. In the wake of 9/11, many novels have explored themes of terrorism, radicalization, and Islam, often grappling with complex issues of identity and faith. However, these portrayals can sometimes lead to the misrepresentation of Islam. Edward Said, in his book *Covering Islam*, contends that the aim of this misrepresentation of Islam is to keep Islam away from Europe and the final result of these attacks is that "Islam has never been welcome in Europe" (13). Updike's *Terrorist* and Abraham's *American Taliban* are notable examples where the depiction of Islam and Muslims has sparked critical debate. One of the primary critiques of *Terrorist* is its reliance on simplistic stereotypes. Ahmad is depicted as a young man who is easily swayed by extremist ideologies, a portrayal that reinforces the stereotype of Muslims being predisposed to violence and radicalism. This reductionist view fails to capture the diversity and complexity of Muslim experiences and beliefs.

Relatedly, Ahmad's character, and those around him, often come across as one-dimensional character. This portrayal of a radicalized Muslim youth is evident in his thoughts about American society. They are"[…] selfish and materialistic, to play their part in consumerism. But the human spirit asks for self-denial. It longs to say 'No' to' the physical world"(*Terrorist*53). This quote highlights Ahmad's disdain for American materialistic culture which reinforces the stereotype of Muslims as rejecting Western values and being critical of Western society. His *imam,* Shaikh Rashid, is depicted as a manipulative figure who encourages Ahmad's extremist views. "[…] all unbelievers are our enemies. The Prophet said that eventually all unbelievers must be destroyed" (50). This characterization contributes to the trope of the "radical *imam*" and

overlooks the fact that the vast majority of *imams* and Muslim religious leaders advocate for peace and moderation. Furthermore, Updike's portrayal of Islamic practices is often framed in a negative light. Ahmad's adherence to his faith is depicted as rigid and joyless, reinforcing the notion that Islam is a religion of strictness and repression. "I am a good Muslim, in a world that mocks faith."Instead of being good, don't you ever want *to feel* good?" Joryleen asks. He believes she is sincerely curious; in his severe faith he is a puzzle to her […]" (50). This shows how Ahmad's commitment is portrayed as a form self-imposed isolation which contributes to the stereotype of Islam as a harsh and unforgiving religion. In addition, it overlooks the richness and diversity of Islamic practices and the positive, life-affirming aspects of the faith that millions of Muslims around the world experience. Unfortunately, however, this does not find expression in Updike's novel.

Similarly, while Abraham's novel aims to explore the personal transformation of an individual seeking spiritual fulfillment, it could be criticized for its prejudiced portrayal of Islam and its followers.John's conversion to Islam is portrayed as an exotic and almost fetishized journey. His fascination with Islam is depicted as a search for meaning in an otherwise empty life, a portrayal that can perpetuate the stereotype of Islam as the "other" – a mysterious and alluring religion that attracts those who are lost or disillusioned."He felt an exhilarating sense of purpose and direction in the prayers, the fasting, the complete submission" (*Taliban* 25).This portrayal exoticizes Islamic practices, presenting them as fundamentally different and more appealing than Western norms, which can contribute to a perception of Islam as the other. By linking John's conversion to his eventual association with the Taliban, Abraham's novel risks reinforcing the prejudiced stereotype that conversion to Islam leads to radicalization. In his quest for identity, John believes that "he was part of a larger cause, a warrior

for God" (32).This monologic narrative contributes to the broader misrepresentation of Islam as inherently linked to extremism and violence, ignoring the peaceful and moderate practices of the majority of Muslims.*American Taliban* also reflects a lack of understanding of the cultural and religious nuances of Islam. John's journey is marked by simplistic and sometimes inaccurate portrayals of Islamic practices and beliefs. This lack of objective depth and accuracy can contribute to the perpetuation of misunderstandings and biases about Islam.John "struggled to fit into a world that was so different from his own, where everything seemed alien and incomprehensible"(65).This extraction underscores the portrayal of Islamic culture as foreign and difficult to understand and reinforces stereotypes about the inaccessibility and otherness of Muslim practices.

To put this more accurately, both novels, through their central characters, reinforce stereotypes about Muslims being predisposed to extremism. Ahmad's and John's journeys are framed in a way that links their Muslim identity with radicalization, perpetuating a harmful and reductive narrative.Neither novel adequately represents the diversity within the Muslim community. The focus on radicalized individuals overshadows the experiences of the vast majority of Muslims who lead peaceful, productive lives. This lack of representation can contribute to a skewed perception of Islam among readers.The misrepresentation of Islam in these novels can have negative consequences. Readers who lack firsthand knowledge of Islam may form their opinions based on these biased portrayals, leading to the reinforcement of Islamophobic attitudes and prejudices. Hence, a piece of literature that fails to accurately and respectfully represent a faith community can contribute to a climate of misunderstanding and fear.

As mentioned earlier, Islamophobia is attached to many themes. One of them is closely related to those cultures and societies

that work to stereotype and marginalize Muslims. So, it can be assumed that treating a Muslim as an other is what creates extremist thoughts. As a result, if these thoughts turn into actions, many people will sadly develop the phenomenon of Islamophobia. Ahmad Ashmawy, the protagonist of Updike's *Terrorist*, is depicted as a young man deeply influenced by his Islamic faith and his *imam*, Shaikh Rashid. From the outset, Ahmad is portrayed as an outsider within his own community. His devout adherence to Islam and his disdain for American secularism set him apart, contributing to a sense of otherness that permeates the novel.*Terrorist* reveals Ahmad's alienation from the broader American society. His belief in the moral and spiritual bankruptcy of American culture reinforces his sense of isolation. This portrayal highlights the cultural and religious differences between Ahmad and his peers, framing him as fundamentally different and disconnected from mainstream American life. In fact, the novel often relies on stereotypical depictions of Muslim characters. Ahmad's *imam*, Shaikh Rashid, is portrayed as a manipulative figure who encourages Ahmad's extremist views. This characterization aligns with the trope of the radical *imam*, perpetuating a narrative that associates Islamic religious leaders with extremism. Additionally, Ahmad's portrayal as a young man easily swayed by radical ideologies reinforces the stereotype of Muslims as inherently prone to violence.

