ORIENTALISM IN JOHN UPDIKE’S NOVEL TERRORIST

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ABSTRACT

One of the characteristics of American literature since September 11 has been its preoccupation with the discourse of terrorism as writers attempt to comprehend both the reasons and results of the terrorist attacks. The long history of antagonistic conflict between the West and Islam always re-surfaces in the outbreak of new atrocities, and literary responses to September 11 reflect this tendency. As we enter second decade after September 11, the response to September 11 has mostly been in the form of a discourse on terrorism. John Updike, a veteran novelist of great repute, tries to understand the reasons and results of terrorism. However, his efforts fail to engage effectively with the “Other” as he depends on Orientalist biases and stereotypes. The author’s work portrays individual terrorists as stereotypes of Muslims and then connects those stereotypes to a constructed discourse about Islam. His fictional terrorists’ individual actions are presented as manifestation of their backward and violent religion. These characteristics are then used to contrast with a progressive and enlightened West. The binaries Updike is building on, was anticipated in the theoretical field by Edward Said, the late Palestinian-American literary theoretician. Said states that Western discourse creates prejudices towards non-Western cultures by labeling them as the “Other.” He argues that this discourse continues to manifest itself after September 11. Based on Said’s Orientalism theory, the present paper analyzes John Updike’s novel TERRORIST’s depiction of Islam and Muslims.

STRUCTURED ABSTRACT

On September 11, 2001, terrorists hijacked four airplanes and carried out suicide attacks against targets in the United States. Planes were flown into the landmarks in America killing thousands of civilians,
which triggered major U.S. initiatives to combat terrorism and defined a new world order governed by discourses of Orientalism. Orientalist discourses intensified when the terrorists were declared the archenemies of Western democracy and its freedom. September 11 was presented as a viable and legitimate manifestation of the larger historical conflict between the two civilizations. This conflict was justified through the use of oppositions of an evil ‘Other’ whose only purpose was perceived as the annihilation of the West. Due to the attacks, the political discourse, the governmental responses, mainstream media and several theories re-emphasized the polarization of the world into two rival blocks of “us” versus “them” and “good” versus “evil”.

The discourses of a clash between Islam and the West were already available in Western discourse prior to September 11. Huntington’s theory of the ‘clash of civilization’ reemphasized hostility between two civilizations and anticipated a major cultural conflict between Islam and the West after the Cold War. The idea gained momentum in the post-Cold War era and reached its apogee at the turn of the century. With the dismantling of the Berlin Wall, the demise of the Soviet Union, and other events marking the end of Cold War, the West lost a chief rival, so the West felt that an alternative was needed. Islam was the perfect substitute that would fill the void vacated by the communist threat and became the primary source of danger for the democratic and civilized West. This fitted perfectly the well-established political dynamics, as there was no need for devising a new political trajectory for the new rival, and no need for dissolving the old myths and shaking the pieces of the West’s political puzzle because everything was to stay the same.

As a Palestinian activist and literary theorist, Edward Said formalized the binaries used to differentiate the East from the West with the theory of “Orientalism”. Drawing on Foucault and, to a lesser extent, Gramsci, Said’s theory became a devastating critique of how through the ages Western texts have represented the Islamic Middle East. His famous book Orientalism (1978), sketched a situation in which the West represents the East on the basis of its own values, thus creating a distorted image of it. Said’s theory also opposed the destructive discourses of conflict and the “Clash of Civilizations” theory. He argued that clashes are not between actual realities or histories, but constructed perceptions and outright lies. The purpose of such a representation was to enable the West to define itself in cultural, political, and psychological terms against its “contrasting image” (Said, 2003, p. 8). Said argued “the Orient is eternal, uniform, and incapable of defining itself; therefore, it is assumed that a highly generalized and systematic vocabulary for describing the Orient from a Western standpoint is inevitable and even scientifically objective” (Said, 2003, p. 75). In this manner, Orientalism can be viewed as “a Western style for dominating, restructuring, and having authority over the Orient” (Said, p. 3). For self-actualization and motivation, the Orientalist West used the characteristics of the East; whatever they are, we are not and the other way around, discarding any similarities there might be.

Using Orientalist principles, the ‘Other’ is characterized as primitive, non-progressive, and violent in order to provide for the projection of a civilized, progressive, democratic, and enlightened West. The West is active, creative, possessing agency and capable of generating
knowledge, whereas the Orient is passive, and object of Western study and, the concoction of the Western imagination. This racist legacy of Orientalism, which regards difference as a threat that must be stigmatized as innately different is an ideologically charged abstraction and the West needs it in order to exert its hegemony and domination. Such abstract ideas are disseminated through “a system of knowledge about the Orient... the knowledge is cursory and distorted because it derives from other abstractions circulated in the same discourse” (Said, 2003, p. xxii). Knowledge informs Western social and political discourse about the East and Islam, and Westerners absorb this textual attitude without any critical consideration. Such prejudiced attitudes have a pervasive influence in its outreach and received from the sources of power and hegemony. They involve aesthetic, scholarly, sociological, economic, philosophical and historical texts. The time period between the eighteenth and nineteenth century marks the systematic construction and development of the Orientalist discourse. Colonialist powers of the early twentieth centuries vigorously employed Orientalism in order to exploit large parts of the world during their colonial quests. As the United States became a world power, it automatically adopted this tradition, because the purpose to exploit was mutual. During the 90s and after the Cold War, Said states “there was an effort in the West to depict Islam as the new evil after the dismemberment of Russia” (Said, p. 355). This effort through the constant discourse of Orientalism met with “heightened intensity after September 11” (Said, p. 9). The present paper uses Edward Said’s Orientalism in order to establish the fact that certain September 11 novels follow Orientalism to portray an irrational, primitive, and despotic Islam against a rational, democratic and progressive West.

Unlike earlier research and critical approaches, this study investigates how a major September 11 novel treats the West – Islam conflict according to Orientalism. These discourses have transformed into more explicit and provocative levels due to the increasing nature of the conflict resulting from September 11. In this context, Orientalism has reconfigured from a subtle “textual attitude” into an explicit one that uses specific classifications to connect individual terrorists to their collective ideology. The analysis includes cultural, political, economic, and historical facts that have caused conflicts. John Updike’s novel Terrorist essentially portrays Islam as constantly trying to attack the West and that religion itself is inherently instilling violence. This is a perfect employment of strategies aimed to demonize the “Other” because it draws on much – trumpeted tropes about Islam in Orientalism to portray a religion of inherent violence and radical fundamentalism. The application of Orientalism is pertinent as the author relies on the political and scholarly discourse of the time, which according to Said, makes one an Orientalist.

The most striking aspect of Terrorist is its use of Orientalist binaries to delineate Islam and the West in opposition and creating the ‘Other’ through a vigorous use of othering and stereotyping. Islam is depicted as a backward and anti – modern religion, which hates the modern West. Another pattern portrays Islam as anti – West, which intensifies the West – Islam opposition. Closely related with the first two patterns, is the characterization of Muslims as inherently violent entities. Individual Muslims and collective Islam are represented as a monolithic identity of
defeat, revenge, and displacement. Later, Muslims are stereotyped as death–loving fanatics and violent jihadists. The other common stereotypes of Muslims are their fatalism, portrayal of Islam as a misogynist religion and Muslims as sensualists. The Western civilization is “us” which is under attack by Islam, the ‘Other’. This use of binary oppositions creates the rigid separation of one civilization from the other and identifies Islam with terrorism by establishing a connection of the September 11 terrorists with religion itself. The conflict between the West and Islam is minimized to Islam’s hatred and jealousy for the West’s unrestrained growth in the course of modernity. As Islam seems to be incompatible with the ideals of Western civilization, so Islam is presented as the problem itself.

