**Ahmed Hassan Mohamed Suliman**

# "The Image of Islam in the Post 9/11 Era in John Updike's *Terrorist*"

**Ahmed Hassan Mohamed Suliman**
(Ph.D. Candidate in English Literature, Suez University)
Lecturer Assistant, Faculty of languages and Translation, Department of English Language
Ahram Canadian University

## Abstract

*This research paper is an attempt to explore the image of Islam manifested in the post 9/11 American literary contexts, an image that revives in the Orientalist studies that intellectually emerged as Neo-Orientalism. In their discourses, many neo-Orientalists overemphasize a distorted image of Islam as an anti-modern, anti-democratic, and anti-Western ideology that is based on antagonism and terrorism against the non-Muslim Western 'Other'. Consequently, Muslims are distortedly depicted as terrorists who hold a Jihadist agenda against Westerners generally and Americans particularly. These neo-Orientalist misrepresentations of Islam and Muslim have highly affected the post 9/11 American literary canon. Published in 2006, John Updike's Terrorist is considered one of the remarkable novels that centers on examining the nature of Islam and the features of Muslims, within the framework of neo-Orientalism. Pivoting around Edward Said's anti-Orientalist approach, this study aims at offering a critical reading of the depiction of Islam and Muslims in Updike's Terrorist. Discussion principally depends on analyzing different quotations from the novel, which represent the nature of Islam and the temperaments of Muslims. The study has concluded that Updike, in Terrorist, misrepresents Islam as an intolerant, antagonistic, anti-Other, and violent religion that constitutes an existentialist threat to the United States.*

**Key Words:** Islam, Muslims, Edward Said's *Orientalism*, Neo-Orientalism, Updike's *Terrorist*

**أحمد حسن محمد سليمان**

**باحث بدرجة الدكتوراه في الادب الإنجليزي- قسم اللغة الإنجليزية وادابها – جامعة السويس**

**مدرس مساعد ــ قسم اللغة الإنجليزية ،كلية اللغات والترجمة، جامعة الاهرام الكندية**

## المستخلص

يهدف البحث الي محاولة تحليل صورة الإسلام في السياقات الادبية الأمريكية بعد احداث 11 سبتمبر، وهي الصورة التي تم انعشها في الدراسات الاستشراقية التي ظهرت فكريا على أنها استشراق جديد. يبالغ العديد من المستشرقين الجدد- في خطاباتهم- في التأكيد على الصورة المشوهة للإسلام باعتباره أيديولوجية مناهضة للحداثة، ومعادية للديمقراطية، ومعادية للغرب تقوم على العداء والإرهاب ضد "الآخر" الغربي الغير المسلم. وبالتالي ، يتم تصوير المسلمين بشكل مشوه على أنهم إرهابيون يحملون أجندة جهادية ضد الغربيين عمومًا والأمريكيين بشكل خاص. لقد أثرت هذه التحريفات الاستشراقية الجديدة للإسلام والمسلمين بشكل كبير على الادب الأمريكي بعد احداث 11 سبتمبر. ، تعتبر رواية جون أبدايك "إرهابي" والتي نشرت في 2006 من الروايات الجديرة بالملاحظة التي تركز على فحص طبيعة الإسلام وخصائص المسلمين ، في إطار الاستشراق الجديد. تتمحور هذه الدراسة حول نهج إدوارد سعيد المناهض للاستشراق ، وتهدف إلى تقديم قراءة نقدية لتصوير الإسلام والمسلمين في رواية ابدايك "إرهابي". تعتمد المناقشة في البحث بشكل أساسي على تحليل الاقتباسات المختلفة من الرواية ، والتي تمثل طبيعة الإسلام وسمات المسلمين. وخلصت الدراسة إلى أن أبدايك ، في روايته "إرهابي" ، يقدم صورة محرفة عن الإسلام على أنه دين غير متسامح وعدائي ومناهض للآخر وعنيف يشكل تهديدا وجوديا للولايات المتحدة.

## Introduction

The terrorist attacks of 9/11 have had a remarkable negative impact on the projection of Islam and Muslims in American socio-political contexts. In the post 9/11 era, many American intellectual, political, and literary figures construct distorted images of Islam as the main threat to the West generally and the United States particularly. For instance, Franklin Graham declares, "The God of Islam is not the same God. He's not the son of God of the Christian or Judeo-Christian faith. It's a different God, and I believe it is a very evil and wicked religion" ("CNN.Com - Franklin Graham Conducts Services At Pentagon - Apr. 18, 2003") To this end, Muslims, especially Arab Muslims, are stereotypically portrayed, in American culture, as barbaric, violent, inhuman, anti-democratic, anti-modern 'Other', and above all terrorists. This distorted image of Islam as a threat to the West, particularly the United States, and Muslims as typical terrorists is known in the world of the academic arena as neo-Orientalism.

