Exploring John Updike’s “Terrorist” as a Neo-Orientalist Narrative of the Arabo-Islamic World

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Abstract

The present study aims at exploring John Updike’s “Terrorist”, as a Neo-Orientalist account of the Muslims, especially the Arabs. In fact, there has been an age long strife between the West and Islam dating back to the Crusades. The ideology which propelled the crusaders was based on the binary of ‘us’ versus ‘them’. The Western rulers, clergy, missionaries, merchants and writers would tend to view Islam and Muslims through their myopic lens and built an exotic, strange albeit distorted image of Islam and Muslims in their accounts. These accounts influenced the representations of the Muslim and Islamic World in the scholarly discipline of Orientalism significantly.

The study underpins that orientalist representations of the Muslims as barbarians, inert, unprogressive and an imminent to danger to world peace, are still very much a part of the contemporary world. This re-incarnation of orientalist thinking is termed as Neo-Orientalism in the post-colonial parlance. Many literary works published in the wake of 9/11 echoes this Neo-Orientalist thinking. Updike’s famous novel ‘Terrorist’, which was published in 2006, has been chosen as a specimen text to this effect. The critical appraisal of the narrative, particularly the depiction of Muslim characters, through application of the methodology of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) on the lines enunciated by Huckin, suggests that Updike has adopted a Neo-Orientalist approach by creating and fortifying the so called binary of West and Islam, and portrayed them as irreconcilable entities. Instead of bridging the gulf between the West and the Muslim World, the narrative is likely to create further chasm between the two.

Key Words: Orientalism, Neo-Orientalism, Discourse, Identity, Reductionism, Stereotype

Introduction

Throughout the course of human history, the dominant forces in the society have been fabricating pseudo binaries in order to legitimize their domination and control over ‘others’. These binaries, inter-alia, stipulate that the ‘others’ are incapable, unprogressive, weak and are always in dire straits to be controlled and guided by those superior to them. One of such binaries is the ‘West-and-Islam’ binary which has been critically and exhaustively explored by Said (1979) in his work Orientalism.

In fact there has been an age long strife between the West and Islam dating back to the Crusades. As per Chew’s study: ‘In medieval and early modern Europe, Christian identities were constructed in opposition to Islam, Judaism or heathenism. Above all, it was Islam that functioned as the predominant binary opposite of and threat to Christianity’, Loomba (1998).

Alam (2006) aptly remarks that,

“European writers presented Islam as a Christian heresy, a devil-worshipping religion…militarist cult crafted for Bedouin conquests”. The subsequent scholars of Renaissance and Enlightenment period, he further says, added something more which portrayed such a tainted picture of Islamic societies that was marked by despotism, fatalism, fanaticism, irrationality and unknowingly hostile to scientific advancement. This frame of mind impelled the Europeans, after they gained military might, to colonize Muslim countries.

Literally speaking, Orientalism refers to a scholarly discipline which aims at study and artistic depiction of the Orient. From the perspective of Post Colonial Studies, however, Orientalism is “a manner of regularized (or Orientalized) writing, vision, and study, dominated by imperatives, perspectives, and ideological biases ostensibly suited to the Orient”, Said (1979). Orientalism is not a static phenomenon rather a mindset with shifting perspectives, keeping itself abreast with the changing geo-political milieu. After the World War II, Orientalism appeared in the new garb of Neo-Orientalism. In fact, it was not a new thesis about Islam but a repackaging of the old version of Orientalism, vociferously targeting only Islam and its followers. Under the patronage of Bernard Lewis, the new Orientalists propound that Islamic societies have failed to keep pace with the changes happening around them and that Islam’s commandments about an intrinsic interplay of politics and religion and politics renders it irreconcilable with modern democratic values. Further, Islam does not give due rights to the women and minorities. This though-wave gained significant momentum after 9/11 when a number of literary works appeared, based on Neo-Orientalist ideology, including Updike’s “Terrorist”, which echoes Neo-Orientalist ideology right from the beginning till end.

The entire plot of the novel revolves around a muslim youth ‘Ahmad’, the protagonist of the novel. Mosque is the place, which provides Ahmad a place to attain equanimity and peace of mind. Shaikh Rashid, another Muslim character in the
novel, is the guide and mentor of Ahmad. He teaches Ahmad Quran and interprets Prophet Muhammad’s hadiths. Ahmad considers himself to be a staunch believer of the teachings of Quran and Prophet Muhammad’s hadiths, even a rank higher than his mentor Shaikh Rashid in terms of belief.