**Keywords:** Orientalism, Islam, Civilization, Democracy, Stereotyping.

**JOHN UPDIKE’İN T ERRÖRİST ADLI E SERİNDE ŞARKİYATÇILIK**

**ÖZET**


**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Şarkiyatçılık, İslam, Medeniyet, Demokrasi, Tektipleştirme.
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Introduction

Orientalism, as a constructed discourse, is based on binaries. Using these binaries, the West engages with the Other. The image of the Other is created to help the West define itself as the “contrasting image, idea, personality, experience” (Said, 2003, 2) of that Other. The result is that the discourse always creates an inferior Other for control and self-realization. A superior, civilized and rational self is contrasted against an inferior, uncivilized and irrational Other. Once the relationship of power is created and established, the powerful can imperialize the weaker. Drawing upon Antonio Gramsci’s identification of hegemony as an indispensable concept for any understanding of cultural life in the industrial West, Said considers the same hegemony at work in a “collective notion of identifying ‘us’ European as against all ‘those’ non-Europeans” (Said, 2003, 7). The discourses of Orientalism, Colonialism and Imperialism are all based on such an unequal power relationship. Now the superior can take refuge under the excuse that they are bringing civilization to the uncivilized. Said gives an example of this practice by citing Lord Macaulay’s 1835 “Minutes” to the British Parliament asserting the presence of the British Empire on Indian soil so that the natives could learn from them (Said, 2003, 152). Postcolonial theorists agree with this idea of an unequal power relationship and the presence of an “othering” strategy in the discourse. Frantz Fanon, the most provocative critic of colonialism and advocate of decolonization, believes that colonialism divided the world into compartments by using binaries to create the Other, to “paint the native as a sort of quintessence of evil” (Fanon, 1963, 41) who must be colonized and reformed. HomiBhabha agrees with Fanon’s depiction of the other, arguing that in order to invade, occupy and establish systems of administration and instruction, the colonial discourse constructs the colonized as a “population of degenerate types” (Bhabha, 2006, 70). Said argues that the creation of the Orient or Islam is nothing more than an imaginary conceptualization of a contrasting Other. Said does not say that the Other does not exist, but his theory is mainly interested in the “internal consistency of Orientalism and its ideas about the Orient” (Said, 2003, 5). His theory does not engage with a correspondence between Orientalism and the Orient to find whether the image created is a true or false representation of the Orient, but engages with the discourse for its uniformities, continuities and strategies. He mentions the strategies employed by Orientalists: “everyone who writes about the Orient must locate himself vis-à-vis the Orient; translated into his text, this location includes the kind of narrative voice he adopts, the type of structure he builds” (Said, 2003,20).

The main focus of Said’s work is to theorize a constructed characterization of the East or the Orient and its people, the ideological and socio-cultural influences shaping such characterization, and the colonial or imperial objective behind such efforts. Said believes that Orientalism possesses a consistency in its representation of the East in Western discourse whose metaphysical binaries have divided the world into two dissimilar and unbridgeable halves or parts. The concept of the Orient in Western discourse is temporal as well as ideological (Said, 2003, 2). It is the geographical division of land as well as the ideological representation of that land and its people. The proponents of the invention in the nineteenth century were the British and the French who desired to control their economic and political aspirations in the East. The American empire of the twentieth century inherited this discourse from its predecessors and Orientalism has come to accommodate to the new imperialism of the United States by accepting uncritically their imperial design to control and dominate (Said, 2003, 322). Orientalism in America galvanized in the middle of the 20th century. Said traces the emergence of Orientalism in America after World War II. It became more explicit following the 1967 and 1973 Arab-Israeli wars. The subject of the Orient was readily taken up by social scientists in the American academia. In contrast to British and French Orientalism, American Orientalism avoided the study of literature and language, preferring to find its expression in administrative policy matters. Furthermore, American usage of Orientalism differed from British and French versions because of the deterritorialized nature of American empire, which meant that America mostly controlled things from a distance as opposed to the British and French empires,
which had actual territorial occupation of foreign lands. However, despite these different trajectories, Orientalism, is the “imperial impulse” of the nineteenth century Britain and France, was easily adopted by the U.S. (Said, 1993, 14).

Orientalism has continued within the discourse of terrorism after September 11 specifically because it has been seen as a peculiarly American issue with the attacks happening on American soil and the military responses provided by the U.S. administration and backed by Western allies. Spivak believes that Orientalism has become more significant after September 11 because the war on terror relies on the Western construction of terrorists as the “Other” (Baer, 2010, 54). Said agrees, arguing that the predominant theme in the discourse of Orientalism after September 11 is the equation of terrorism with a specific religion or culture, attaching terror to “religion and political abstractions and reductive myths that keep veering away from history and sense” (Said, 2013, 76). The discourse lacks in historical sense because it tries to look for justification for the killings of innocent people in ideologies inspired by cause, God or religion, rather than looking into concrete instances of exploitations, aggressions, occupations and interferences around the world and the U.S. role in them. Consequently, these “reductive myths” have reduced Islam and Muslims to monolithic entities of violence. A heterogeneous Muslim population around the world is stereotyped into a homogenous pack of radicals. These discursive endeavors involve a uniformed effort to reduce vast complexities of ‘West’ and ‘Islam’ to totalizing and misleading simplicities. If American literature is viewed as part of this media, then it shares the culpability for the discursive flow of these myths. Following the event, American literature embraced the task of serious engagement with terror and Islam because it opened up new spaces for critical dialogue. The trend was also inspired by the American public as they “wanted to understand Islam, the Middle East, and the history of American involvement in the region” (Kaufman, 2009, 647). Fiction became an effective tool to respond to the event and the conflicts, which caused it. As the following discussions show, some novelistic responses contributed to the circulation of the reductive myths in Orientalism. One such myth was the incompatibility of the West and Islam and the resultant clash between them. These texts set the West and Islam in opposition without any chance of reconciliation. Islam as depicted has an inherent hatred for the West. This opposition and hatred is reinforced through a plethora of reductive myths and stereotypes. These include the ideas that: Islamic society is perceived as a collectivity without any place for individuality; its philosophy is purported as backward looking, fatalistic and otherworldly; it promotes violence through a death-loving and suicidal fervor; it’s against science, technology, progress and freedoms. In general, Islamic society is perceived as despotic, oppressive, stagnant, and defeated while Muslims are backward, irrational, displaced, disloyal, sensual and violent individuals who follow the collective ideals of their religion. On the other hand, Islam’s contrasting image is the West that is depicted as technologically advanced, forward-looking, progressive, democratic, liberal and rational. These qualities of the West then become the target of Islam’s hatred due to their opposition. Like the hegemonic discourse of imperialism, authors too asked the question “why do they hate us?” The answers came in the form of irreconcilable differences based on the binaries of “us” against “them,” and vice versa. Such novels confirmed Said’s belief that it was always “We are this, ‘they’ are that” (Said, 1994,229).

Terrorist draws on the “clash of civilizations” theory of Western discourse in which Islam is the enemy. This enemy status of Islam, reinforced by the othering process and stereotypes, creates anxiety and fear in the Western public, which has generated the name “Islamophobia.” This fear grows and feeds on what the Other is perceived to be doing and what it stands for. Depiction of Muslims as anti-West, violent and death-loving fanatics and jihadists, irrational, backward and suppressive people, contributes to Islamophobia. September 11 heightened the fear as Orientalists found evidence to prove their perceived stance. Updike contributes to this fear by depicting Islam as a violent death cult and Muslims as death-loving and fatalistic jihadists. The concept of jihad has
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contributed immensely to deep-rooted Islamophobia in the West. Such hostility towards Muslims is perpetrated by a series of closed views that imply and attribute negative and derogatory stereotypes and beliefs to Muslims. On the basis of this definition, the othering process and stereotypes in Terrorist contributes to Islamophobia. John L. Esposito argues that contemporary Islamophobic resurgence had been triggered by Muslim migration to the West, the Iranian revolution, hijackings, hostage-taking and acts of terrorism in the 1980s and 1990s. Conditions were therefore ripe, but September 11 “exacerbated and fed the growth of both Islamophobia in the West and anti-Americanism in the Muslim world (Esposito, 2011, xxiii). Terrorist feeds on this Islamophobia in the post-September 11 world. Islamophobia is closely connected with the concept of Jihad in Islam. According to Said, as a stereotype, jihad lurks behind all the images of Islam and Muslims in the West (Said, 1994,287). The stereotyped Islamic violence, suicide bombing and the death-loving cult find their strength and justification in the often-misinterpreted concept of jihad in Islamic tradition. The Oxford English Dictionary defines jihad as “a religious war of Muslims against unbelievers, inculcated as a duty by the Qur’an and traditions.” “Holy war” and “war against unbelievers” are included in most definitions, usually in the first entry for jihad. These ambiguities, and most of the times, outright generalizations, have led to all kinds of misuse and controversies about the meanings of jihad in relation to terrorism. All these strategies are meant to reinforce the image of a violent and anti-West Islam. Based on Said’s Orientalism theory, the following arguments analyze John Updike’s novel Terrorist’s portrayal of Islam and Muslims.