It can be assured that American Neo-Orientalism and New Imperialism are two sides of the same coin. Noam Chomsky, for instance, emphasizes that American wars launched in the post 9/11 era are not broken out for the sake of retaliation or saving the world of Muslim terrorism, however; "the basic principle is that hegemonic is more important than survival" (*Hegemony or Survival*, 83). Furthermore, Chomsky asserts that American wars on the different Middle Eastern regions can only be described as criminal actions, as they have resulted in killing a massive number of people, Americans, and non-Americans, who have no direct connection with the 9/11 attacks. According to Common Dreams, an American News Website, "The so-called War on Terror launched by the United States government in the wake of the Sept. 11, 2001 attacks has cost at least 801,000 lives" (Corbett).

In the post 9/11 era, literature is highly influenced by the change in the American socio-political contexts. Pankaj Mishra states, "if the world changed after 9/11, literature also changed. Anyone writing after the event was shaped and informed by the events" (4). Hence, many American well-known novelists, such as Don DeLillo and John Updike, produced ideological literary works, overstressing the neo-Orientalist stereotypical representations of Islam and Muslims. They focus on offering portrayals of Islam as the main threat to the entire West because it is based on a bloody, anti-modern, and anti-democratic civilization. They also propagandize the neo-Orientalist overgeneralization that almost all Muslims are radical terrorists who hold a *Jihadist* agenda against non-Muslims, particularly Americans.

This study analytically considers John Updike's *Terrorist* (2006). Depending on Edward Said's anti-Orientalist approach, the study is a close text analysis from the novel, which offers a detailed account of Updike's novel with the aim of portraying the image of Islam. It examines to what extent Updike, in *Terrorist*, constructs a stereotypical misrepresentation of Islam.

**Theoretical Framework**

The process of 'Othering' the East and its nations is a dominant practice in Western culture. This, in turn, results in the production of multiple Western intellectual works, which aim at investigating the basic features of the East and the nature of the Orient. This intellectual tradition is known as Orientalism. According to Said, Orientalism, however, is merely a "style of thought based upon an ontological and epistemological distinction made between "the Orient" and (most of the time) "the Occident." (2). Western depictions of the Eastern world are characterized as stereotypical images, which are significantly removed from reality. Said describes the Orient that is depicted through Orientalism as "a system of representation framed by a whole set of forces that brought the Orient into Western learning, Western consciousness, and later Western empire" (203). In this context, many Orientalists represent Middle Eastern people, especially Muslims, in their writings through constructing stereotypical images; they depict them as savage, irrational, and backward 'Others' who are deprived of any kind of civilization and democracy.

In addition, Said points out that many Orientalists claim that Islam and its civilization stands as a threat to Western civilization. Therefore, Orientalists tend to divide the East into "Near Orient" and "Far Orient" (58). A defining characteristic of the "Near Orient" is Islam. According to Said, "such a category is not much away of receiving new information as it is a method of controlling what seems to be a threat to some established view of things" (59). Since the numerous Islamic conquests in the Middle Ages, Islam has been associated with fear. Hence, many Westerners attach Islam to "terror, devastation, the demonic, horde of hatred barbarians" (59). These peculiarities are made to help the West justify its ideological imperialist agenda of Muslim nations. Said states that "the European representation of the Muslim, Ottoman, or Arab was always a way of controlling the redoubtable Orient" (60).

In *Covering Islam*, Said examines the image of Islam in the pre-9/11 American cultural contexts. He argues that "Islam as it is used today seems to mean one simple thing but in fact is part fiction, part ideological label, part minimal designation of a religion called Islam" (1). He asserts that the image of Islam in American cultural discourses is affected by

ideological agenda, as well as biased fictional representations. Said explains that American Orientalists associate Islam with "not only patent inaccuracy but also expressions of unrestrained ethnocentrism cultural and even racial hatred, deep but paradoxically free-floating hostility" (1). Phrased in other words, the representations of Muslims and Islamic culture in the pre-9/11 discourses are connected not only with excessive stereotypical images, as hostile and savage identities, but also with unjustified racial hatred.

Since the terrorist attacks of 9/11 on the United States, a new interest in the study of the Orient by Western and American scholars has emerged. This interest, which is considered by many scholars a revival of Orientalism, has resulted in a hostile attitude towards the Orient, especially the Arab Muslims, called neo-Orientalism. In Said's preface to *Orientalism* (2003), he defines the twenty-first Western discourse on the Middle East and Islam as "belligerent neo-Orientalism" (xxi). The neo-Orientalist discourse is characterized by much more aggression towards Islam and Muslims; it centers on defining Islam as a threat to the West and Muslims as terrorists for the sake of justifying the Western, particularly American, culture, military, political dominance over them. It must be noted that in the neo-Orientalist era the words Arabs and Muslims are used as synonyms for each other. Catharina Raudvere points out that "today, there are approximately 1.5 billion Muslim across the world. Nevertheless, the conventional stereotype of a Muslim is an Arab, despite the fact that only 20 per cent of the world's Muslims live in the Arabic-speaking parts of the Middle-East and North Africa" (1). According to the American neo-Orientalist discourse, all Arabs are Muslims and all Muslims are Arabs, and they are all terrorists.