At home, he has his mother named Teresa Mulloy. She is an Irish-American. Though brought up with Catholic background, she has given up religion, takes little care of Ahmad and displays openness towards sexuality having frequent relationships with men. Ahmad strongly dislikes her due to her promiscuity. Instead he adores his father, who was an immigrant from Egypt and after marrying with his mother, left them when Ahmad was three years old.

Jack Levy is Ahmad’s career counselor and also develops love affair with Ahmad’s mother as the story progresses. He is a Jew by origin and initially visits Ahmad’s home to persuade him to abandon the career of truck driver he intends to choose. Jack Levy is also skeptical of religious dogmas and has given up practicing his religion. He is a melancholic type of character typifying traditional Jewish cynicism and depression. He, too, is a strong critic of American culture, but unlike Ahmad who attributes the faults in American culture due to its aloofness from God, he considers it a natural outcome of historical events and human rapacity.

Ahmad also dislikes academic studies which, in his opinion, nurture secular values and beliefs. He prefers to become a truck driver, as driving is practical skill. He chooses this career on the instructions of his Shaikh. His decision to become a truck driver ultimately leads him to become a part of a terrorist mission, which aims at blowing the Lincoln tunnel under the Hudson River, to destroy American infidels.

Ahmad is so much convinced of the validity and righteousness of his mission that he is ready to sacrifice his life as a suicide bomber to create mass destruction and win the Will of God. On the stipulated day when the attack is to be made, Ahmad’s accomplices are, however, not found at the meeting place. But Ahmad proceeds on his suicide mission by escaping the federal agents.

Meanwhile, Jack Levy, having come to know through his sister-in-law about the terrorist plot, intercepts Ahmad before he gets on the highway with his bomb-laden truck. He accompanies Ahmad into the Lincoln Tunnel convincing Ahmad to abandon his suicide mission.

He tells Ahmad that the terrorist conspiracy was maneuvered by the Government and that his friend and accomplice Charlie Chehab, who in fact was an agent of CIA, has been beheaded by those involved in the plot after knowing his identity. He also confesses that there has been an affair between him and Ahmad’s mother for the past several months.

Just as they reach near the planned location, Ahmad starts to review his interpretation of the teachings of Islam. He comes to understand that God has not ordained to kill innocent persons, and abandons the suicide mission. He along with Jack comes back to New Jersey through Manhattan.

Literature Review

Updike’s “Terrorist” was published in 2006. Like any other literary work, Terrorist has also attracted reviews both positive and negative. The reviewers who are against the book don’t find fault with the subject matter, but with the portrayal of Ahmad’s character, which lacks credibility.

Stufflebeam (2006) opines that, “John Updike’s Terrorist is a thriller born of the headlines we read every day. It is the story of the making of a terrorist, sans moralizing and sentimentality.”

All of Updike’s characters are so genuine, each with good and bad qualities, that I wasn’t certain which one of them was going to be the terrorist for at least the first third of the novel, Stufflebeam (2006).

Miller (2006) regards Terrorist “a timely piece of contemporary literature that is well-written and dense with observation and description. Updike takes readers into the mind of a terrorist and helps us understand the possible motivation and mindset of those involved in terrorism”.

According to Sweis (2006), “John Updike’s new novel, Terrorist, released a few weeks ago in the United States, is selling like “hot cakes”. Perhaps it became an instant best-seller because it is a John Updike novel. Or perhaps because the life and mind of a terrorist fascinates Americans.”

In an interview with Charles McGrath of the New York Times, Updike (2006) stated that he originally contemplated creating “a young seminarian who sees everyone around him as a devil trying to take away his faith…. The 21st century does look like that, I think, to a great many people in the Arab world…. I think I felt I could understand the animosity and hatred which an Islamic believer would have for our system.”

There seems to be little doubt about Updike’s intentions which urged him to contribute something towards the cause of his community but the territory in which he ventures into, is alien to his own bailiwick so he doesn’t fare well. The flaws have been noted by some critics. According to Badar Sheikh (2006), “A limp bitterness languishes in the narrator’s attempts at omniscience. Ahmad is given a monotonous identity, and a childlike peevishness that leads him to volunteer for the bombing mission. It is as though Updike took the CNN sketch of a Terrorist: America-hater, consumerism-intolerant, marginalized Muslim-American, and added inadaptable muscle and bone to lifeless cells.