Orientalism in Terrorist

The orientalist discourse with Updike is heavily engaged was patently evident in statements he had already made prior to the appearance of his novel. Updike, in his interviews and public statements, puts Islam and the West in opposition by calling Islam an absolutist religion and positions Muslims as the enemies of the West. His novel, Terrorist, attempts to go inside the mind of the same enemy to understand the psychology of the terrorist, Islam and its beliefs, and the reasons for Islam’s hatred against the West. The two civilizations and ideologies are differentiated—the liberal, consumerist and capitalist West; and an anti-West, backward, irrational, suppressive and violent Islam. The novel depicts Muslims as disloyal, irresponsible, superstitious, death-loving fatalists, fundamentalists and radicals by using Orientalist strategies. They fight the West collectively on the basis of Islamic commandments emanating from the Quran and the sayings of Prophet Muhammad. Terrorist also raises economic, political and historical issues from the Muslims’ perspective as causes for the conflict, but these are overwhelmed by Updike’s focus on religion in which Muslims “fight for God against America” (Updike, 2007,248).

To support the claim of irreconcilable differences between the West and Islam, and to justify Muslims’ anger and readiness to strike a blow to the West, Updike relentlessly quotes from the Quran and the sayings of the prophet. He brings in verses from the Quran and sayings of Prophet Muhammad without any context, and sometimes out of context to skew meanings and reinforce certain stereotypes. The veracity of his knowledge is questionable, as Updike does not have any background knowledge of Islam or the Arabic language. In an interview with Louise Witt, Updike says, “My conscience was pricked by the notion that I was putting into the book something that I can’t pronounce” (“Why Updike Delved into Suicide Killers’ Psyches”). This statement suffices to prove that the abundant use of verses from the Quran and sayings of Prophet Muhammad are meant to prepare the reader to believe in the veracity and credibility of Updike’s background knowledge as something that emanates from nothing more foundational than inner guidance. Readers are never told that every single Muslim interprets these verses and sayings differently. More importantly, Updike might have depended on other Orientalist narratives and translations of the Quran to arrive at seemingly informed conclusions. This lack of knowledge about the people, their culture and language is a typical characteristic of Orientalism. Knowledge of Islam is redundant “since what one
is dealing with is considered to be a psychological deformation, not a “real” culture or religion” (Said, 1997, xxxvi). This belief in psychology than scholarly knowledge might explain why writers such as Updike arrive at an already accepted conclusion concerning the opposition between West and Islam.

_Terrorist_ perceives this opposition in the life of Ahmad MulloyAshmawy, an 18-year-old high school student at Central High, New Prospect, New Jersey. He is the son of Omar Ashmawy, an Egyptian exchange student, and Teresa Mulloy, an Irish-American who is a nurse’s aide and part-time painter. Omar left the United States for Egypt when Ahmad was only three years old. With no prospects in life, the novel traces Ahmad’s conversion to the Islamic philosophy of jihad and martyrdom. Shaikh Rashid, a radical Yemeni imam and Charlie Chehab, an American Muslim and the owner of a furniture business, brainwash Ahmad into wanting to kill thousands of Americans by blowing up the Lincoln Tunnel with an explosive laden truck. Jack Levy, a teacher and counselor at Central High, tries to help Ahmad with studies and a future career. Spiritually, the American-born and raised Ahmad is torn between an ascetic Islam and a materialist West. Socially and culturally, he is living on the fringes of mainstream America as he is an “outsider” in an Arab-American community, which itself is an “outsider” in America. His progression from an unhappy kid to a suicide bomber draws upon typical stereotypes of Islam in Orientalist discourse to reinforce irreconcilable differences between Islam and the West.

The first sentence of _Terrorist_ sets the tone of this enmity and conflict between Islam and the West. While the omnipresent narrator mediates Islam and Muslim identity for a Western audience, unfortunately he mediates it through an Orientalist discourse. Ahmad, inspired by a few weeks’ lessons in Islam by Shaikh Rashid, while observing lustful girls at Central High School, thinks, “these devils seek to take away my God” (Updike, 2007, 3). In the paragraph that follows, Islam is perceived in opposition to those devils - Western materialism, capitalism, consumerism and the indulgence of young boys and girls in sensual pleasures. Ahmad also believes that Christians and Jews are weak because they are careless about their religious teachings. Everything about Central High school, its teachers and students reek of waywardness and a life of less restraint and almost non-existent belief. In true Orientalist tones, using the binarism of “us” and “them,” everything Western is depicted as despicable to Islam, and then one after another, this sweeping hatred is detailed as the disease of the West. In the very act of choosing this particular racial identity, ills like drunkenness, moral turpitude, destruction of family structure due to sexual wantonness ending in divorce and an irreligious education system based on science are seen as an unsympathetic Orientalist diatribe couched as Islam’s hatred against the West.

I. Stereotyping Islam and Muslims as anti-West

Anti-West resentment is a common trope in Orientalist texts. Orientalists perceive September 11 as the result of Islam’s hate for the West and then try to explain its reasons, most of which try to look for reductive myths to justify the hate. The West itself is a broader term, standing for America, Europe, modernity, science and technology, liberal democracy, secularism, rationality and advancement in other human efforts. In Orientalist discourse, opposition to any of these means opposition to the West. In the selected text, Islam’s opposition to the West is implied in all of its manifestations. In some instances, it’s the umbrella term, but in most cases, opposition and hatred towards the West is reflected in hatred towards its ideals. It is pertinent to mention here the presence of an equivalent discourse in the Orient or Islam. Unlike Orientalism, it others and stereotypes the West from the other side - the East. Ian Buruma and AvishaiMargalit call it Occidentalism, a discourse in which opponents paint a dehumanizing picture of the West (Buruma and Avishai, 2004, 5). According to them, these stereotypes are its materialism, immorality, godlessness, love for life and fear of death (Buruma and Avishai, 2004, 49) and arrogance due to its power and technological advancement (Buruma and Avishai, 2004, 15). Updike draws on Orientalist discourse by
stereotyping the West in the eyes of Islam. At the same time, he draws on Occidentalism as he creates a discourse in which Muslims are made to stereotype the West. The stereotype of Islam and Muslims as anti-West became ubiquitous in the West in the 1980s following the Iranian revolution (Pinto and Piscatori, 1999, 1), which was further reinforced after 9/11 (Abbas, 2011, 71).

Orientalism presents Islam in opposition to Western progress in science and technology. Modernity is one of many to differentiate the West from Islam. The term modernity, like the West, is also multifaceted as it has political, economic, social, cultural and artistic connotations. In the context of Orientalism, Said uses modernity to mean Western secularism, democracy, progress, scientific advancement and a general notion of contemporary life in the West. Baudrillard looks at modernity in conjunction with globalization in the context of expansion of capitalism, technologies, media and all the cultural and social values that go with them. Due to the totalizing nature of these expansions, a reaction rises “against this abstract universality—including Islam’s antagonism to Western values” (Baudrillard, 2003, 95). Though Baudrillard does not exonerate Islam, he believes that Islam is merely “the moving front along which the antagonism crystallized” (Baudrillard, 2003, 15). Zizek also believes that capitalism and the hegemonic role of the scientific discourse in modernity influenced the Muslim world; its “symbolic universe” was disturbed as it was exposed to the onrush of capitalism without “a protective screen or temporal delay” (Baudrillard, 2003, 82). Orientalism implies that anti-Americanism is not due to modernity or technological advancement, but is motivated by concrete instances of American foreign policy. Said believes that anti-Americanism is not based on a “hatred of modernity or technology,” but “is based on a narrative of concrete interventions” in which America interferes, invades and occupies foreign lands (Said, “Islam and the West”).