*In Five Years after 9/11*, Julianne Smith and Sanderson Thomas indicate that the neo-Orient is a production and reflection of the change in American political and social contexts in the post 9/11 era (33). Nair-Venugopal, in *The Gaze of the West and Framings of the East*, defines neo-Orientalism as the latest version of Orientalism (13). Hence, neo-Orientalism can be defined as the post 9/11 American representation of the Arab Muslim nations, constructed for the sake of fulfilling the American neo-imperialist agenda in the Middle East. It focuses on emphasizing the traditional binary opposition and clash between the Judeo-Christian civilization and Islamic civilization. Furthermore, it overstresses the twentieth-century American hypothesis that defines Islam as the main threat to the West and Muslims as radical terrorists.

One of the main American intellectuals who has augmented the production of distorted representations of Islam and Muslims in the neo-Orientalist era is Bernard Lewis. *In What Went Wrong*? Lewis, for

instance, asserts that Islamic values, traditions, and civilization stands in great opposition to Western civilization and its modern qualities. He argues that the superiority of Western civilization over Islamic one results from different reasons. Lewis emphasizes that the most fundamental reason that places Islamic civilization as inferior to Western civilization is the Islamic inequality treatment of human beings, highly presented in the way Islam treats non-Muslims and women. He argues that "according to Islamic law and tradition, there were three groups of people who did not benefit from general Muslim principles of legal and religious quality – unbelievers, slaves, and women" (67). To overstress that Islam is a discriminatory male-dominating religion, Lewis highlights that Islam assigns women "the worst-placed of the three" who never benefit from Islam (67).

The conception of Islam as the main threat to the Judeo-Christian Western civilization is a dominant one in Lewis's Orientalist discourse. In *Covering Islam*, Said points out that Lewis's Orientalist representation of Islam is based on the assertion that "Islam is danger to the West" (xxxiv). For instance, Lewis, in "The Roots of Muslim Rage", emphasizes that Islam is based on the idea of refusing the 'Other'. Therefore, Western civilization is perceived as "evil" and non-Muslim Westerners as "enemies of God" (48). Lewis argues that Muslims, throughout history, always define themselves as God's armies, which shoulder the responsibility for fighting the evil West, God's enemy. He states that according to Muslims' antagonistic civilization "the army is God's army and the enemy is God's enemy. The duty of God's soldiers is to dispatch God's enemies as quickly as possible to the place where God will chastise them—that is to say, the afterlife" (49).

Affected by the hatred discourse of Lewis on Islam and Muslims, along with the different antagonistic intellectual publications and media statements released after 9/11 about them, many American neo-Orientalists have tended to emphasize the American myth that all Muslims are radical terrorists. Although the terrorist attacks of 9/11 were claimed to be committed by a small group of radical Muslims, neo-Orientalists represent these attacks in their discourse, and especially the literary canon, as a collective attitude of all Muslims. Hence, they emphasize that Muslims, on the whole, hold a bloody scheme to destroy the entire American society. In 2009, this assertion became more persistent when Brian Michael Jenkins produced his famous neo-Orientalist book *Will Terrorists Go Nuclear?* Jenkins introduces a terrifying image of Muslims to the American public. He argues that Muslims will destroy American society if they own the nuclear weapon,

"if they get their hands on a nuclear weapon, they will use it without hesitation" (278). As a result, the American government, along with the oriented public, stresses the fact that putting Muslims under control, or even vanquishing them is an inescapable necessity.

One of the principle stereotypical images that many neo-Orientalists propagandize, in their cultural discourse upon Muslims, is that they are all radical extremists. To this end, they tend to investigate the dimensions of the concept of *Jihad* in Islam, depending on their limited knowledge or the traditional distorted biased Western understanding of the Islamic teachings and heritage. It can be said that Samuel P. Huntington is one of the main American intellectuals who emphasizes the distorted image of Muslims, in the post 9/11 era, as *Jihadists* who aim at killing nations who adhere to different religions or civilizations, under the umbrella of the concept of martyrdom. In this respect,Amal AL-Leithy opines that post 9/11 American culture portrays Jihad as "Islam's justification for war and violence" (207).

It must be pointed out that the neo-Orientalist aggressive discourse on Muslims has augmented the sense of *Islamophobia* in both American and international socio-political contexts. *Islamophobia* can be defined as the extremist form of prejudice against Islam and Muslims. In *The Fear of Islam* (2019), Todd H. Green defines *Islamophobia* as "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). Hence, it can be presupposed that *Islamophobia* is an ideological institution which is predicated on excessive discriminatory actions and antagonistic attitudes towards Islam and Muslims. In terms of discrimination and antagonism towards Islam and Muslims, many terms that are regarded as synonymous for*Islamophobia*, such as Muslimophobia, anti-Muslims, anti-Islamism, demonization of Islam, and neo-Orientalism.