In this sense, the othering of Ahmad in *Terrorist* has significant implications for readers' perceptions of Muslims. By presenting Ahmad as an isolated, radicalized individual, the novel risks reinforcing negative stereotypes about Islam and its followers. This portrayal can contribute to a broader cultural-Islamophobic narrative that views Muslims as outsiders and potential threats, rather than as diverse individuals with varied experiences and beliefs. One of the situations that shows Ahmad as a narrow-minded fanatic person, is when Terry notices Jack “Levy’s eyes […] fix on her jauntily demure head scarf, she laughs and explains, ‘He wanted

me to wear it. He said if there was one thing he wanted for his graduation it was his mother not looking like a whore" (87). In fact, Terry's explanation to Jack about Ahmad's persistence in making her wear the *hijab* before she attends his convocation is loaded with a mocking tone against Ahmad's fanatic discourse. In this respect, Manquosh and others contend that mockery is realized:

> [T]hrough the use of the word "demure" which means "modest" or "shy" and does not characterize Ahmad's mother at all. In fact, the way she "laughs "and her own definition of herself as a "whore" reflect her brazen manner. Terry's implicit opposition to Ahmad's insistence is an expected reaction for two main reasons. Firstly, Terry is not a Muslim to be asked to wear the hijab. Secondly, the perception that by wearing the hijab, she will "not [be] looking like a whore" illustrates that Ahmad is a simple-minded fanatic. (76)

In *American Taliban*, John Jude Parish is depicted as a young American who converts to Islam and eventually joins the Taliban. Disillusioned with his life and seeking deeper spiritual meaning, he converts to Islam. John's disillusionment with American culture is a recurring theme in the novel. "He felt suffocated by the constant demand for consumption, the relentless push for more" (81). This shows John's perspective on the materialism and consumerism of American society. His journey takes him from the United States to Yemen and eventually to Afghanistan, where he joins the Taliban.John's conversion is driven by his quest for spiritual fulfillment and a sense of belonging. He feels disconnected from his family and the secular values he was raised with. "He wanted to be a part of something greater than himself, something pure and true" (24). This reveals John's yearning for a sense of belonging and his belief that Islam offers a path to purity and truth. Abraham portrays

John's conversion as a response to his feelings of disconnection and aimlessness in American society.Islam offers him a structured, disciplined way of life that he finds appealing. However, this biased narrative also emphasizes his transformation into the "other".John's conversion to Islam is portrayed with a sense of exoticism, framing his spiritual journey as an escape from his mundane American life. This exoticization reinforces the idea of Islam as an "other" – a mysterious, alluring religion that attracts those seeking an alternative to Western values. This portrayal can contribute to a superficial understanding of Islam, reducing it to an exotic and foreign entity.By linking John's conversion to his eventual association with the Taliban, Abraham's novel reinforces the stereotype that conversion to Islam leads to radicalization. This monologic narrative context otherizes John's Muslim identity by associating it with extremism and violence. It overlooks the reality that the majority of converts to Islam led peaceful lives and do not turn to radicalism.John's immersion into Islamic life is depicted through a lens of cultural misunderstanding and oversimplification. This lack of depth contributes to the othering of Muslims by presenting their practices and beliefs as foreign and incomprehensible to Western readers. The monologicalty of the narrative presentation excludes the Muslim and marginalizes him.

Respectively, stereotyping is the cultural concretization of the exclusionary processes of otherness since the latter stems from a differentiation of the self from the other on an identity platform. Garth Myers, in his essay in the Encyclopedia of Human Geography, postulates:

> The outside segment of the binaries—self/other and same/different often is feared, loathed, or held as inferior. Thus, people often seek to expel, reject, abject, or exclude what is taken as other, outsider, or different, for instance, people who are out of place

> from where the mind's prevailing order wants them. The term othering often is used for these exclusionary processes (345).

Noticeably, after 9/11incidents American fiction builds its master narratives on this exclusionary process of the other. It others Muslims, and Muslim Americans in particular, by stereotyping them. Georgiana Banita finds the excessive othering operative in much post 9/11 fiction simply distorting because it "divests the self of its innocence by recasting it as violent, condemnable, and abject through narratives that effectively block the path of self-exoneration and raise suspicions about the self's rhetorical reliability and coherence" (33).

Furthermore, both *Terrorist* and *American Taliban* employ monologic narrative technique that contributes to the othering of their Muslim protagonists. Ahmad's rigid adherence to his faith and John's exoticized conversion create a sense of separation from the mainstream culture which emphasize their differences rather than commonalities.The portrayal of Muslims as radicalized or prone to extremism in both novels has broader cultural- islamophobic implications. These narratives can shape readers' perceptions and reinforce prejudiced views which contribute to a climate of Islamophobia and misunderstanding. By presenting Muslims as others such writings risk perpetuating Islamophobic attitudes.

Another facet of Islamophobia comes through the cultural stereotyping of non-Muslims to Muslims. That is to say, the word Islam became synonymous with terrorism in many people's minds. The term terrorist is almost exclusive to Muslims and the purpose of such image making, Said argues in *Culture and Imperialism*, is to reorient international discourse and direct it in a way that "suits the West's interests. This process has led to the mobilization of armies and the dispersion of communities. The West then is designated an "ethos" and a righteous identity through which the East is pitted

against by means of nebulous criteria" (374-375).The image of some extremists defines the public image of the entire Muslim community all over the world. Many people became racist and hateful towards Arabs, Muslims and those of Islamic faith. Muslims in non-Muslim communities face many difficulties like religious discrimination. In other word, the non- Muslim deal with them as a potential threat, or a booby trap. Such illogical an inhuman treatment makes many Muslims experience discrimination in employment and probably harassment from completely strange people whom they have never met. This hardship comes out of the stereotypes of Muslim like being uncultured, violent, religious extremists and not only as anti-modern barbarians, but also as terrorists. These common stereotypes can be found in the political discourse and in media which eventually influence the social lives of Muslims. In his article, "Framing the other: worldview. Rhetoric and media dissonance since 9/11,"Pintakargues:

> There exists today a fundamental disconnect in communications between the USA and Muslims around the world. At its root lies an essential truth: each side see the world through a very different prism. This perception gap is exacerbated by an increasingly polarized media who do little to counter what columnist Paul Krugman […] has called ' a willful ignorance."(188)

Since the9/11 attacks the political discourse is filled with hatred towards Muslims. Certain notions and concepts are repeated, and became synonymous to Islam. Some western politicians claim that Muslims hate their freedom and their way in life and they want to destroy their secular civilization , like former president Bush in his speech after the 9/11 attacks, he says, "Americans are asking ' Why do they hate us ? They hate what they see right here in this chamber: democratically elected government. Their leaders are self -

appointed. They hate our freedoms our freedom of religion, our freedom of speech, our freedom to vote and assemble and disagree with each other "(n.p). But these claims are wrong, as many can see Muslims don't hate America for its freedom or secular life and all the hatred come from its foreign double-standard policy in the middle East and how America treat it's deputy state in the Middle East, Israel, as its spoiled child. Commenting on this point, Pintak elucidates:

> In a study of polling data from the Arab world , Mark Tessler found that ' a Americanism is for the most part a response to perceptions and judgments regarding our foreign policy ' and ' all aspects of our Middle East policy were judged very unfavorably ' […] . Similarly, a Gallup poll concluded that 'the perception that Western nations are not fair in their stances to Palestine fits in with a more generalized view that the West is unfair to the Arab and Islamic worlds. '(qtd. in Pintak 190)

In Updike's *Terrorist*, *imam* always connects Ahmad to the whole Islamic community especially the Middle East and its problems and how people there are suffering because of America's interventions in their countries. Sheikh Rashid is doing his best to drive Ahmad away from the American way of life. Likewise, Charlie, the son of Ahmad's boss, tells him that America's war wasn't only for the sake of freedom, but to have the oil. He claims that its peaceful armies are out there spreading democracy:

> In America, nothing is free, everything is a fight. There is no nmmak[*sic*] , noshari'a. Let the young man here tell you, he's just out of high school. Everything is war, right? Look at America abroad— war. They forced a country of Jews into Palestine, right into the throat of the Middle East, and now they've forced their

> way into Iraq, to make it a little U.S. and have the oil. (109)

It is noteworthy that the West justifies its colonization of the Islamic world and thefting its sources, like oil and gold, under the pretext of war against terrorism. In *Covering Islam*, Edward Said argues that the Western culture considers Arabs and Muslims "as oil suppliers or as potential terrorists" (8). In *Terrorist*, Ahmad and Charlie exchange ideas on the topic which reveal the colonizing ideology when Charlie confesses "The western powers steal our oil, they take our land" (141).Meanwhile, Ahmad gets more interested in the Middle East than America. Despite of the fact that he is American; he suffers alienation and displacement in the American society. He sees that the true spiritual guide is there in East, all the things that he longs for is there. America for him is a fragile and infidel nation that tries to spoil the other to become like her:

> Ahmad was native-born, and in his travels dirough [*sic*] New Jersey he takes interestless in its pockets of a diluted Middle East than in die American reality all around, a sprawling ferment for which he feels the mild pity owed a failed experiment. This fragile, misbegotten nation had a history scarcely expressed in the grandiose New Prospect City Hall and the lake of developers' rubble on whose opposite shores stand, with their caged windows, the high school and the sooty black church. (133)

Relatedly, President Barak Obama in his speech in Cairo announces, "I consider it part of my responsibility as president of the United States to fight against negative stereotypes of Islam wherever they appear." He also proposed a whole new beginning between America and the Islamic world depending on mutual respect and mutual understanding:

> I have come here to seek a new beginning between the United States and Muslims around the world; one based upon mutual interest and mutual respect; and one based upon the truth that America and Islam are not exclusive, and need not be in competition. Instead, they overlap, and share common principles—principles of justice and progress; tolerance and the dignity of all human beings. (n.p)

Although Obama shows his commitment to end the stereotypes repeated about Muslims nothing had changed. Media discourse is not different from the political one. There is an important theory about the effects of media called Cultivation Theory. It was represented by George Gerbner in 1969. It theorizes that "through repeated, heavy exposure to television, people begin to view the world as similar to the television world" (Werder 633). So, according to it, representing a systematic bias in the portrayal of Muslims and repeating such a mixture of words (Islamic fundamentalism, Muslims extremists, Muslims terrorists, violent attacks by Muslims): a lot of such words in media from trusted people confirm this meaning in people's mind. In his book *Orientalism*, Edward Said used the term "Orientalism" to capture the ways in which Muslims have been constructed as the extremist, violent, intolerant Other. Additionally, during one of the waves launched against Muslims after Boston Marathon bombings. Fox news channel opens fire on Muslims; for example, on *The Hannity Show*, Sean Hannity invited Ann Coulter to talk about the developing case against the Boston Marathon bombing suspect. Talking about the older Boston Bombing suspect Coulter says, "She ought to be in prison for wearing a *hijab*" (n.p). She must be in jail just for practicing her religion and without doing anything wrong, what a twisted freedom! People cannot judge something or someone based upon appearance, race, religion, etc, but Muslims are always identified by their religious identity as whole not through each

person's individual act and thought. In his book *Reflections in a Bloodshot Lens America, Islam and the War of Ideas*, Pintak contends:

> For Americans, Islam has emerged as the quintessential 'Other', replacing the Soviet Union as the touchstone against which US citizens measure their collective sense of self. It has become a cliché to say that the attacks of9/11'changedeverything'.On one level that is true: America's illusion of security was shattered; its relationship with terror as something that happened 'somewhere else' was unalterably changed. But on another level 9/11 simply made overt a world view that had long been present but little acknowledged: since a *keffiyya*-clad Rudolph Valentino first strode across the silent screen, Arabs and Muslims have been 'Othered' in US society, the subject of stereotype and differentiation. (13)