Updike’s work displays evident Orientalist leanings. His public statements and interviews consist of sweeping statements and generalizations about Islam and Muslims. After making sweeping statements about Islam as an “absolutist” religion, Updike deems it important to go inside the mind of the Muslim “Other” in his novel Terrorist to understand something about which he has already made up his mind. He wants to understand and represent “the animosity and hatred” of the “enemies [Muslims]” against the West (Louise Witt, “Why Updike Delved into Suicide Killers’ Psyche”). In other words, he tries to represent to the West the outsider enemy who cannot represent himself, which Said, quoting from Karl Marx, says is typical of an Orientalist move to render the East inarticulate: “They cannot represent themselves; they must be represented” (Said, 2003, 335). In a New York Times interview with Charles McGrath, Updike says, “I think I felt I could understand the animosity and hatred which an Islamic believer would have for our system.” Ahmad is that Islamic believer who hates everything about America. This “othering” and depiction of the enemy only leads to typical stereotypes of Muslims as anti-Western.

Terrorist portrays Islam as having no ideals of its own but only strives to destroy whatever the West stands for. According to Ahmad, Islam hates America because it has no God and is “obsessed with sex and luxury goods” (Updike, 2007, 38). The American way is the way of the infidels. America has become the “global Satan” (Updike, 2007, 236) in the eyes of the imam due to its influence and power in the world. Ahmad believes that the economic system on which American imperialism is based is “rigged in favor of rich Christians” (Updike, 2007: 80), and a Godless government in Washington governs a Godless American society. Everything around Ahmad, from top to bottom, is corruption and immorality. As a Muslim and Arab-American he is incapable of indulging in such worldly pleasures and Islam, as a religion and way of life is a hindrance to such enjoyment. Material possessions and everyday pleasures in the West are repugnant to him because these are insubstantial to him. Contrarily, real pleasure in life in Islam comes from pleasing God, which is the “only real guidance” (Updike, 2007, 18). Islam is against the West that has evolved into its current form due to enlightenment, tolerance, rationality and science. Ahmad, who was born and
raised in America, believes that science, a symbol of Western modernity, is basically incompatible with Islam. He thinks that whatever science teaches is godless as it teaches godless capitalism and “biology and chemistry and physics” (Updike, 2007, 4). His Christian and Jewish teachers and fellow students are his enemies because they are morally weak, as they do not follow even the basic tenets of their religions. In one of his heated conversations with Joryleen Grant, he justifies his meeting her to “know the enemy” (Updike, 2007, 68). Ahmad also remembers that in one of their discussions, the imam had told him that all infidels are the enemy of Islam. He supports his inimical attitude to unbelievers with the saying of the prophet that all infidels should be destroyed (Updike, 2007, 68).

Though Updike should have provided necessary evidence in support of claims, as he does in other situations with copious references, in this case, it’s just one baseless and biased interpretation by the imam. The narrator, who has a selective taste for the scripture, might have found enough in the prophet’s sayings to repute such a claim, but he does not. The prophet had pacts with Jews and Christians, and they were his subjects when he became the military, political and religious leader of Islam. More importantly, Islam even allows Muslim men to marry Jews and Christians. Updike ignores these to reduce something to a myth. Said finds it unique in Western Orientalists to make generalizations about Prophet Muhammad’s life and saying without supporting evidence or reference (Said, 1997,xxxviii). Updike goes a step further by ascribing statements against non-Muslims to the Prophet to project an anti-West Islam.

The novel has instances of out of context and incomplete references from the Quran and from the sayings of the prophet to depict an anti-West Islam. Ahmad in his fits of anti-Americanism finds verses attributed to God in the Qur’an. In one such instance, Ahmad tells Jack Levy, “Be ruthless to unbelievers. Burn them, crush them, because they have forgotten God” (294). Neither the context nor the name or number of the verse is given as Updike usually does in other instances. Similarly, a wrong perception is created at the beginning of the novel when Shaikh Rashid and Ahmad discuss Hutama (Crushing Fire), a chapter in the Quran. Before introducing the verses, the narrator talks about the Jews and Christians whom God is going to throw in hell. Then Updike introduces the verses, which say “And who shall teach thee what the Crushing Fire is? It is God’s kindled fire” (Updike, 2007, 6). The chapter has actually nine verses, but Updike omits the first four and starts with the fifth one. The first four verses read: “Woe to every slanderer, back-biter; Who amasses wealth and hordes it; Does he think his wealth will abide forever with him; By no means, He will be thrown into Hutama” (Al-Quran, A Contemporary Translation:104:1-4). The chapter does not say Jews and Christians but Updike quotes the verses in such a context that these verses seem directed against them. The injunctions about wives as baggage and women’s uncleanliness are also out of context.

Updike constantly uses words like kafir and kuffar (unbeliever) for the West and Westerners to show Islam’s contempt for them. In these instances, Updike is manipulating Islamic injunctions to present an Anti-West Islam. Motivated by such misinterpretations, Ahmad believes that he is on the side of God against the armies of Satan. To please his God, he must fight ruthlessly against God’s enemies—unbelievers in the West. His killings of Americans would please God, as well as Muslim around the world. He imagines Muslims dancing with joy at Americans’ deaths in the streets of Damascus and Karachi. Scenes of destruction on CNN after the attacks will be “filling the Middle East with jubilation” (Updike, 2007, 281). Updike here is playing on a much-trumpeted trope of pleasure in the Muslim world about the events of September 11. A few examples were repeated in the media and literature to make it a collective statement about ethos in Islamic countries around the world. According to Said, such double standards or “contradictory norms” (Said, 1997,xxii) are used by the West for “the dominance” of their “crude power allied with simplistic contempt for dissents and ‘others’” (Said, 2003, xviii). Ahmad has distaste for American materialism due to his ascetic religion. Spirituality of the Orient is not new, as Orientalists have always focused on it to differentiate
II. Stereotyping West as Islam’s Opposite

Islam became the main rival of the West after the Cold War. Gray, Said, and Huntington believe that Islam replaced Soviet Union as the archenemy of the West. Huntington came up with his theory of “Clash of Civilizations,” which predicted wars after the Cold War to be predominantly cultural. According to Huntington, when considering all clashes around the world, Islam and the West are set to become the two major players in major cultural conflicts around the world (Huntington, 1996, 216). Huntington’s theory was a response to Francis Fukuyama’s ‘The End of History,’’ which says that dialectical history has ended after the Cold War as mankind has arrived at the final stage of its ideological evolution and final form of government in the form Western liberal democracy (Fukuyama, 2006, xi). Gray argues that Islam replaced Communism as the West’s Other after the Cold War (Gray, 2009, 32). Similarly, Said believes that since the demise of the Soviet Union there has been a rush in the United States to find in an Orientalized Islam a “new empire of evil” (Said, 2002, 346). In his 2003 “Preface” to Orientalism, Said laments how the continuation of Orientalism against the perceived “empire of evil” met with heightened intensity after September 11.