**Islam as a Threat and Muslims as Violent *Jihadists* in Updike's *Terrorist***

Updike's *Terrorist* is one of the initial responses to the terrorist attacks of 9/11. This, in turn, places it as one of the most significant literary works not only in American but also in the Western literary canon. Therefore, it is meticulously reviewed and analyzed by different literary scholars and critics, in the world over.  In *The 9/11 Novel: Trauma, politics and Identity*, 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). This is because it sheds light on the changes that occur in American society in the post 9/11 era. Furthermore, Jit Pal Aggarwal, in "Terrorism: Problem of Survival in John Updike's

Terrorist", assures that in *Terrorist* the reader "feels a unique experience" as "Updike deals with a global problem of terrorism that concerns the humanity and the people of America" (1). He adds that Updike "has selected a historical event with his visionary motive to explore the causes and the solution of the cancer of terrorism threatening the peace and stability of the world" (1). To this end, Kristiaan Versluys argues that Updike attempts to narrate his novel from the point of view of "the ultimate other" (16). He explains that the "centrality of his novel is related to the fact that, alone among several attempts by novelists to deal with the question of alterity in the context of global terrorism, it seeks fully to illuminate the viewpoint of the other" (16).

On the contrary, some literary and intellectual scholars argue that the novel merely follows the dominant polemical neo-Orientalist discourse which underscores that Islam is the typical threat to the West generally and the United States particularly and introduces Muslims as violent *Jihadists*. Although Updike never declares himself as a neo-Orientalist writer, Abdul Haseeb, in "The (Mis)Representation of Islam in John Updike's *Terrorist*" underscores that Updike, in *Terrorist*, demonstrates "his neo-Orientalist views regarding Islam and Muslims" (1084). He illuminates that Islam to Updike "essentially does not have a wider scope; it is non-inclusive in nature and essentially a fanatic religion" (1084). Moreover, Muhammad Farooq and Sajid Ali cast fierce criticism on Updike's Terrorist. They accuse Updike of constructing a threatening image of Islam as a religion that instills "violent and terrorist teachings into the minds of his adherents and breeds violence in society" (43). They clarify that Updike, in this manner, intensely supports the stereotypical distorted portrayals of Islam as a religion of terrorism, and Muslims as violent *Jihadists*, propagandized in the post 9/11 era (43). Therefore, Geoffery Nash argues, "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 addition, Teresa Botelbo debates that in *Terrorist* "readers are taken to place of discomfort and uncertainty" as "they are asked to imagine positions and viewpoints they find inimical" (24).

*Terrorist* begins with an important monologue by the protagonist Ahmed, the new adherent of Islam, in which his extreme hatred and antagonism towards American society are exposed. Ahmed expresses his intense distrust and hatred to American society and its moral values. The first word that encounters the reader in the novel is "Devils" (3). In *John Updike: A Critical Biography*, Bob Batchelor opines, "Updike captures the conflict within Ahmed early in the novel. The reader's first interaction with the character is what the teen internalizes "Devil"" (180).

Depending on the long-established Orientalist conception of Islam as an anti-modern, anti-democratic, undeveloped civilization, Updike views Ahmed as a retarded person who cannot cope with American modern and democratic civilization. Ahmed believes that the American values and codes aim at demonizing Islam and its values. Therefore, he thinks that these evil values constitute the main danger to his Islamic beliefs "These devils seek to take away my God" (*Terrorist* 3). Although he is raised in American society and taught under the American modern educational system, Ahmed's Islamic tendency hinders him to accept the 'Other'. He cannot feel familiar with the deeds of his peers "All day long, at Central High School, girls sway and sneer and expose their soft bodies and alluring hair…Boys strut and saunter along and look dead-eyed, indicating with their edgy killer gestures and careless scornful laughs that this world is all there is" (3)

Updike introduces Ahmad, at the beginning of the novel, as an adolescent who holds deep hatred and antagonism to American society without giving the reader any account of Ahmad's personal life. After a few pages, the reader is giving a description of Ahmed in which Updike's Orientalist tendency is uncovered. Updike narrates, "Ahmad himself is the product of a red-haired American mother, Irish by ancestry, and an Egyptian exchange student whose ancestors had been baked since the time of the Pharaohs in the muddy rice and flax fields of the overflowing Nile" (10). James Wood, in his long essay "Jihad and the Novel", criticizes Updike's description of Ahmad as a "lofty genealogy" which he asserts, "it is an extraordinary example of air Orientalism" (Wood). He clarifies his point of view by stating, "the sentence combines baking and mud, clumsily manages to imply that the ancestors were somehow baked in mud, Egyptian bog people!" (Wood).