According to Mathé (2006), “The sad truth is that, in Terrorist, Updike’s empathy does not carry him quite far enough to become the voice and suffering…of his teenage protagonist.” Like other narratives propagating Neo Orientalist ideology,
Updike’ *Terrorist* is also instrumental in altering the perceptions of Western people about Islam and the Muslims. It seems as if Updike has made it his mission to apprise the Western readers, says Deyab (2006), “that any political, historical, and scholarly account of Muslims must begin and end with the fact that Muslims are Muslims: violent, intolerant, and life haters”.

My point of departure at this juncture is that Updike seems to be induced by a genuine desire, like that of Joseph Conrad in the *Heart of Darkness* about a century ago, to debunk the shallowness and seamy side of his own society; however, while doing so he could not do away with his ideological and cultural biases which marred the character portrayal of Ahmad, making it a replica of what Western media is presenting now-a-days about the Muslims, associating terrorism with Islam and making it a Muslim monopoly.

The problem with both these zealous volunteers is that they were obsessed with some preconceived notions about the subject matter they chose to contemplate upon to slake their desire. Conrad, while writing about the Africa in the *Heart of Darkness*, imported certain images about the distant land and its inhabitants, especially those in the wake of the period called the “Scramble of Africa”, which he referred to in an essay as “the vilest scramble for loot that ever disfigured the history of human conscience and geographical exploration.”. Undoubtedly, Conrad was far ahead of his contemporaries when pointing out the evil aspects of colonialism, but the cultural and racial biases accompanied him throughout the narrative. “Conrad’s genius allowed him to realize that the ever-present darkness could be colonized or illuminated – *Heart of Darkness* is full of references to the mission civilatrice, to benevolent as well as cruel schemes to bring light to the dark places. (Said, 2004: 516)

The racial and cultural biases of Conrad were fist exposed by the Chinua Achebe in a lecture he delivered at the University of Massachusetts in 1975. He says that, “*Heart of Darkness* projects the image of Africa as ‘the other world’, the antithesis of Europe and therefore of civilisation ”. Though Conrad embarked upon a noble mission yet the he could not got rid of pre-conceived notions and assumptions of the Africa and its inhabitant. To him the earth seemed “prehistoric that wore the aspect of an unknown planet, and its inhabitants some mysterious creatures.

The counter arguments in favour of Conrad holds that Conrad was merely ridiculing the ‘civilizing’ mission in Africa; that he was pointing out the decaying European values and was not sympathetic to European characters either. That Marlow was a fictional character and should not be identified with Conrad, who was an anti-imperialist.

Whatever noble aim had Conrad before him, he cannot be condoned of the racial and ideological biases in *Heart of Darkness*. The obvious reason for these biases, which led to myopic representation of the Africans by Conrad, is that Conrad had not a long and detailed contact with the people he was writing about and he has to rely mostly on second hand knowledge.

The same is the case with Updike in *Terrorist*. He also sets out to criticize the decaying values and shallowness of the American capitalist society through Ahmad, but falls prey to his own ideological and cultural biases about Islam and the Muslims. His portrayal of the Muslim characters and distorted interpretation of Quranic verses and Islamic precepts render the narrative a myopic representation.

Updike does not seem to have anticipated the aftermath of such representation which tends to supplement the already prevalent Western thought-wave about Islam and the Muslims. Said, however, was well aware of the imminent danger of such biased representations when he says that “to demonize and dehumanize a whole culture on the grounds that it is ‘ennrged’ at modernity is to turn Muslims into the objects of a therapeutic, punitive attention”.

**Methodology**

*Words carry and reflect interests of those who speak them. The words of those who wield power in society are taken as authoritative and authenticated whereas the words of less privileged class are considered without having any substance. So there is a binary of dominant and marginalized discourse.*

The dominant discourse is primarily focused on interpreting the conditions and issues to support the cause of the elites and takes the discourse of marginalized people as a challenge to cope with. In order to unveil the tacit assumptions in the dominant discourse, CDA is the most appropriate methodology. CDA deals with study and analysis of the written texts, spoken words and any form of lingual expression to debunk the discursive sources of power, dominance, inequality, and bias. It sheds light on how the elite class in the society constructs pseudo versions of reality that suits to their vested interests, and uncovers the hidden assumptions — ideological and cultural — muffled in the written text or oral speech.