Updike considers Islam an “absolutist” religion, which controls all aspects of human life. Employing the othering strategy, he says, “Islam doesn’t have as many shades as the Christian or the Judaic faith does. It’s fairly absolutist, as you know, and you’re either in or out” (Updike, “Why Updike Delved into Suicide Killers’ Psyche”). Terrorist uses explicit vocabulary to describe this absolutist Islam. The narrator, as reflected in his in-text comments and explanations about Islam and Muslims, contributes to this discourse of hatred throughout the novel. Added to this are the pronouncements by characters representing the West. The most important and predominant voice among these is that of the highest authority responsible for securing America—the Secretary of Homeland Security. As Huntington, Gray and Said argue, the Secretary replaces Communism with the current enemy (Islam) because “The enemy’s superstitious mentality” orchestrated the September 11 attacks on capitalism’s “headquarters” to bring it down by cutting off its head” (Updike, 2006, 47). He also thinks that the enemy does not believe in democracy and freedoms. He also believes in a conspiracy that the Arab League wants to take over the United States (Updike, 2006, 261). He is absolutely sure of the unequivocal hatred of Muslims for West and asks the nagging question of the time, “Why do they hate us?” Hermione, assistant to the Secretary and a responsible official of the government responds in a typical, though harsh Orientalist way: “They hate the light. Like cockroaches. Like bats” (Updike, 2006, 48).

The novel furthers these collective and individual stereotypes in the sayings and lives of individual Muslim characters and Westerners’ statements about Islam and Muslims. Muslims are perceived as a collectivity of irrational beings, devoid of any individuality, which might explode anytime as they accept a violent ideology uncritically. Islamic teachings derive their strength from the Quran and the sayings of the prophet as evidenced by Updike’s quoting from them extensively. Muslims, inspired from these teachings, have been taught that the West, Jews, Christians and everyone outside the sphere of Islam is a kafir and thus worthy to be killed. As Islam is against these people, it’s also against their ideals of freedoms, liberty, democracy and modernity. In Orientalist discourse, Islam is always stereotyped as “antidemocratic” (Said, 2003, 150) as evidenced by the Secretary’s views. Ahmad imbibes this hatred against everything Western from his religious teachings in only a few weeks. He is mostly ambivalent, but his perceived faith pulls him into a deadly certainty about the righteousness of his faith. During his interactions with the American public, he finds people to be mostly friendly, good and civil. Contrary to Charlie’s assertions that the September 11 victims were not innocent, Ahmad shows sympathy with the September 11 victims.
especially those who jumped from the towers. Still, Updike makes him embark on a senseless plan to kill merely due to Islam. Ahmad’s thoughts indicate then that while individual Muslims might be ambivalent sometimes, their religion always encourages negative feelings towards the West.

_Terrorist_ depicts Islam as a religion of universal aspirations, which does not believe in boundaries between countries and nations. Charlie Chehab claims that Islamic faith is fruitless without absolute allegiance to the “ummah,” (Updike, 2007, 231) the bigger Islamic community or caliphate. Islam is depicted as an Orientalized religion, which is monolithic, eternal and beyond time and space, and whose rules and injunctions are absolutist and therefore cannot be debated or evaluated critically. Even otherwise intelligent people like Ahmad do not dare to question an Islamic injunction if they have qualms about it. The result is that all Muslims are the same without exceptions.

In contrast, Updike treats characters belonging to other religions and ethnicities differently. Jack Levy is Jewish but distanced himself from his religion long ago. Beth Levy, Jack’s wife was a Lutheran who does not have any religious connections or views. Teresa, Ahmad’s mother is of Catholic descent, but lives a life unencumbered by religion. Tylenol Jones and Joryleen Grant are African Americans with no active religious leanings. Even the Secretary of Homeland Security, a “stout churchgoer,” has secularist views, having left the medieval superstitions of religion long ago (Updike, 2007, 48). Only Muslim characters are connected to their religion and ethnicity. Shaikh Rashid, the imam, is seen as absolute evil because nothing good comes out of his mouth. He thinks that Islam is always right against the wrongs of the West. The West is full of corrupting influences—“bad philosophy and bad literature. Western culture is Godless” (Updike, 2007, 38). His Islamic teachings can be compared to the secular education promoted by Jack Levy at Central High. The imam pushes Ahmad towards terrorism by instigating hatred against the West on the basis of a religious ideology, whereas Jack persuades Ahmad to respect human life and abort his attack.

One exception to this general trend of stereotyping Muslims as irrational and violent individuals could have been Charlie Chehab, who has been raised “pure American” (Updike, 2007, 218). This seemingly pragmatic businessman has nothing Islamic about his character, morals or lifestyle. Still, as a Muslim, he expresses typical sentiments against the West, Capitalism, consumerism, media, the American empire and its invasion and occupation of Muslim countries. Quite brazenly, he thinks of the tactics used by Al-Qaeda and Hamas to be similar to those used by George Washington during the American Revolution. He is inspired by that revolution, as it could teach much to the movement of jihad because both “waged the same kind of war” (Updike, 2007, 183). Strangely, this critic of American atrocities turns out to be a CIA operative who ensnares and traps other Muslims. Being a Muslim suits his act because he can easily play the stereotype. His character is so stereotypical that the reader believes him to be a genuine Muslim sympathizer. The stereotype is partial, as it focuses on its political aspect.

Updike’s characterization of Charlie has conspiratorial repercussions as well. He transfers money to the Middle Eastern bomb makers and arranges transportation of explosive material to the workshop and then the Lincoln Tunnel. It’s difficult to guess who floated the idea of bombing in the novel, but it’s Charlie who manages every step of the operation. The whole thing was a sting operation, which could have gone wrong if Ahmad had not changed his mind. Like other Muslim leaders who are named in the novel, Charlie is also stereotyped as a tool of America. Likewise, a Muslim husband as well as father is stereotyped as disloyal and irresponsible. Omar Ashmawy, Ahmad’s father, left the family without any reason when Ahmad was three. He has not visited or contacted them in fifteen years. The marriage between them was a compromise to achieve individual goals. Teresa married Omar to show “how liberal and liberate” she was because he was an Oriental—“exotic, third-world, put-upon” (Updike, 2007, 86) to her in the first place. Omar marrying her was motivated by his desire to get American citizenship. The marriage was a disaster, as Teresa tells Levy. She constantly calls Omar a loser. In one of their conversations, she tells Levy about Omar,
“What a pompous, chauvinistic horse’s ass he was” (Updike, 2007, 86). Even Ahmad thinks of him an escapee who “decamped” when Ahmad was three (Updike, 2007, 35). Similarly, Muslim political leaders are characterized as uniform stereotypes. Leaders like Husni Mubarak, the Saudi princes and Muammar al-Qadafi are tools of “America” (Updike, 2007, 249) because the U.S. uses them for it’s imperial interests. As such, there is no individual Muslim character that can be differentiated from the group.

Othering works on many levels, such as the religious, social and cultural divides between West and Islam, but it also resonates through language. In the novel, Arabic language is ridiculed in comparison to the rational and straightforward lingua of the West. The Secretary finds the “poetic euphemisms and pathetic braggadocio” in Arabic “alien and repellent” to his Western ears (Updike, 2007, 47). He also says that “there is something weird about the language—it makes them feeble—minded, somehow” (Updike, 2007, 259). According to the narrator, the language of the Quran has made the imam delusional, as he “… inhabits a semi-real world of pure words.” It is due to the fact that he “loves the Holy Quran for its language,” a strange and exotic language of “mounted robed warriors under the cloudless sky of Arabia Deserta” (Updike, 2007, 168). In one abstract and ambiguous sentence, Updike presents the Arabic language, its speakers and the geography in the most exotic forms to the Western audience. The labyrinthine and vague nature of the Arabic language is an established stereotype in Orientalist discourse. Said finds similar stereotypes in Orientalism about Arabic: an emphasis on rhetoric and its negative impressions on the Arab mind vagueness and its grandiloquence (Said, 2003, 287).