As the reader goes into the novel, he finds out more about Ahmad's character. The reader discovers that Ahmad is a victim of his father's irresponsibility. Omar Ashmawy, Ahmad's father, suddenly abandons the family when he is a three-year-old child leaving him with his mother, Teresa.  Since then, Ahmed and his father never have any contact together; he even does not know whether he is alive. This is evident when Ahmed introduces his father to the reader "His name was—is; I very much feel he is still alive— Omar Ashmawy" (27). In the novel, Updike indicates to the reader that because Ahmed is raised up as a fatherless child, he strives to find anyone to compensate for the lack of his father when he becomes an adolescent. In Ahmad's journey of searching for someone to fill in the role of a father in his life, he falls into the trap of Shaikh Rashid. Bob Bachelor denotes "as a young Muslim, Ahmed turns to his strict religious training for answers, even though he does not

believe that his teacher, Shaikh Rashid, holds God as close to his heart as he does. Bachelor argues that as a result of Shaikh Rashid's terrorist beliefs "Ahmad determines that American society is evil" (180).

Updike creates the character of Omar in a sense to offer stereotypical images of Muslims, especially Arab Muslims, as dishonest and unreliable people. He explains that Omar suddenly abandons the family leaving them even without any financial support. This proves to what extent Updike tends to misrepresent Omar as an irresponsible, savage, and opportunist Arab Muslim. Phrased differently Updike, influenced by the neo-Orientalist outlook, represents Omar as a character who is highly affected by the ills of the Arab Islamic civilization. To this end, Omar is depicted as a person who manages his life according to the conception of ends justifies means. To Omar, Teresa is the tool he uses to maintain good living conditions in American society during his scholarship; Teresa "would gain him American citizenship, and so it did" (*Terrorist* 27). Therefore, after achieving his aim, Teresa becomes no longer beneficial.

The conception is that Islam is based on the idea of refusing the non-Muslim 'Other' is overstressed in *Terrorist in*, many instances. For example, Ahmed believes that Muslims are the only people who have the right to speak of virtue and moral values as they are adherents of the true religion of God, namely Islam. On the Other hand, non-Muslims cannot be granted this right as they are imprisoned in materialistic values and immoral beliefs. This is evident in his description of the non-Muslim teachers. He describes his teachers as "week Christians and nonobservant Jews" who "make a show of teaching virtue and righteous self-restraint, but their shifty eyes and hollow voices betray their lack of belief . . . they lack true faith; they are not on the Straight Path" (3). According to Ahmed's perspective, every aspect of American society is controlled by materialistic desires. He accuses his teachers of being "paid to say these things" by the government (3). Ahmed believes that the American society is full of a heap of unreal images, and thus people who live in this wicked materialistic society turn out to be "slaves to images" (3).

The clash between western and Islamic civilization is one of the main topics investigated in *Terrorist*. On many occasions in the novel, Updike highlights the neo-Orientalist conception of Islam as an antagonistic religion that inspires its followers to hold hatred and hostility towards the western 'Other' and its civilization. Updike signals that Ahmad, living under the umbrella of Islamic teachings, begins to define every aspect of American society according to Islamic antagonistic codes and values, which identifies the 'Other' as an enemy. Ahmad perceives the American society as a corrupted entity as it is far away from Islamic spirituality.

According to him, American society is based on two main principles: secularism and materialism. These two hideous principles, in turn, place the American society and its values as a threat to Islam and its spiritual teachings. Sheikh Rashid teaches Ahmad that Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) was a materialist "The Prophet himself was a merchant. Man never wearies of praying for good things, says the forty-first sura" (116). Yet, he assures Ahmad that the Prophet's materialism is completely different from American materialism. According to him, Prophet Muhammad's materialism is limited as it is spiritually controlled, whereas American materialism is unlimited as it is secularly supported. Thus, Ahmed believes that the American social and economic codes drive American to be selfish materialistic individuals "All America wants of its citizens, your President has said, is for us to buy—to spend money we cannot afford and thus propel the economy forward for himself and other rich men" (55).

Updike underscores that Islamic spirituality blindly drives Muslims to take irrational decisions. This is evident in Ahmad hasty and irrational decision of leaving his high school although Levy, his school counselor, assures him that he must continue his education as he is a brilliant student "I just thought, boys like you—bright, obedient—go for more education" (163). Yet, Ahmad's words shock his counselor "People have suggested it, sir, but I don't feel the need yet." Ahmed believes that education weakens his faith; it separates between him and God. He thinks that the more he is educated, the more he is encountered with the ills of American society "More education, he feared, might weaken his faith. Doubts he had held off in high school might become irresistible in college. The Straight Path was taking him in another, purer direction" (163).

In *Orientalism*, Said pinpoints that Orientalists frequently construct stereotypical portrays of Islam and Muslims as "irrational, menacing, untrustworthy, anti-Western, dishonest, and – perhaps most importantly prototypical" (207). Following the traditional Orientalist stereotypical representations, Updike overstresses that Islam, unlike Western Civilization, is against any sort of progress, civilization, and modernity. Therefore, it drives its adherents to be irrational and backward entities. Otherwise stated, Updike pictures Muslims as a herd controlled by Islamic retardation and ignorance. Updike illuminates that the more Ahmad becomes a devoted Muslim, the more his antagonism towards Western culture increases. Ahmed believes that "the college track exposed [him] to corrupting influences—bad philosophy and bad literature. Western culture is Godless" (29). From Ahmed's Islamic perspective, because Western culture is "Godless" it is "obsessed with sex and luxury goods" (29).