Since CDA is not a specific direction of research, it is not a single and autonomous theoretical framework rather seen as a shared perspective encompassing a range of approaches.

For the current study, the approach and methods enunciated by Huckin (1997) have been applied on the lines worked out by McGregor (2004). In this context: first, the selected text of ‘Terrorist’, has been read as an ordinary reader without raising any queries; which, in the words of Price (2002), is engagement without estrangement. It requires submission to the power of text by ignoring one’s own position and offering unquestioned support of the status quo.

The second reading has been done with a critical eye, which involved revisiting the text at different levels, raising questions about it, imagining how it could have been constructed differently.
Then, as Huckin (1997) says, the next stage involved looking at what kind of perspective the writer [Updike] is presenting. This is called framing. It involves synchronising the details to form a coherent whole to give a unified impression. This includes focussing on topicalization, agency, nominalization, presupposition, insinuations, connotations, etc.

The selected excerpts from the text of “Terrorist” have been analyzed by dovetailing the above referred three steps so as to deduce meaningful inferences, which have been discussed as follows.

**Analysis and Discussion**

The first impression we get after reading the narrative is that Ahmad is a misguided and de-tracked youth. His religious beliefs are responsible for his rigid outlook, which is incompatible with the contemporary thinking of the modern world. We also tend to be sympathetic with Ahmad whose religious beliefs are exploited for terrorist activities. We feel a strong dislike for his mentor Shaikh Rashid who is using Ahmad for his nefarious designs. Similarly we also hold a negative view of Ahmad’s father who left his family when Ahmad was only three. On the other hand, Jack Levy, in spite of his extra-marital affair with Ahmad’s mother, wins our sympathy when he convinces Ahmad abandon his suicide mission.

Upon close scrutiny, it reveals that all the Muslim characters in the narrative, with few exceptions, are presented intolerant, anarchists and hostile to democratic values. They are mere stereotypes and reduced to monolithic entities. Though their appearances and ethnicities differ yet they share the same religious commonalities; they are naïve, fanatics, fundamentalists and incompatible with the modern world. They are not representing themselves; it is the narrator who is representing them before the readers. They lack substance. They are puppets whose strings are in the hands of Updike.

Their mouths are filled with the words which are very tantalizing and express the mindset of American media, like, “True believers believe in Jihad...they believe...in action. They believe that something can be done...they believe that a billion followers of Islam need not have their eyes and ears and souls corrupted by the poisonous entertainments of Hollywood and a ruthless economic imperialism whose Christian-Jewish God is a decrepit idol, a mere mask concealing the despair of atheists.”

The tug of war between the dominant and marginalized elements in the society is perennial. This tussle is waged along binaries created by the dominant forces on the terms and conditions determined by the elite.

The tragic incident of 9/11 not only rendered the entire American nation shell-shocked but also spurred writings on the various implications of this incident. Since the characters involved in this incident were Muslims, all the writings, discussions and reviews were directed towards Islam and the Muslims holding them responsible for the incident as well as an imminent danger to the modern world and civilization. Whether the incident was pre-planned or it was really hatched and executed by the Muslims, is still a mystery and it is not yet conclusively established that these were executed by the Muslims, though the Western media – electronic as well as print – is adamant and propagating that the Muslims are solely responsible for this.

The lopsided view of Western media set the line of thinking of many a person who delved into the causes and effects of the tragic incident; literary artists were no exception. The incident, as construed and portrayed by the neo-orientalists further fortified the already emerging binary of “us” versus “them” and divided the world into two poles.

Some thoughtful thinkers are, however, cognizant of the fact that this one-way traffic would ultimately lead to further dividing the people of the world instead of bridging the gulf. Alastair Crooke (2006) rightly says that the war on terror has transformed Orientalism, from a European perspective of modernity that could be used to ‘domesticate; the non-Westerners, into a program that erects a boundary between ‘Civilization‘ and ‘the new Barbarism.’

However, not all the thinkers thought this way. Majority of them tuned themselves with the media chorus and tried to ascribe all their interpretations of the event with the Muslims and Islam. Unfortunately, Updike also trod the same path.