### III. Stereotyping Muslims with Defeat, Loss, Revenge and Displacement

The stereotypical depiction of the collective Islamic identity is one characterized by defeat, loss, revenge and displacement. Whereas Said believes in the fluid or ever-changing nature of identity, he argues that Orientalism fixes identities, even though these are “constructed, and occasionally even invented” (Said, 2003,322). The essence of “the Orient” is that it is a “constituted identity.” In other words, it’s not factual or real, but invented, in this case by others. In his discussions on Stereotype, Discrimination, and the Discourse of Colonialism, HomiBhabha considers the dependence of colonial discourse on the concept of “fixity” in the ideological construction of otherness (Bhabba, 2006, 66). Stereotype is a discursive strategy of otherness, in which the identification of the other is fixed, but repeated constantly. Similarly, Stuart Hall argues that stereotypes are “reduced to a few essentials, fixed in Nature by a few simplified characteristics” (Hall, 1997, 249), which have similar “essentializing, reductionist, naturalizing effects” on the reader or audience (Hall, 2007, 257). The novel under discussion engages in this process of repetitious fixity. As the second strategy in stereotyping, the same fixedness is repeated in individual and collective lives. The individual stereotype merely represents the collectivity stereotype, as the individual stereotype cannot stand on its own outside of a collective identity.

The Orientalist strategies Updike employs is to make the case that Muslims once had a glorious past, which was taken away from them by the West. As a consequence, the loss of history and power has made Islam and Muslims revengeful and has transformed them into violent individuals determined to fight and reclaim their history. As they lost their history to other cultures, the idea is that Muslims feel dislocated, out of place and time. The disorientation was brought by the invasion of outside cultural forces, capitalism and aggressive foreign policies of Western powers. Updike’s Ahmad is a displaced and disoriented individual who takes refuge from the ‘devils’ of the West inside the closed space of the mosque. The immoral, material and sensual West wants to take away his God from him. The mosque is the only place of solace where he can hear people criticize the West, while providing refuge and stability to such a displaced individual. Even though, the mosque looks “shabby and fragile in its external trappings,” it could support Ahmad as “it is woven of tenacious strands and built upon truths set deep in the hearts of men” (Updike, 2007, 148). At another place, it’s implied
that the mosque provides a better space for respect and recognition than Christianity and the U.S. (Updike, 2007, 72). But mosques are depicted as dark, close and secret places. It is a “closed space” in the closed inner city, and its “windows have a view of only brick walls and dark clouds” (Updike, 2007, 234). The teachings and an anti-West atmosphere in the mosque transform him into a terrorist, but it is presumably inside the mosque that the plot to bomb the Lincoln Tunnel is hatched. Ahmad even sleeps in the mosque to stay pure the night before the attack.

Ahmad’s displacement is evident in his birth and very being is “a disaster” (Updike, 2007, 89), according to his mother. He is the product of an unlikely marriage between a Catholic woman and a Muslim man. The failure of Ahmad’s parents’ marriage conveys the bitter message that marriage or peace between the West and Islam is impossible. A disillusioned youth with no prospects for future, living in a dis-functional family with an absent father and non-serious mother, Ahmad, as an Arab-American, stands nowhere in the segregated ethnic world of New Prospect. He is against all things American, so there is no hope of him forming a relationship with mainstream America. He is on bad terms with African-Americans as his relationship with Joryleen Grant and Tylenol Jones show. He always contradicts Joryleen, even calling her the enemy, and Tylenol always picks fights with him. The only possible hope could be his Arab-American community. But the chances are even worse on that front as he is called a “minority’s minority,” (84) and “an outsider among outsiders” (Updike, 2007, 244). There are no instances of Ahmad’s past interactions with the Arab-American community. After his father had left when he was three, Ahmad lived with his Irish-American mother. His interaction with the imam and Charli Chehab are the first instances of his interaction with the community. As a religious and ethnic outcast, Ahmad develops psychological barriers and fears between himself and American society.

These barriers, though multifaceted, are perceived to be instigated by religion. Socially, he has problems with schoolmates, his mother at home and teachers at schools because of religious differences. Though Ahmad is articulate, aggressive and confident in his interactions with people, his mother believes that he’s “easily led” when it comes to his lessons in Islam at the mosque. The economic condition of the family is so bad that Ahmad had to stop his education and become a truck driver. Updike tries to blame Islam for Ahmad’s educational and economic failures by saying that his future prospects are bleak because his “devotion to Allah” meaning “his future has been amputated.” Updike sees the Islamic God not as “a God of enterprise but of submission” (Updike, 2007, 184). This is symptomatic of Orientalism, as according to Said, Orientals are perceived to have a “fundamental incapacity for trade, commerce, and economic rationality” (Said, 2003, 259). Ambivalent, displaced and hopeless, Ahmad turns to Islam as his identity, lured by its aggressive ideology. As Ahmad’s dislocation is critical, he needs an absolutist ideology to lean upon for stability. Ahmad’s fanaticism in the narrative seemingly comes from Shaikh Rashid, but there are instances in the novel where Ahmad surpasses his teacher’s fanaticism in their interpretation of Islamic injunctions. He cannot tolerate confusion or ambiguity as to the meaning of Quran and the sayings of the Prophet. As a result, he disagrees even with Shaikh Rashid about the interpretations of Islamic injunctions during their lessons. As the imam tries to soften some stances or make some injunctions open to interpretations, his voice would remind Ahmad of “the unconvincing voices of his teachers at Central High.” While listening to the imam, Ahmad hears “Satan’s undertone in it, a denying voice within an affirming voice” (Updike, 2007, 6). The student’s extremist faith “exceeds the master’s; it frightens Shaikh Rashid to be riding the winged white seed of Islam, its irresistible onrushing” (Updike, 2007, 7). This single statement stereotypes Ahmad, the imam and Islam as extremist. The text explains that Ahmad does not like the teacher because he opens the prophet’s words to reason. This unbelievable character, in his search for absolutes and stability, would agree easily with any absurd statement if said with firmness. He agrees to blow himself up in the Lincoln Tunnel bombing at the drop of a hat. He does not ask questions, and the text does not give us any
external or internal motivation for his acts. These considerations, Updike seems to imply, are not important in the case of Muslims who he stereotypes as religious fanatics whose character remains the same.

This fixity is true of Ahmad throughout the novel, even during his unconvincing decision to abort his mission. After he has embarked on the mission, he does not seem to have any qualms about it. Jack Levy tries to persuade Ahmad to abort his mission to no avail. Even minutes before the time of the attacks, Ahmad stays resolute. And then he sees two children waving from the backseat of a car in front of Ahmad’s truck and he changes his plan. It is an unbelievable change of heart. His heart melts as he reminds himself that God “does not want us to desecrate His creation by willing death. He wills life” (Updike, 2007, 306). This revelation comes from nowhere. Updike creates an unbelievable situation leading to an equally unbelievable conclusion. The closure is unconvincing, as Ahmad is transformed only for a short period of time. After aborting his plan, while driving the truck to an FBI office, Ahmad sees Americans busy in their daily routine like insects and still calls them devils. Once again the stereotype is back to square one, as it has to stay the same. Ahmad remains the same disoriented and dislocated individual who might lean on another crazy ideology to embark on a similarly horrible mission. Collectively, Muslims in the novel are displaced because of the West, exacerbated further by disorientations in individual lives due to an Islamic ascetic core. As a result, they are perceived as ready to commit suicide and kill thousands to eradicate the sense of defeat and pain that come to define their lives as Muslims.

IV. Stereotyping Muslims with Hatred for Life

The stereotypes of Islam as a violent religion and Muslims as ruthless killers are commonplace in the West. These stereotypes are associated with other stereotypes of them as death-loving and suicidal jihadists. These closely connected stereotypes are repeated in Orientalist discourse to create an atmosphere of misperceived anxiety about Muslim culture, which has also been termed Islamophobia. Islam and Muslims are perceived to threaten the existence of the West and its inhabitants. According to Süleyman Elik “Islamophobia is viewed a product of clash of cultural conflict or clash of civilization concept after the end of Cold War” (Elik, 2013, 454). Likewise, Peter Gottschalk and Gabriel Greenberg argue that Westerners enact Islamophobia, while Muslims perceive they are discriminated against because of it. They believe that Islamophobia plays a critical role in convincing people that an all-consuming civilizational clash is inevitable due to the “fact” that there is “an essential and irreconcilable difference between “them” and “us” (Gottschalk and Greenberg, 2008, 3). As a result, the mention of Islam and Muslims in Orientalist discourse brings to mind terrorism, violence, suicide bombing, and jihad.