The neo-Orientalist conception of Islam, which emphasizes that it instills ill thoughts and hatred towards the non-Muslim 'Other' in the mindset and hearts of its adherents, is evident in Ahmad's attitude towards Jorlyeen, his Christian high school colleague. Updike demonstrates that after becoming a devoted Muslim, Ahmad's attitude towards her becomes completely negative because of two main reasons, which are mainly related to the Islamic hatred towards the 'Other' and retardation. First, Ahmad learns, in the mosque, that all non-Muslims are "unbelievers", so they are enemies that must be killed mercilessly "all unbelievers are our enemies. The Prophet said that eventually all unbelievers must be destroyed" (38). Second, he learns that "women are animals easily led…blind animals in a herd bumping against one another, looking for a scent that will comfort them" (9). It is clear, here, that Updike, in introducing the Islamic view of women, is highly affected by Bernard Lewis's misconception of women's status in Islamic civilization. As elaborated before, Lewis declares that women in Islam are considered inferior to all human beings; they are even inferior to the non-Muslim 'Others'.

Furthermore, the binary opposition between Islam and Christianity is underscored in Ahmed's relationship with his mother. Updike creates this relationship in a manner that overstresses the idea that Islam, unlike Christianity, is an intolerant religion. From his anti-Other and male-dominating Islamic perspective, Ahmed views his mother as "a trashy and immoral" woman as she is an adherent of Christianity (27). Tolerance and peace-loving traits of Christianity, however, is revealed in Teresa's attitude towards her son Ahmad when he becomes a Muslim. Updike signifies that although Teresa is Christian, she never shows any opposition to Ahmad's decision of converting to Islam "I've treated Ahmad as an equal since he was eleven, when he began to be so religious" (69). This also highlights the democracy and modernity of the American social context, which maintains the free choice of religion for each individual. Moreover, she emphasizes that she supports Ahmad to go to the mosque despite the cold weather "I encouraged him at it. I'd pick him up at the mosque after school in the winter months" (69).

In *Terrorist*, the mosque is represented as the typical place of terrorism; the place where humans turn to be inhuman; a place where Muslims turn to be terrorists. Updike writes the parts of the mosque, and the conversations held between Ahmed and Shaikh Rashid, the mosque's Imam, in a sense that over stresses the neo-Orientalist declaration that Islam is the main threat to American society. He emphasizes that the more Muslims become attached to Islam and its hideous teachings, in

mosques, the more they become terrorists. For instance, Shaikh Rashid teaches his followers that Americans are not the same as Muslims; they are not humans because they are not adherents to Islam. In one of his lessons to Ahmed in the mosque, Shaikh Rashid describes Americans as "cockroaches that slither out from the baseboard and from beneath the sink… [or] The flies that buzz around the food on the table, walking on it with the dirty feet that have just danced on feces and carrion" (59). He assures Ahmed that killing such insects, namely Americans, cannot by any means be considered a crime; it is rather an inevitable action to purify the world from their ills and dangers.

To highlight that Islam is an anti-democratic religion, Updike demonstrates that Muslims do not, by any means, have the right to show any sort of opposition to the Imam's opinions about non-Muslims, which assert that they are non-humans because they are not Muslims. Updike indicates that Islam plunders its adherent's freedom of opinion and expression. According to him, Muslims, under the umbrella of Islam, turn to be animal-like people because of the oppression and anti-democratic life they experience. This is demonstrated in Ahmad's reception of Imam Rashid's discourse on Americans. Although Ahmad does not believe that all Americans are feelingless insects, as they are unbelievers, he does dare to oppose the words of his Imam. Ahmed thinks that "Joryleen, though an unbeliever, did have feelings; they were there in how she sang, and how the other unbelievers responded to the singing" (60). Updike, however, reveals that Ahmed realizes well that he cannot express his thoughts freely "But it was not Ahmad's role to argue; it was his to learn, to submit to his own place in Islam's vast structure, visible and invisible" (60).

Fear of Islam, known as *Islamophobia*, largely occupies Updike's *Terrorist*. Saad Abd Saadoon and Wan Othman argue that Updike, in *Terrorist*, produces different fearful misrepresentation of Islam and Muslims depending on the concept of Islamophobia (1559). In constructing stereotypical images of Islam and Muslims, Updike depends on heightening the sense of *Islamophobia* in the reader's consciousness. Thus, he largely centers on the neo-Orientalist hypothesis that Islam encourages its adherents to hold a *Jihadist* agenda against the West generally, and the United States particularly. Amal AL-Leithy states that *Terrorist* "focus [es] all the while on the condemned concepts of Jihad and Martyrdom in Islam that lead to self-sacrifices" (203). The word *Jihad* turns to be a prominent one in the neo-Orientalist era; it becomes the definition of Islam. David Cook argues, "the word, [Jihad], entered into common usage in the United States in the wake of September 11, 2001" (1). He underscores that "politicians use it to conjure up terrifying

images of irrational foreigners coming to destroy American freedoms; religious figures use it to define Islam" (1).