Having extensively written on local / social issues, Updike contemplated upon environmental and ideological factors contributing towards making of home-grown terrorists. These are the environmental factors, Updike thinks, which are responsible for the teenagers’ adopting the very dangerous path leading to the colossal loss of life and property. However, Updike’s focus on a Muslim youth who chooses the path of a suicide bomber strongly influenced by the teachings of his religious teacher, leaving aside terrorists elements from other factions of society, tends to make the narrative a myopic representation, which is unbecoming of an accomplished artist.

There is no doubt that religious issues matter a lot. The persons involved in the 9/11 incident were all Arab Muslims. But Updike’s efforts to base all of his findings on the religious and ideological differences only, simply reflects that he was oblivious of the real causes of the rage which Arabs and the Muslim world feel for contemporary imperialism, of which US is the sole leader and torch bearer. The terrorist acts of 9/11 cannot be justified in any context but need to be investigated and explained in detail; Updike foregoes a serious and rational attempt well before writing his book.

It is a special characteristic of capitalism that anything which becomes a public demand, it turns it into an industry flourishing on the ever increasing demand of its products. The same happened after 9/11. Reporting about and coverage of Islam at once became an industry dealing in engineered images, reports, messages and scenes.

Due to fast means of communication, the world has squeezed into a global village. If any important event happens the question is not frequently asked what are its reasons or factors behind that event rather how the media reports this incident and how it is captured by camera.
Media is no more an objective tool reflecting what is actually happening around or contemplating upon the root causes. Its role is not mere passive reporting about the events, rather it has become a tool of creating, manipulating and shaping what is being reported according to the policy and vested interests of those who are at the helm of affairs.

Take for example the era when Soviet Union invaded Afghanistan more than three decades ago. At that time Islam was not a significant concern for the West. It only existed in the peripheries of their consciousness.

It was an era of Cold War between two super powers of that time, USA and USSR; though USA, is still a super power and perhaps the only one after disintegration of Soviet Union. After invasion of Soviet Union, the Afghan mujahideen became heroes for the West confronting the Empire of Evil in Afghanistan. Islam seemed as an ally of the forces of freedom having its headquarters at New York and London.

When the Cold War was over and the Capitalist Block headed by USA defeated the Communist Block, headed by USSR, the same mujahideen went into background and treated as a waste paper by the West, thrown into the dustbin after use.

However, after 9/11 we see a drastic change in the Western perceptions about Islam and the Muslims. The Afghan mujahideen are now labeled as terrorists, though they are doing the same thing i.e. fighting against the foreign invaders. Since, they are not now allies of the Western powers, their label of freedom fighters has been stripped off and replaced with a newly, media-coined, label of terrorists and they are presented as enemies to the modern civilization and democratic societies.

The Muslim world comprises 57 countries. A large number of diversified geographic and cultural elements constitute the Muslim world. Some countries are wealthy and rich in natural resources. The standard of life of the citizens of these countries is also high as compared to other Muslim countries marred by inner turmoil and weak administration. Some states are liberal while some are conservative. In some countries there are democracies while others have dictatorial rule. Some countries provide enough freedom to the women in terms of jobs and roaming around while in some countries the environment is not so conducive for women.

But, this glaring mosaic of vast and varied constituents is absent from the coverage of Islam in the Western media. What is presented there about the Muslim are only accounts about bloody terrorists, chaotic mobs, mal-treated wives, confined daughters etc. This negative reductionism and superficial approach makes the entire picture distorted and bleak.

Thus the Muslim world assumes the status of an object, which is silent. It is spoken for by the reporter sent from the metropolis. One may point out that media reports what is already existing there. But things are not so plain and simple in the actual world. The reporting persons carry the agendas and designs of their employers to report about the situation in accordance thereof. The owners of large media corporations are not driven by some philanthropic feelings. They mean business and cash in during periods of crises by magnifying the issues after adding spicy additives.

Exactly the same thing happened after 9/11. It was reported in such a manner and style that all the clues were directed towards Muslims making them the only element responsible for the tragic incident. Not for a single moment, it was seriously thought about the possibility of that incident being an inside act. Of course, there were substantial counter evidences to support that only planes colliding against the twin towers could not make the towers fall yet the media carried on with a pre-planned reporting of the event. Setting aside the debate of whether it was an inside act or otherwise, the incident produced an environment for the people from all walks of life to see and analyze the incident from their own perspective.