Such spread stereotypes eventually affects the social life of the young Muslim generation who were born in non-Muslim countries especially who were born in America and Britain.Othering Muslims in the non-Muslims communities is done in insidious ways by alienation and religious persecution which makes them feel rejected. How would anyone who feels like being an outcasted and rejected by his own and only known home behave? They have a sense of displacement; they don't relate to anything, they are torn between two cultures, two different identities; the religious one and the cultural one. In this respect, Nissim Rejwan proposes:

> On the personal, individual level, identity can be defined as the understanding of oneself in relation to others. On the national, corporate level, identities are formed partly in relation to other nations, collectivities, and states. In both cases, identity is

> essentially a matter of self-definition—of how individuals, nations, states, or any other corporate groups choose to observe and define themselves. (26)

In Updike's *Terrorist*, the main protagonist Ahmad is a Muslim teenager who is recruited to be a terrorist. Any human being relates himself to another thing in life; it might be family, work, or religion. The necessity to be related to something appears in the teenage, when young men start to create their own image about the other world outside the house. In Ahmad's condition, it started when he was just eleven. He couldn't link himself to his family or to work. So, he relates himself to religion the only thing that he knows for sure. From the very early beginning, when the readers meet Ahmad, they find him confused about his origin and the life he has. His mom is an Irish American and his father is an Egyptian exchange student who had left them. He has no father and had a bad relationship with his mother and his only mentor is his religious teacher at the mosque. Ahmad cannot relate himself to a father he never knew, he doesn't have anyone to guide him through life and teach him how to live in the American society without losing his faith or his God. Everything around him is contradictory even from his teachers at school who advise students to be virtuous but they do not practice what they preach. Ahmad's view of American society is colored by his religious beliefs that lead him to a critical stance:

> […]scuttling after school into their cars on the crackling, trash-speckled parking lot like pale crabs or dark ones restored to their shells, and they are men and women like any others, full of lust and fear and infatuation with things that can be bought. Infidels, they think safety lies in accumulation of the things of this world, and in the corrupting diversions of the television set. (3)

As shown above in the narrative sequence, Ahmad's disdain for what he sees as the moral emptiness of American society underscores his radicalization. Updike uses Ahmad's perspective to explore the ways in which alienation and a sense of moral superiority can fuel extremist ideologies.Even Sheikh Rashid, Ahmad sometime feels that his voice is hollow and "It reminds him of the unconvincing voices of his teachers at Central High. He hears Satan's undertone in it, a denying voice within an affirming voice" (5). Ahmad doesn't have any definite identity or personality because of his father's absence which makes the *imam* to become a substantial father figure for him. *Imam* viewed him a strict version of Islam. Ahmad lives through the *imam*'s views. All his ideas about the infidel community where he had to live and how they are enemies of the God and might take away his faith, all these extremist ideas were taken from his *imam*. Ahmad has no experience in life; he has no ideas about women or sex. *Imam* warns Ahmad about western women and how they are animals looking only for vice and the true believer shouldn't come near to them. Women are seen by Ahmad as "animals easily led, Ahmad has been warned by Shaikh Rashid, and he can see for himself that the high school and the world beyond it are full of nuzzling—blind animals in a herd bumping against one another, looking for a scent that will comfort them" (7).

As a matter of fact, readers didn't meet Ahmad until he was eleven years old; they don't know anything about his life before meeting Sheikh Rashid unless his mother mention that he did not make her tired and is always "so easily led" (182). Ahmad's life is empty: no friends, no habits, and no favorite teachers. Ahmad has no friends which, in turn, aggravate his feelings of displacement and the lack of real sense of community or cultural identity. Beingtorn between two different cultures, lead him to an identity crisis. No one from school ever deal with Ahmad except for Joryleen and Mr. Levy. Elsewhere in the novel, some students in Ahmad's school prove their hatred to him. For instance, Tylenol Jones, during his

fight with Ahmad, speaks some words which show that Ahmad is categorized as an other. "Hey.Arab"(11). "your type wouldn't understand," "Black Muslims I don't diss [*sic*],but you not black, you not anything but a poor shithead. You no raghead [*sic*], you a shit head" (12).Such words reflect how Ahmad's schoolmates think about Muslims. Obviously, othering and stereotyping Muslims is a natural result of Islamophobia. Loss of identity and displacement that Muslims suffer in some western communities are natural results of the repeated stereotypes in both the political discourse and media. Some non-Muslim communities unconsciously push Muslims away, by spreading these stereotypes among common people in the street. Such alienation makes the mission of the extremism easier to recruit young ignorant Muslims and convince them of attacking their homeland and their victimizers as well.

More to the point, the phenomenon of Islamophobia is created by non-Muslims themselves as a counter effect to the prevalent racist media discourse, which incites hatred and hostility towards Muslims. Islamophobia is also spread through the prejudiced- racist writing, whether directly or indirectly. Stereotyping Muslims and othering them is what leads to the phenomenon of Islamophobia, because the non-Muslims are waiting for the reaction from those who have wronged them, instead of being busy correcting their ideas regarding Islam and amending their unfair speeches and writings.

In this sense, Islamophobia is the other face of extremism. Convincing a young Muslim, who feels displaced and far away from the Islamic movement notions was an easy task. Extremism and terrorism are two faces of the same coin. Extremists had certain strategies to recruit young Muslims to their radical movements and they take advantages of their weakness points. Robert A. Pape writes, "Existing accounts suicide terrorism focus on personal alienation, mass unemployment, social humiliation, or religious

totalitarianism. Each of these fits aspects of some cases, but all miss[*sic*] the central feature of modern suicide terrorist campaigns" (63). Islamic extremists isolate or confirm the sense of isolation in the recruited from everything or anybody who could affects their ideas elsewhere. This isolation includes everything; society and even their families. For both Ahmad and John, they share the same idea that being a Muslim meant being in conflict with non-Muslim communities and both of them were blindly introduced to political Islam through a radical, biased, and falsified discourse.