Ahmad believes that one should be ruthless to the unbelievers and burn them. He and the Imam also believe that death takes one nearer to God. It’s implied that an attachment to worldly life takes one away from God so that death through martyrdom guarantees quick and easy entry to the Islamic paradise full of virgins. Homeland Security closely observes online communications through blogs, emails and chats among Muslims around the world to decipher threats to America. Among many other topics of discussions, the office takes notice of the recurring discussions about life and death among Muslims. These discussions mock the unbelievers’ love of life and glorify Muslims’ love of death (Updike, 2007, 48). A verse from the Quran is often repeated in these discussions to prove their distaste for life. The repeated verse in the context of the Terrorist purports to compare the life of believers to those of “The unbelievers who love this fleeting life too well” (Updike, 2008, 48). The verse, in the context of the Quran, compares the eternal life in paradise with the fleeting life of this world. Baudrillard makes the same assumption when he says that terrorists defy the Western system of zero-death, as “they put their death into play, to which there is no possible response” due to the “impossible exchange of death” (Baudrillard, 2003, 57). As a general rule, the stereotype of Muslims as death-loving people has been reinforced in Orientalist discourse by making the
interpretation of a few individuals the standard. Buruma and Margalit think that a small minority of terrorists headed by Osama bin Laden has hijacked and driven Islam’s narrative despite the fact that “Islam is not a death cult” (Buruma and Margalit, 2004, 69).

This death-cult stereotype is visible in Ahmad’s life as well as in the comments of others about Islam and Muslims. Joryleen is surprised by Ahmad’s extreme views about worldly life. As a young man, people around him expect him to live like other teenagers, but he abhors such life. Joryleen thinks that life without fun and laughter is miserable and concludes that Ahmad hates life (Updike, 2007, 72). Jack Levy’s wife Beth, influenced by her relentless television watching, tells her sister Hermione Fogel that Muslims are least bothered if they die. Time and again in the novel, Muslims are presented as impatient individuals who want to die quickly to get rid of this shadowy and illusionary world. Such platitudes in the novel include the following: the idea that the human body and all its needs are looked down upon as sinful; that all worldly attachments, including those of children and wives, are distractions, as these might take Muslims away from jihad, the “struggle to become holy and closer to God” (Updike, 2007, 108). The idea of the suicidal terrorist has become an elusive concept in modern times, which baffles attempts at its comprehension. Baudrillard takes up this issue in his collection of essays on September 11 and terrorism. At times complex and multifaceted, he tries to explain the idea behind suicide in the context of globalization. According to him, terrorism is not due to poverty in Third World or Islam. It goes beyond this categorization, as terrorism is an “allergy to any definitive order, to any definitive power” (Baudrillard, 2003, 6). America is that definitive power in the contemporary world. The definitive power has succeeded in absorbing and resolving crises, thereby creating a situation of deepest despair. Previously, people were dying of despair for no return, but “the terrorists have ceased to commit suicide for no return” (Baudrillard, 2003, 16). Now, they direct their death towards the opponent’s Achilles heel, as the opponent’s quasi-perfection system operates “on the basis of the exclusion of death.” Including improvements in all fields, the West attempts to exclude death from life, at least in visual and conceptual terms. The terrorist turns his own death into a powerful weapon against the Western system “whose ideal is an ideal of zero deaths” (Baudrillard, 2003, 16). Baudrillard locates terrorism in the evolution of capitalism and globalization, but his reference is always Islam. Another contemporary theorist, Zizek, locates suicide in the clash between science and religion, the clash between absolute meanings provided by religion and the Western godless way of life based on modern science (Zizek, 2002, 81), and the terrorist’s attempt to sacrifice himself to show the power of his belief against unbelief (Zizek, 2008, 72). I believe these theories are deficient, as these try to locate violence, death cult and suicide in Islam, which clearly proscribes taking one’s own life and those of others. Jihad, the much trumpeted so-called war against the infidels, is no more than a defensive war against aggression and occupation, and even in that war, taking one’s own life and those of other innocent people, especially women and children, is prohibited. More importantly, a recent upsurge in suicide bombing shows otherwise, as Muslims are killing Muslims. Suicide bombing does not seem to be aimed against a totalizing order or a deadlock between belief and unbelief in majority of the cases. As to the clash between the West and Islam, these theories look at a few instances or individuals and draw misleading, reductive and totalizing theories of violence that epitomize Islam as a whole.

V. Stereotyping Islam with Violence: Jihad

The very concept of jihad itself is controversial in Islam. Muslims across the world interpret it differently. For some, it’s the individual’s struggle against his own temptations. For others, it’s resisting injustice and evil. On a collective level, it’s a defensive war against aggression. Fawaz A. Gerges considers Jihad a collective duty, not an individual one, according to the consensus among mainstream Islamic scholars (Gerges, 2005, 3). Even if it’s a collective duty to defend, Islam does not explain its parameters as to who will announce jihad or under what conditions. Contrarily, in
contemporary history, not a single state in the Islamic world has announced jihad against the West. It is true that some individuals and dissidents have called for jihad, but they do not represent Islam. Contrary to the common perception in the West, mostly Muslims are the victims of these jihadists. The intent in linking terrorists with Islam is to suggest that it is diametrically and absolutely opposed to the West.

Updike perpetuates this jihadist stereotype further by making Islam and Muslims absolute jihadists who desire to annihilate the West. Incredibly, this message is conveyed in most unlikely manner. Islamic ideology is depicted in the novel as nothing more than an escape from the hard realities of this life into the fantasized promised after-life of eternal happiness. Glorifying words like a “good brave kid, a great hero and a faithful son of Islam” (Updike, 2007, 250) are employed to uplift and empower Ahmad. All these terms are designed to lure and prepare a weak individual like Ahmad to become a jihadi, a defender of Islam who has a “willingness to die for Jihad” (Updike, 2007, 233). Life for Ahmad is cumbersome and unlivable. Only jihad can help him get out of life. Similarly, an unlikely situation is created to reinforce the notoriety of jihad in the novel. Shaikh Rashid, the poisonous imam, is made to speak from the pulpit on the very sensitive topic of jihad to a predominantly American audience at the graduation ceremony at Central High School. It is no more than a crude attempt to exacerbate the conflict between Islam and the West, reinforce and stereotype Jihad and enflame Islamophobia. Representatives of three religions—Christianity, Judaism and Islam—are invited to the ceremony, but it’s surprisingly the imam, whose “twist of Arabic” is like “sticking a dagger into the silent audience,” who is given a chance to speak (Updike, 2007, 111). Confounding it further, he is made to speak about Jihad. He translates from the Quran and jumps to the saying of the prophet about those who die in the way of God: “Say not of those who are slain on God’s path they are Dead; nay, they are Living” (Updike, 2007, 112). Updike should have known that it comes from the Quran, not the prophet. Unfortunately, jihad is a reductive myth in Orientalist discourse, as it reduces controversial concepts to absolute truths. But once started, these myths take new forms. In the very same paragraph, Jack Levy is perturbed by the imam’s “belief system that not so many years ago managed the deaths of, among others, hundreds of commuters from northern New Jersey” (Updike, 2007, 112). There is no qualification here to separate the wrong ideologies and actions of a few stray individuals from their religion. Instead, their actions are connected with their religion to malign the whole community of Islamic believers. Ahmad does not have any fun in life as his individual live shows. He wants to get rid of life and jihad provides a convenient concept with which he can attain this goal.

VI. Stereotyping Islam with Fatalism, Misogyny and Sensuality

The stereotyping process works like a uniformed system in which all stereotypes must work in unison and complement one another to make the othering system work. Exceptions and loopholes would only complicate the process. Connected with hatred for life, suicide and jihad is Islam’s controversial belief in fate. It becomes a stereotype itself as it occurs in the selected texts, repeats itself time and again, and manifests itself as both an individual attribute and as part of a collective response. As depicted in Orientalism, the Oriental lives a resigned life away from actual realities, as he has no agency in such a conception of human life. As they have no agency in their lives, they accept whatever happens to them according to pre-destiny. Taken for granted with this view is the overarching and limiting stereotype of inclusivity, which means that if one Muslim is a fatalist or violent or against the West, then the whole Islamic community is against the West because the complex causation behind individual or smaller group motivation is absent as a conceptual consideration. Most Orientalist strategies employ this stereotype either in connection with an evasion of responsibility for a violent act due to fatalism or to reinforce the irrationality of the perpetrator.