Updike was no exception, and he comes up with his most coveted novel “Terrorist”, echoing the mainstream thought of the West about an intrinsic relationship between Islam and terrorism. What prompted Updike to venture into an unknown territory does not remain a mystery in view of the above preamble.

When so much ink is being spilled to explore and analyze the phenomenon of terrorism, it would have been appropriate to investigate the origin and implications of this phenomenon instead of executing a premature attempt provoked by the vicious media campaign as did Updike. The novel, thus, proves to be a Neo Orientalist narrative of the Arabo-Islamic world on the following grounds.

A New Binary “Us” Versus “them”

In the narrative, Updike creates a binary of what is American and what is non-American or, in other words, what is modern secularism and what is Islamic fundamentalism. In an interview, Updike said that “he was hoping to talk to America to address it and describe it to itself… The audience is America, your fellow Americans” (2006b).

According to Said (1979), “Everyone who writes about the Orient must locate himself vis-à-vis the Orient… this location includes the kind of narrative voice he adopts… to deliberate ways of addressing the reader, containing the Orient, and finally, representing it or speaking in its behalf.”

Updike locates himself opposite to Ahmad and speaks to his readers on behalf of Ahmad and other Muslim characters. Such representation, based on some pre-conceived notions about the subject, becomes mis-representation. Keshavarz aptly remarks that the Neo Orientalist narrative “reduces the contemporary Muslim Middle East to an uncomplicated black and white world of villains (usually Muslims) and victims (usually sympathizers with the west).”
Updike creates a number of binary oppositions in the narrative. For example there is a binary of devil versus God. For Ahmad, the Americans are “devils” who are trying to take away his God. The binary resonates throughout the narrative until the Eurocentric view holds the upper hand when Ahmad finally admits that these devils have taken away his God. Updike thus wants to assert the superiority of Western secular beliefs over fundamentals of Islam.

Then there is another conspicuous binary found in the narrative i.e. the binary of pragmatic and progressive West versus static Islam. Ahmad does not want to graduate into an “imperialist economic system rigged in favor of rich Christians”. It is Ahmad’s staunch religious beliefs and narrow approach which prevent him to continue his education into that system. On the contrary, he pins all his hopes of success in the life hereafter by consistently treading the ‘Straight Path’. “More education he feared, might weaken his faith…the Straight Path was taking him in another, purer direction”.

The underlying message being conveyed by Updike is that Islam is the only hurdle in the way of Muslim’s path towards educational and cultural advancement in the contemporary world. It advocates only that education which would equip them to destroy their enemies. Take for example, the words of Shaikh Rashid when he says, “It was Islam…that has preserved the science and simple mechanism of the Greeks when all Christian Europe has in its barbarism forgotten such things. In today’s world, the heroes of Islamic resistance to the Great Satan were former doctors and engineer, adepts in the use of such machines as computers and airplanes and roadside bombs”.

**Islam – The Greatest Threat to Modern Civilization**

The narrative tends to portray Islam as the greatest threat to modern civilization. Updike’s misrepresentation of Islam due to his limited knowledge and prejudice, echoes his ideological and psychological apprehensions, already present in the Western mind and termed as Islamophobia.

**Stereotyping and Negative Reductionism of Muslims**

Updike also tends to do stereotyping of Muslims and resorts to their negative reductionism in the narrative. His portrayal of Muslim characters is biased and lacks penetration, which is unbecoming of an accomplished artist. Most of the time the conversation of these characters seems a repetition of media rhetoric, which “repeatedly depicted Arabs as lacking democracy, unity and modernity…as having a common heritage of defeat, living in the past, moving rapidly toward fundamentalism”, Hashem (1995).

As for other characters, though they also have different religions and ethnicities like Teresa who is an Irish-American with catholic background, Levy is a Jew for whom “religion meant nothing”, Tylenol and Joryleen are African-Americans, yet they are given substantial presence.

This discriminate treatment is attributable to the fact that Updike had the first-hand knowledge of these people, whereas, in regard to Muslim characters, his knowledge was based on input obtained from other resources. The lack of accurate knowledge and exposure to the people and culture he was writing about prevented him from their true representation and what we get is mere stereotyping and negative reductionism. The after-effect of such representation, in the words of Palmer (1995), is that “such images become dangerous when they materialize in the complex social narrative and foreign policies enacted simultaneously on the world stage in the human mind and heart.”