In Ahmad's condition, he has been already pushed away from the society because he is a Muslim .*Imam*'s mission is to confirm this isolation. Sheikh Rashid printed in Ahmad's mind wrong notions and exaggerates the illnesses of the society. Sheikh Rashid's hatred of the American prejudice towards Muslims passed to Ahmad. He is preparing him to his last task in life. From the very early beginning, when Ahmad was just eleven, he is only teaching him to become a terrorist not to be a Muslim and he succeeds. "Devils;" the first word in the novel, Updike made Ahmad's vision clear about his society. Ironically enough, he repeated this word about eleven times throughout the novel as an expressive adjective of his perception of the American people. This shows a great part of Updike's excellency as a writer. He writes an entire novel called *Terrorist*, in which he indirectly expresses his own Islamophobia, but at the same time he describes non-Muslims as devils. There is no contradiction at all. A plausible presumption is assumed that Updike does that in order to make his writing seems more convincing and logic to his readers. Ahmad, too, uses the word "Devils" to describe people around him. For Example, girls at school showing up their bodies and trying to seduce him and take away his faith are devils. According to Shaikh Rashid, a true believer should neglect everything around him, reject the infidel individuals, and refuse their secular education and their secular liberal ideals of their society because it is fatal and headed to a doomed end. Rashid says, "I of course do not hate all Americans.

But die American way is the way of infidels. It is headed for a terrible doom" (28). In the *imam*'s point of view, all the unbelievers are the enemies of Muslims and they should be defeated and shouldn't be allowed to spread their infidelity to the other. Muslims should study the enemy carefully to know his weakness points.

As the text connotes, this is clear in Ahmad's conversation with Joryleen when he went to her church to see her singing "You have been gracious to me, and I was curious. It is helpful, up to a point, to know the enemy." "Enemy? Whoa. You didn't have no enemies there." "My teacher at the mosque says that all unbelievers are our enemies. The Prophet said that eventually all unbelievers must be destroyed" (50). *Imam* also succeeds in cutting Ahmad off his own mother because she isn't a Muslim. Most of the time, Ahmad's thoughts about his mother are full of rejection. He describes her as a "his blithely faithless mother" (28). When Mr. Levy visited Ahmad in the house, he was so embarrassed from Mr. Levy to see "the embarrassing mother he tries to hide,to keep to himself" (70). Ahmad dislikes his mother because she isn't committed to her religion and doesn't attend the church regularly "His flighty mother, who never went to mass, and deplored the restraints of her own religion"(74). As a result, Sheikh Rashid is successful in his main mission of isolating Ahmad from any outer influences.

Noticeably, Islamophobia is reinforced among non-Muslims because of their misunderstanding of the Muslim's doctrine of *jihad*. For example, Updike sheds light, many times through the novel, on Ahmad's will to sacrifice his life. The first was when he met his boss for the first time. They were taking about *jihad* and Ahmad expresses his wish to die. The second, when he was with Joryleen and he tells her that he want to die and be with God to keep his company although he knows that God doesn't need any help from his creature. Joryleen replies, "You better get on top of all those weird

ideas you have, or they gone to drive you crazy."His lips move within an inch of her brow."[…]No sooner are the words out of his mouth than he recognizes them as blasphemy: in the twenty-ninth sura it is written, *Allah does not need His creatures' help*."To die, you mean? You're scaring me again, Ahmad. How's that prick been poking me doing? We talk it all away?"(170). In a similar vein, Akbar S. Ahmed highlights the Western Islamophobia, but he relates that fear to the Western misunderstanding of Islam:

> Not being able to understand Islam fully and being impatient with it, the West will consider Islam as problematic. It will be seen as the main counterforce to Western civilization. Into the 1990s, an opinion is already taking shape of Islam as the major enemy after the collapse of communism (230-231).

Equally, in *American Taliban*, the word "martyrdom" is linked in the western culture with Muslim's fanatic and self-suicidal tendencies: In a speech given to the American public in the aftermath of 9/11, one of the American converters, who join Taliban, speaks of his motive for participating in the bombing. He uses the word shahid/martyr as a fair enough reward. [I]t's the goal of every Muslim to be shahid … every single one of us, without any exaggeration, every single one of us was one hundred percent sure that we would all be shahid … all be martyred (225). In a similar vein, Sayyid argues "Abraham implies that such Muslims are easily seduced by the fundamentalist ideology of Jihadism according to which the path to self-realization is made possible through martyrdom" (9).

More importantly, *Imam* knows Ahmad's wish and he makes use of it. Ahmad is convinced that it is God's will to die, and he will die for supreme goal. He will punish the infidels (the God's enemies); he will be a part of the "war for God" (177). Besides, his mother may convert to Islam after seeing the great sacrifice of her

son. *Imam* also knows that Ahmad is fascinated by the description of heaven and all the gifts that the martyr rewarded in Janna. Sheikh Rashid manipulates Ahmad's feeling to be sure that he will accomplish his mission to the end. "Ahmad, listen to me. You do not have to do this. Your avowal to Charlie does not obligate you, if your heart quails. There are many others eager for a glorious name and the assurance of eternal bliss.The *jihad* is overwhelmed by volunteers, even in this homeland of evil and irreligion" (180).He also tries to influence his ego by telling him that If he isn't courageous enough or his faith isn't strong, he would give that mission to another one "with more courage and faith may carry out the mission" (180).He tells Ahmad that he envy him so much because he is young and the *imam* was old to do that task by himself.

Ahmad did not have the chance to know what Islamism is and what Islam is. Ahmad wants to do anything for Islam and for God; he wants to take revenge from all the (*Kuffar*) the Gods enemies. As mentioned before, *imam* took advantage of Ahmad's love for God and makes it suites his personal aims. When *Imam* first tell Ahmad about the mission:

> There is a way." his master cautiously begins, "in which a mighty blow can be delivered against His enemies"."A plot?" Ahmad asks. A way," Shaikh Rashid repeats, fastidiously. "It would involve a shahid whose love of God is unqualified, and who impatiently thirsts for the glory of Paradise. Are you such a one, Ahmad? (177)

Here, Rashid uses some words to agitate Ahmad's feelings like (His enemies- shahid- glory of paradise). Ahmad thinks that this mission is like a gift from God carried to him by the Sheikh; a gift which he will never refuses. The only connection between the American society and Ahmad is through Joryleen; the only one that Ahmad wants to receive her sympathy after his death. *Imam* warns

Ahmad of coming again to the Islamic Center, because it may be under surveillance and they will not talk again about this subject any more. Ahmad informs Charlie that he is in. Charlie introduces Ahmad to some specialists to teach him everything about the operation. They told him what to do exactly and give him all the instructions and how to blow up the tunnel. They told him that there will be no pain at all for him. "For you, no pain, not even panic moment. Instead, Happiness of success and God's warm welcome"(188).