The word *Jihad* is mentioned in the novel almost ten times; in every time Updike tends to highlight that violent *Jihad* against non-Muslims, namely killing them, is a central duty of every Muslim. Furthermore, he indicates that this is the main reason that places Muslims as the main threat to Americans "They are dangerous men. They wish to destroy America … It is Jihad" (114). As explained before, the declaration that Muslims are the main threat to the United States is the justification used by the American administration in the so-called 'War on Terror'. Accordingly, depicting the nature of Muslims, in different cultural and literary contexts, is a dominant feature in the neo-Orientalist age. Danielle Blab, in *Muslims of Interest: Practices of Racialization in the Context of the War on Terror*, underscores that "Muslims has been a distinguishing feature of the new millennium, which is frequently referred to as the post-9/11 era, defined by the so-called ─War on Terror" (1). In this respect, Updike represents the 'War on Terror' as a retaliation action taken by the innocent American administration against Muslims to protect its nation from the danger of Islam "What they expect, Americans to lie down flat under feet and make no self-defense" (*Terrorist*114).

In his attempt to offer a negative stereotypical image of Islam as a religion of violence and terrorism, Updike mentions many verses from the Noble Qur'an, which emphasize that Islam is based on the ideology of violent *Jihad* against non-Muslims. Amal Al-Leithy argues that *Terrorist* "buzzes with many verses from the Noble Qur'an which are quoted to emphasize a point or convince the protagonist, but all of them reveal a desperate need to get more knowledge of this book and study it in more" (205). She criticizes Updike of quoting "only the verses that tackle the issue of Jihad and martyrdom" (205). For instance, in convincing Ahmad that non-Muslims are unbelievers that must be killed, Shaikh Rashid recites:

> And who shall teach thee what the Crushing Fire is?
> It is God's kindled fire,
> Which shall mount above the hearts of the damned;
> It shall verily rise over them like a vault,
> On outstretched columns. (4-5).

To over emphasize the image of the Noble Qur'an as a text that preaches Muslims violence, hatred, and antagonism against the non-Muslim 'Others', almost all the verses Updike quotes in the novel contain words such as fighting and killing. Otherwise stated, Updike demonstrates that Noble Qur'an preaches to Muslims that they are God's soldiers who must

fight God's enemies, namely non-Muslims, under the conception of *Jihad* and martyrdom "He that fights for Allah's cause, the twenty-ninth sura says, fights for himself" (73). This distorted image of the Noble Qur'an is constructed to highlight the neo-Orientalist hypothesis that Islam is the main threat to Westerners. Geoffery Nash, in *Writing Muslim Identity*, argues that Updike, in *Terrorist*, constructs a distorted image of Noble Qur'an as a text, which supports terrorism. He underscores that Updike repeatedly reveals that Ahmad's "hatred of America and acceptance of a mission to blow up the Lincoln tunnel with a lorry-load of explosives is fired almost solely by ingestion of passages from Noble Qur'an taught him by a suave Mephistophelean Yemeni imam at the local mosque" (105).

In addition to representing the Noble Qur'an as a text of violence and terrorism, Updike constructs a distorted image of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) and his teachings. Following the dominant discourse of the age, Updike, in many instances in the novel, reveals that Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) is a typical terrorist whose teachings inspire his followers to hold a *Jihadist* agenda against non-Muslims. For example, Updike writes "The Prophet said that eventually all unbelievers must be destroyed" (53). He also indicates that Prophet Muhammad's teaching inspires Muslims to believe that God rewards committing martyrdom in the sake of killing unbelievers; such Muslims are on the "Straight Path" (86) of God. Even if they are physically dead, their souls are enjoying a delightful life in God's Heaven "Say not of those who are slain on God's path they are Dead; nay, they are Living!" (86).

**Conclusion**

The terrorist attacks of 9/11 have had a highly negative impact on the projection of Islam and Muslims in American culture. The attacks have resulted in the production of myriad of antagonistic discourses on Islam and Muslims, called neo-Orientalism. In their discourses, neo-orientalists construct distorted representations of Islam as the typical threat to American society, and Muslims as violent *Jihadists*, terrorists. It can be assured that the neo-Orientalist American discourse is the tool used by the American administration to justify its so-called 'War on Terror'. Following the dominant antagonistic neo-Orientalist discourses on Islam and its adherents, John Updike, in *Terrorist*, constructs different distorted misrepresentation of the nature of Islam and Muslims.