**Dishonest and Unreliable Leadership**

The Muslim leadership at religious and home fronts is also depicted as dishonest and unreliable. It is Ahmad’s mentor Shaikh Rashid, the imam of a Mosque at New Jersey, who is responsible for inculcating in Ahmad a strong hatred for the non-believers and making him an intolerant person. Ahmad’s father Omar Mulloy is also portrayed as an unreliable person who left his family when they were in dire need of his support. It is noteworthy that nowhere in the narrative we find Omar Mulloy speaking for himself. He is only talked about by other characters throwing light on different aspects of his personality. He is shown as careless, irresponsible, opportunist and an escapist husband. His negative portrayal makes the readers visualize a bleak picture of Muslim husbands leaving their families at the mercy of circumstances.

Both Shaikh Rashid and Omar Mulloy are the personalities whom Ahmad idolizes and who have deep impact on his personality. Shaikh Rashid’s teachings are ingrained in Ahmad’s mind to such an extent that he is ready to sacrifice his life in a suicide mission.

On the other hand, we find a complete foil of both these characters in the form of Levy, Ahmad’s guidance counselor. He shows care and concern for Ahmad and convinces him to continue his study. It is Levy who successfully persuades Ahmad to abandon his suicide mission and prevents a catastrophe. He performs dual function; he provides practical guidance to Ahmad for a successful life and also exhibits his worry and paternal affection when comes to know that Ahmad’s involved in the suicide mission. He puts his own life in danger when he intercepts Ahmad on his way to the planned location of bomb blast. In spite of his being an atheist and having extra-marital affair with Ahmad’s mother, he is presented as an amiable character who wins the favour and sympathy of the readers.

Similarly, in regard to matrimonial relationship, though both the couples, Omar-Teresa and Levy-Beth got married with mutual consent, Omar Mulloy left his family out of personal reasons while Levy still continues to keep the wedlock despite the fact Beth does not provide him satisfaction and comfort.

The foregoing amply reflects that Updike portrays Muslim leadership as dishonest and unreliable while the people who are objects of hate for the Muslims prove contrary to their perceptions as being friendly, caring and dedicated.
The fanatic and Mindless American Muslim Youth

Updike portrays the American Muslim youth as fanatic and mindless. Two obvious examples are Ahmad and Charlie Chehab. His attempt to approach the recesses of a Muslim terrorist proves futile as he sets out with a pre-defined mindset.

Ahmad is presented as a prototype terrorist often presented by Western media. The gradual and logical development of events and situations making him the final product we observe is absolutely missing which make him a flat character that seems unrealistic. Similarly, Charlie Chehab, another young American-Muslim who has been “raised pure American”, and turns out to be a CIA undercover agent, presents the other extreme. He is patriotic but also sex-obsessed as well showing naivety and carelessness. To Levy, “he sounds like a loose cannon...his fatal mistake was to wait too long to spring his trap. He'd seen too many movies”

So there is no middle ground where any of the Muslim character is found standing. They have been presented always occupying pole positions. According to Trudy Bush (2006), a great weakness of the novel is that the only Muslim characters in it are this naive, oblivious boy and the people who manipulate him. It doesn't present Islam as a complex faith practiced by many kind and spiritual people who take part in ordinary life and are good citizens.

Conclusion

The epitome of the entire discussion entails that Updike’s Terrorist proves to be a neo-orientalist narrative of the Arabo-Islamic world. He follows the Neo Orientalists’ assumption about the Arab world as the new barbarians whose culture, above all, encourages violence whose cultures, rather than anything else, perpetuates violence.

Dag Tuastad (2003) has rightly said that the basic ideological assumptions of …Neo Orientalism, are consistent with the tenets of new barbarism, where violence is seen as deeply rooted in local culture, which means that political and economic situations and structures are irrelevant.

Terrorism, which is a global phenomenon and involves agents from various quarters of society and not Muslims only. It would surely be helpful to any reader with a balanced outlook to appreciate the multi-dimensions of terrorism across the world. It is only the better and accurate understanding of this issue that would help the people cope up with this menace which is dividing them into factions.

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DOI: 10.24297/jah.v4i5.4578