During their conversation, Ahmad senses a great hatred towards America. They also told him that he is a tool, but in the hands of the God. The God's tool to make a difference, his action will have a great effect in the world. "God Himself is simple, and employs simple men to shape the world" (190).The night before the mission, *imam* visits Ahmad in his new small room. He looks different in his clothes and appearance:

> The man this evening wore not his usual shimmering embroidered caftan but a gray western-style suit, as if dressed for a business trip among the infidels. How else explain his shaving off his beard, the precisely trimmed gray-flecked beard? It had concealed, Ahmad saw, a number of small scars, traces on his waxy white skin of some disease, eradicated in the West, contracted by a child in Yemen. (201)

Rashid visits Ahmad to make sure that he is still eager to accomplish the mission no matter what happened.*Imam* didn't tell Ahmad that Charlie is killed because they find out that he was a CIA agent. He encouraged him by telling him that it is a great mission and by accomplishing it, he will fulfill his faith and gain superior place in heaven above the others even the *imam* himself:

> "Dear boy. I have not coerced you, have I?"

> "Why, no, master. How could you?"
> "I mean, you have volunteered out of the fullness of your faith?""Yes, and out of hatred of those who mock and ignore God.""Excellent. You do not feel manipulated by your elders? "It was a surprising idea, tliough [*sic*] Joryleen also had expressed it. "Of course not. I feel wisely guided by them." (204-205)

Ahmad never, not for a second suspected the *imam* intentions but he feels that there is something hidden away from him. At the end, when Ahmad did not find Charlie at the place they have agreed meeting on, he completed the mission as arranged. He derived the truck towards the tunnel. In his way Mr. Jack stopped him and got in the truck. Ahmad then knew the truth that *imam* had known everything but he did not tell him anyway. Ahmad felt manipulated, but did not express his feelings to Mr. Jake, who starts telling Ahmad that he should cancel the whole mission. He made him think about all the people who would get hurt: "For you there will be no pain." "No, but there will be for plenty of others," the older man responds" (232). Ahmad has perplexed thoughts about God and life. He is torn between his devout adherence to Islam and the secular, often morally ambiguous world around him."God having willed the great transition from non-being to being. This was the will of the Beneficent, the Merciful, *ar-Rahman and ar-Rahim*, the Living, the Patient, the Generous, the Perfect, the Light, the Guide. He does not want us to desecrate His creation by willing death. He wills life" (232).Then, Ahmad tells Mr. Jack that he will not complete the mission and he had convinced him. The last line in the novel is very expressive "These devils, Ahmad thinks, have taken away my God"(235). This quote reflects Ahmad's perception of the world as antagonistic to his faith. His use of the word "devils" highlights his view of secular influences as corrupting and evil, which

demonstrates his deep sense of alienation. Relatedly, in a review by James Wood, he defends Updike and contends:

> Updike has spoken of his desire to treat Islam "sympathetically" in his new novel; and he has been praised, if a little wanly, for differing from "other novelists looking over their shoulders at 9/11." Unlike them, says John Leonard in *New York*. "Updike isn't writing from the victim's point of view." There is no reason to doubt Updike's intention. If sympathy brings understanding, let us have sympathy.But who would desire Updike's kind of sympathy? Wanting to dignify his hero, Updike drastically overcompensates and turns his schoolboy into a stiff stereotype—he's a bigot. Updike seems to be saying, but rather a stately bigot, for all that. How can it be sympathetic to a religion to present, as its exemplar, such a solemn robot? (n.p)

Conversely, the aforementioned opinion is totally disagreeable because Updike's intention wasn't to treat Islam sympathetically. He just wants people to pay more attention to the terrorist Ahmad. Though he is a young boy who is manipulated by some radicals to become a suicide terrorist and kill people. Extremists recruited him too young. He is only introduced to the political aspect of Islam not to the whole tolerant religion.

Nevertheless, both Ahmad and John are just examples of the recruiting process under the name of Islam. Ahmad and John feel displaced and disconnected from the others as a direct result of the stereotype spread in the media and the political discourse. These stereotypes make them want to be part of something bigger. Meanwhile, this leads them to adopt radical thought. Extremists provide the misfit young Muslims with a holly purpose to achieve and a place in life. They became connected globally with other

Muslims they never met before and they feel that they are will rooted.

Similarly, Abraham's *American Taliban* explores themes of Islamophobia, identity, and the complexities of cultural integration. While John's mother, Barbara, plays a significant role in shaping his views and decisions, it's essential to approach this portrayal in an objective critical manner. His mother, a personification of Western secularism, dominates his thoughts as she "lived in his head and without wheels, there'd be no escape" (33). In other words, Barbara's character can be seen as a reflection of the conflicts and challenges that arise when different cultural and religious values intersect. In the context of the story, her actions and attitudes may contribute to John's radicalization by either inadvertently alienating him or failing to provide the support he needs as he navigates his identity. What she seeks for him is "originality and intellectuality and a lifestyle shaped by the liberal humanist ideas in which, as Barbara liked to point out, he had been immersed from the instant of his inception (22).