Through misrepresenting the mindset and attitude of Ahmad and Shaikh Rashid towards non-Muslims, Updike demonstrates that Islam is an anti-democratic, anti-modern, anti-Western and anti-American religion that supports violence and terrorism towards the 'other'. This, in turn, places it as a typical threat to the modern and democratic American society. In

addition, he constructs distorted portrayals of Muslims as violent, irrational, untrustworthy, intolerant, and opportunist people. Furthermore, Updike casts fierce criticism on the Noble Qur'an and the Prophet Muhammad's (PBUH) teachings. He emphasizes that Muslims' antagonism towards the non-Muslim 'Other' is inspired by the hate verses of the Noble Qur'an and the terrorist and violent teachings of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH), which encourage Muslims to kill non-Muslims, especially Americans, under the justification of violent *Jihad* against unbelievers. Consequently, John Updike's *Terrorist* can be largely considered as a typical neo-Orientalist novel; it follows the polemical neo-Orientalist American discourse that stereotypically misrepresents Islam as a threat to American society and Muslims as violent *Jihadists*, terrorists.

# References

"CNN.Com - Franklin Graham Conducts Services At Pentagon - Apr. 18, 2003". Edition.
        Cnn.Com, 2020,
        http://edition.cnn.com/2003/ALLPOLITICS/04/18/graham.pentagon/.
        Accessed 5 Jan 2021.

Abd Saadoon, Saad, and Wan Mazlini Othman. "Islamophobia as an Antithesis of Western
        Hegemony in John Updike's Terrorist." International Journal of English
        Literature and Social Sciences (IJELS) 4.5 (2019).

Aggarwal, Jit Pal. "Terrorism: Problem of Survival in John Updike's' Terrorist'." The Achievers
        Journal: Journal of English Language, Literature and Culture 5.4 (2020): 1-21.

Al-Leithy, Amal. "Stereotyping Islam: A Critical Study of Terror in John Updike's
        Terrorist." Engaging Terror: A Critical and Interdisciplinary
Approach (2009): 203-8.

Batchelor, Bob. John Updike: A Critical Biography. ABC-CLIO, 2013.

Blab, Danielle. Muslims of Interest: Practices of Racialization in the Context of the War on
        Terror. Diss. 2017.

Botelbo, Teresa. "Under His Skin: Reconstructing the Adolescent Longings of a Would-be
        Terrorist." European Perspectives on John Updike (2018): 13:27

Chomsky, Noam. Hegemony Or Survival?. London: Hamish Hamilton, 2003

Cook, David. Understanding jihad. Univ of California Press, 2015.

Corbett, Jessica. "The So-Called War On Terror Has Killed Over 801,000 People And Cost $6.4
        Trillion: New Analysis". Common Dreams, 2019,
        https://www.commondreams.org/news/2019/11/13/so-called-war-terror-
        has-killed-over-801000-people-and-cost-64-trillion-new-analysis.
        Accessed 5Jan 2020.

Farooq, Muhammad, and Sajid Ali. "Misrepresenting the 'self': Critical Discourse Analysis of
        Ahmad in Updike's Terrorist." ARIEL-An International Research
        Journal of English Language and Literature 28 (2018).

Green, Todd H. The fear of Islam: An introduction to Islamophobia in the West. Fortress press,
        2019.

Haseeb, Abdul. "The (Mis) Representation of Islam in John Updike's Terrorist International
        Journal of English language and Literature in Humanities Volume V,
Issue VIII (2017).

Jenkins, Brian Michael. Will terrorists go nuclear? Prometheus Books, 2009

Keeble, Arin. *The 9/11 novel: Trauma*, politics and identity. McFarland, 2014.

Lewis, Bernard. "The roots of Muslim rage." The Atlantic Monthly 226.3 (1990): 47-60.

Lewis, Bernard. *What went wrong? the clash between Islam and modernity in the Middle East*.
        Harper Collins, 2003

Mishra, Pankaj. "The end of innocence." The Guardian 19 (2007): 4-6.

Nair-Venugopal, Shanta, ed. *The Gaze of the West and Framings of the East*. Springer, 2012.

Nash, Geoffrey. *Writing Muslim identity*. Bloomsbury Publishing, 2012.

Raudvere, Catharina. *Islam: an introduction*. Bloomsbury Publishing, 2014.

Said, Edward W. *Covering Islam: How the media and the experts determine how we see the rest
        of the world (Fully revised edition)*. Random House, 2008.

---. *Orientalism*, Penguin, 2003.

Smith, Julianne, and Thomas M. Sanderson, eds. *Five years after 9/11: an assessment of
        America's war on terror*. CSIS, 2006.

Updike, John. *Terrorist*. epub ed., Ballantine Books, 2007

Versluys, Kristiaan. *Out of the Blue: September 11 and the Novel*. Columbia University Press,
        2009.

Wood, James. "Jihad And The Novel". The New Republic, 2006,
        https://newrepublic.com/article/64175/jihad-and-the-novel. Accessed 31 Dec 2020.