To put this more accurately, Barbara's character can be seen as a representation of secularism, while John's exploration of Islam represents a journey towards spirituality. This dichotomy helps to illustrate the tension between secular and spiritual values in John's life, and how these conflicting influences shape his identity and choices.Barbara, John's mother, embodies a secular worldview, which emphasizes a non-religious or culturally mainstream approach to life. She wants "the kind of hallowed celebrity a sophisticated parent could take pride in, meaning her son would do something highly remarkable, perhaps even original, but definitely not embarrassing" (22). Indeed, Barbara likely represents the dominant cultural norms and values of the secular American society in which John is raised. This includes a focus on material success, social conformity, and perhaps a lack of emphasis on spiritual or religious

practices. Her character may lean towards a pragmatic and rational outlook, favoring logical explanations and practical solutions over spiritual or religious considerations. This might manifest in her guidance and expectations for John, focusing on tangible achievements and societal acceptance. Besides, Barbara's secularism might also contribute to a sense of alienation or disconnect from deeper spiritual or existential questions. This could lead John to seek answers and meaning beyond what he experiences at home and prompts his exploration of Islam.

Consequently, John's attraction to Islam symbolizes his quest for spirituality and deeper meaning, contrasting with the secular values represented by his mother. John is fed up with his mother's old superior religious dogma. That is why he once identifies her as "Barbaric Barbarella":

> [I]f someone broke a leg Barbaric Barbarella would have broken two legs, and perhaps an arm as well, and if the Washington Post had written about a friend or friend of a friend, then the Washington post had also interviewed Barbara multiple times and had also misquoted her, or quoted her out of context, she know exactly how it all worked, nothing was new to her, she couldn't be surprised or impressed by anything. (4)

This extraction indicates how the new non-religious Westerners of imperialism see themselves as superior and self-righteous. Barbara sees herself as civilized, and the others are barbaric. John describes her as the "self-important" and self-absorbed" Barbara (4). Noticeably, Islam offers John a framework for understanding his place in the world, providing him with a sense of purpose and belonging that he may not have found in the secular environment of his upbringing. Implicitly, the spiritual teachings of Islam, with their focus on faith, morality, and community, offer John a contrasting set of values to the secular ones he has known. This

spiritual pursuit can be seen as a reaction to or rejection of the secularism embodied by his mother. Obviously, John's exploration of Islam can be seen as a journey of inner transformation, where he seeks to align his life with a higher spiritual calling. This contrasts with the more external and material focus of the secular world represented by Barbara.The tension between Barbara's secularism and John's spiritual journey through Islam is evident in the narrative. This conflict highlights the challenges of navigating different belief systems within a family and the broader society. It explores how individuals seek identity and meaning, sometimes in opposition to the values they were raised with.

Furthermore, the characters of both Noor and Barbara serve as symbolic representations of Eastern and Western cultural-philosophical ideals. The protagonist, John Jude Parish, experiences a significant internal conflict between these two opposing cultural influences, which play a crucial role in his journey towards radicalization.Noor represents the East, embodying values such as spirituality, tradition, and communal living. She is associated with Eastern philosophies and practices, such as meditation and a minimalist lifestyle, which emphasize inner peace, discipline, and a connection to something greater than oneself. Noor's character reflects a worldview that prioritizes spiritual fulfillment and a deep sense of community over material success and individualism. Seeing Noor, the Muslim American girl, John "nodded without taking his eyes off Noor, off her thin face, her prominent nose, and her wide dark eyes. Her skin, desert Bedouin eyes, with the depths of sand and caves. He was thinking like book, in clichés, and he was ashamed of it, but he couldn't help himself" (64).Through Noor, John is exposed to the allure of Eastern thought, which he perceives as offering a richer, more meaningful alternative to the shallow consumerism of the West.Barbara, on the other hand, symbolizes the West, characterized by modernity, materialism, and individualism. She represents the cultural and societal norms of Western life, which

often focus on personal freedom, economic prosperity, and scientific rationalism. Barbara's world is one of comfort, consumer goods, and the pursuit of personal success. For John, Barbara and the Western lifestyle she represents come to symbolize the superficiality and moral emptiness he increasingly rejects. The West, through Barbara's character, is seen as prioritizing external success over internal well-being, leading John to feel alienated, ostracized, and othered.

Meanwhile, John's character is at the crossroads of these two contrasting cultural spheres. His journey reflects a deep-seated struggle between the allure of the East's spiritual and communal values and the West's emphasis on individualism and material success. This clash is not just an external conflict but an internal one, as John grapples with his own identity and beliefs.Initially attracted to the Eastern ideals represented by Noor, John finds a sense of purpose and belonging that he feels is lacking in the Western world. However, his growing disillusionment with the West, symbolized by Barbara, leads him to increasingly radical views. He becomes "fully free of the prison of childhood, of well-meaning Barbara and her version of adult life" (69).The more John immerses himself in Eastern philosophies, the more he rejects the Western way of life, which he comes to view as morally corrupt and spiritually bankrupt.

As a result, the clash between these cultural ideals in John's life ultimately drives him toward radicalization. His rejection of Western values, coupled with an idealized and extreme interpretation of Eastern thought, leads him down a dangerous path:"[H]e has an unreasonable attraction for the underdog; a foreshadow for his unreasonable attraction for the fundamentalist Islamic sectors in Afghanistan" (31). John's transformation into a member of the "American Taliban" highlights the perils of cultural and ideological absolutism, where the rejection of one set of values in favor of another can result in extreme actions and beliefs.

Like, Ahmad in Updike's *Terrorist*, John undergoes a significant transformation that lead to a controversial journey of self-realization. His experiences and the cultural clashes he encounters play a crucial role in his radicalization. John is a typical American teenager, who grapples with the usual questions of identity, purpose, and belonging. However, he becomes increasingly disillusioned with the materialistic and superficial aspects of Western culture. This disillusionment drives him to seek meaning and authenticity elsewhere.His fascination with the East can be seen as John's rejection of the perceived emptiness of Western consumerism and individualism, as represented by Barbara. John's journey to self-realization involves a deep search for authenticity. He begins to adopt Eastern practices, such as meditation and a minimalist lifestyle, which contrast sharply with the Western materialist consumer values he has been raised to. This shift is not just about lifestyle but also reflects a deeper ideological transformation: "[h]e emerged with a prayer on his lips, an invitation to his soul. He would become as he would become" (11). He becomes increasingly critical of Western society, perceiving it as morally bankrupt and spiritually hollow.

As a matter of fact, John's quest for meaning leads him to extreme interpretations of the Eastern philosophies he initially found appealing. His transition from a seeker of spiritual enlightenment to a member of a radical Islamist group often referred to as the "American Taliban," represents a dark twist in his journey. This radicalization is fueled by a combination of personal dissatisfaction, the allure of belonging to a cause greater than oneself, and a rejection of his previous life.For instance, Jalal, a Muslim friend of John's, whom he met in Afghanistan, once told him that for hundreds of years, Muslims have suffered a lot from the Westerners. First, the French occupied Egypt. Next, the British took it from the French. Afterwards, the Italians invaded Libya. Then the French and English

divided India: "As a Westerner […] you are as wet with colonial guilt as you stand here slick with soap" (184).

Significantly, John's radicalization brings him into conflict with his former life and identity. His transformation shocks those around him and develops their Islamophobic attitude. So, he becomes increasingly isolated from his previous community. His actions and beliefs become a manifestation of his internal struggle and the cultural clash he embodies. This path leads him to become a terrorist, a decision that marks a complete departure from his original quest for spiritual and cultural understanding. As such, the novel ends on an open and somewhat ambiguous note. After John's full transformation into a member of the Taliban and living under their control, John's fate is left uncertain. He is imprisoned by U.S. forces, but the narrative does not explicitly state what happens to him afterward. The focus is more in John's ideological journey and the consequences of his radicalization, rather than providing a clear-cut conclusion.

To conclude, both Updike and Abraham are clearly adopting Islamophobic attitudes that come as a result of the general influence of their Western xenophobic anti-Islamic culture. The lens of their narrative connects between Islam and terrorism. Even the way they present some Islamic concepts such as *jihad* is largely wrong. The misrepresentation of Islam in these novels can have negative consequences. Readers who lack firsthand knowledge of Islam may form their opinions based on these portrayals which, in turn, reinforce Islamophobic attitudes and prejudices. Besides, the portrayals of Islam and Muslim characters in Updike's *Terrorist* and Abraham's *American Taliban* offer a subtle and one-dimensional perspective that focuses on simplistic stereotypes. Both authors explore themes of religious devotion, cultural conflict, and the search for meaning, providing deep insights into the motivations and struggles of their Muslim characters. In fact, Ahmad and John's

paths to radicalization are depicted with complexity that highlight the personal, cultural, and ideological factors and influence their transformations .Updike's *Terrorist* sheds light on the role of religious authority and the alienation experienced by devout individuals in secular societies. Ahmad's character is portrayed as a sincere but misguided youth, whose turn to extremism is influenced by his search for moral clarity and purpose. While, Abraham's *American Taliban* spotlight the psychological and social dimensions of radicalization. John's conversion to Islam and subsequent involvement with the Taliban are portrayed as responses to his disillusionment with American culture and his search for deeper meaning.

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الإسلاموفوبيا في روايتي *الإرهابي* لجون ابدايك و *طالبان الأمريكية* لبيرل ابراهام

ملخص

الإسلاموفوبيا هي ظاهرة الخوف غير المبرر أو الكراهية أو التحيز ضد الإسلام وأتباعه والتي برزت كقضية اجتماعية وسياسية في المجتمع المعاصر. تتجلى هذه الظاهرة في أشكال مختلفة، من الأفعال الفردية للتمييز وجرائم الكراهية إلى السياسات المؤسسية التي تهمش المجتمعات المسلمة. تلقى كل من رواية جون أبدايك "*الإرهابي*" و"*طالبان الأمريكية*" لبيرل ابراهام الضوء على تجارب الشخصيات المسلمة الشابة في أمريكا بعد احداث ١١ سبتمبر. وتفترض الدراسة أن بعض الكتاب الغربيين يربطون، بطريقة أو بأخرى، بين الإسلام والإرهاب وبالتالي لديهم خوف داخلي من الإسلام. وفي الوقت نفسه، تبحث الدراسة في ظاهرة الإسلاموفوبيا في كل من رواية أبدايك "*الإرهابي*" و"*طالبان الأمريكية*" لإبراهام. حيث ان كلا الكاتبين يعبران عن الفكرة السائدة عن الاسلام كدين تم تصويره اعلاميا وثقافيا على انه دين الارهاب والعنف وهذه النظرة الاستعلائية والعدائية ضد الاسلام وأهله ماهي الا نتاج للثقافة الاستعمارية الجديدة السائدة في الغرب. بالإضافة إلى ذلك، فإن هذه الدراسة تسلط الضوء على التمثيل الخاطئ للإسلام، واستبعاد المسلمين، والتنميط الثقافي لهم. ويمكن القول ان التصوير الخاطئ للإسلام في هذه الروايات له عواقب سلبية. حيث ان القراء الذين يفتقرون إلى المعرفة المباشرة بالإسلام قد يشكلون آراءهم على أساس هذه الصورالمجحفه التي بدورها تعزز المواقف والتحيزات المعادية للإسلام. هذا فضلا عن تصوير الإسلام والشخصيات المسلمة في رواية *الإرهابي* لأبدايك و *طالبان الأمريكية* لإبراهام بمنظور أحادي البعد يركز فقط على الصور النمطية التبسيطية. ومن الجدير بالملاحظة ان مسارات أحمد وجون نحو التطرف تم تصويرها بتعقيد يسلط الضوء على العوامل الشخصية والثقافية والأيديولوجية ويؤثر على تحولاتهم .فبينما تلقى رواية *الإرهابي* لأبدايك الضوء على دور السلطة الدينية والاغتراب الذي يعاني منه الأفراد المتدينون في المجتمعات العلمانية، فإن رواية *طالبان الأمريكية* لإبراهام تسلط الضوء على الأبعاد النفسية والاجتماعية للتطرف.

الكلمات المفتاحية: الإسلاموفوبيا، التطرف، تنميط المسلمين، تشويه صورة الإسلام، العلمانية، النبذ الاجتماعى.