Ahmad is playing “God’s instrument, cool and hard and definite and thoughtless, as an instrument must be” (Updike, 2007,285). Inspired by religion, Ahmad believes that God is the owner
of the human body. Human beings are only the trustees, and they have to return the body when required by God. The reality is that no such concept exists in Islam and God has made man responsible for his actions on earth, and the good and bad fortune he brings on himself (Al-Quran, A Contemporary Translation, 30:41; 42:30). Contrary, Ahmad’s failures as Muslims, the Secretary of Homeland Security, as a Christian, has enabled himself to use his critical and rational mind to doubt a “will-of-God fatalism,” and a “heavy bet on the next world” (Updike, 2007, 47). He cannot let his actions in this world take their motivation from such superstitious beliefs in fatalism and the hereafter. According to these Orientalist authors, a Muslim cannot doubt such beliefs as such doubts would mar the uniformity of the stereotype.

The oppression of women is a commonplace charge the West hurls at Islam. Orientalist discourse has transformed it into a controversial issue as well as a stereotype. The mention of women in Islam in the West brings to mind all kinds of oppressions. This oppression itself is represented through clothing, specifically the veil or hijab. Leila Ahmad argues that Islam’s peculiar practice with respect to women in Western narrative has “always formed part of the quintessential otherness and inferiority of Islam” (Ahmad, 2005, 319). The stereotype is part of “a civilizational discourse among Western imperial nations, which have historically represented Islam as a backward religion” (Morey and Yaqin, 2001, 177). Similarly, Geoffrey Nash argues that representations of female subjugation in Islam have become a common feature of western discourse (Nash, 2012, 50). Updike draws on the same discourse in his portrayal of women in an Islamic society. They are described as oppressed and inferior in comparison to men.

Bernard Lewis, the archenemy of Said in academia and a harsh critic of Islam, makes the oppression of women a recurring point in his theory of differentiation between the West and Islam. He argues that women’s status in an Islamic society is like a non-Muslim, a slave, or children (Lewis, 1993, 162). As Shahid Alam points out, these are specific cultural problems due to variations in interpretations. Even Muslim intellectuals and leaders have been struggling against these evils in their communities (Alam, 2006, 19). Alam further argues that like in the West, there are problems in Islamic societies, but despite Muslims’ struggling against those problems, the West still Orientalizes them. Mohanty considers such Orientalization reductive as it depicts specific instances of oppression in Islamic societies as “the universal oppression of women” without considering context-specific differentiated analysis (Mohanty, 1998, 75). According to her, the meanings attached to women wearing the veil in the 1979 Iranian revolution and contemporary Iran are context-specific, as women in both contexts were motivated by different reasons. During the revolution, middle-class women veiled to “indicate solidarity with their working-class sisters,” while in contemporary Iran, “Islamic laws indicate that all women wear the veil” (Mohanty, 1998, 75). Orientalist discourse takes a different approach as it takes specific instances and turns them into a uniform stereotype.

Updike’s Terrorist creates situations in which women’s oppression in Islam is perceived to be universal. In one such situation, Ahmad tells Joryleen that the prophet advises women to cover their ornaments (Updike, 2007, 65). This insertion of the prophet’s saying is true, but people interpret covering and ornaments differently. Muslim women in Turkey, Saudi Arabia, Iran, or other Muslim societies interpret the injunction about covering their bodies differently. This difference in interpretation also explains the differences in their hijab or veil. Some societies with orthodox interpretations, like those in Saudi Arabia, prefer women to cover their heads and faces. Some women show their faces but cover their heads. Yet others interpret it according to their own understanding and dress like any other woman in the world. In some cases, these differences in covering female bodies are visible even in seemingly homogenous communities. An example can be the women in the urban centers of Turkey like Istanbul. Compared to women in rural areas, women in cities have more flexible interpretations of covering their bodies, and in most cases, both contest their interpretations on public forums. Secondly, the concept of hijab has a context, conditions and
exceptions. Muslims think that some injunctions regarding hijab were specifically for the times of the Prophet Mohammad, his wives and daughters, and so the injunctions do not apply to them in the contemporary world. Similarly, there are exceptions to the laws of hijab, which gives female individuals an immense space to exercise their free will. Again, it’s a matter of interpretation, and people interpret Islamic injunctions differently depending on many factors. It becomes a stereotype when a certain interpretation, in most cases a minority interpretation, is imposed on the whole group. In some cases, sweeping statements are made without any context. In one such example, the narrator says that women in the Middle East “withdrew into wrinkles and a proud shapelessness” (Updike, 170). The context is not necessary because the reader can read between the lines due to an already established stereotype. Teresa resents how Omar wanted her to be submissive towards him. She also thinks that Sheikh Rashid shows extreme hostility towards her. She believes, she is mere flesh and nothing more. The imam and Ahmad believe that wives are distractions because they hinder you from becoming good and stop you from taking part in a jihad. At another point, the imam’s exhortations are symptomatic of a misogynist stereotype of Islam, as he tells Ahmad “Do without these women without Heavenly-flesh, these earthly baggage, these unclean hostages to fortune” (Updike, 108). These instances are nothing but the imam’s own interpretation, which is one of many such interpretations, and is comparable to the diversity of schools of thought in Islam. These schools interpret Islam differently, and there are even different interpretations inside a single school of thought.

Ahmad believes in the total segregation of men and women in the religious space. He cannot tolerate the sight of women sitting beside men in the African American church when he goes to listen to Joryleen sing in the choir. According to him, the presence of women stains the church. He cannot tolerate their presence, as the mosque in Islam is perceived to be a male-dominated space where women have no presence. Women can never be good friends, confidantes or moral beings according to the imam, because “women are animals easily led” (Updike, 2007, 10). The young, beautiful and diverse girls at Central High are devils for him, and even Teresa, his own mother, is “trashy and immoral” (Updike, 2007, 35) due to her non-conformity with Islamic injunctions even though she is not a Muslim. To prove that women are considered “unclean” in Islam, Updike refers to the Quran as the ultimate evidence. Worried about his own uncleanliness, Ahmad finds that the Quran “talked of uncleanness but only in regard to women, their menstruation, their suckling of infants” (Updike, 156). In the same paragraph, an unnecessary and out of place reference is inserted to intensify Islam’s subjugation of women. The text reports the Quran saying “Your wives are your field: go in, therefore, to your field as ye will” (Updike 156). This verse appears at an unlikely place in the novel. Ahmad wants to know about cleanliness in Islam after he has started experiencing nocturnal emissions. He finds the Quran devoid of sexual advice or advice about the cleanliness of men. The text in the novel says that the Quran only talks about cleanliness only in regard to women. However, the reality is that the injunctions about cleanliness are directed to both men and women in the Quran. At this moment, Updike introduces the verse about wives being fields to create a certain effect. He connects this with another verse, which appears immediately after, by saying: “In the verse before that, he reads that women are a pollution” (Updike 156). The verse after this talks about women’s menstruation, and their “uncleanliness” according to Updike. According to Al-Quran: A Contemporary Translation, the first verse translates: “Women are like fields for you: so seed them as you intend” (2:223), and the second verse does not translate into women’s “uncleanliness” but their “stress” (2:222). In Terrorist, the context is not given, whereas the out of-context information is connected through authorial comments to reinforce a certain stereotype. The reader would think that a field means a field. The reality is that no one can say for certain what these words mean. The word “field” in this verse has metaphorical meanings, and Muslim scholars have interpreted it differently in the context of reproduction, injunctions about proper means and ends of sex, and in some interpretations, even the appropriate way to perform sex. Fourteen hundred years of Islam’s history have not fixed its
meanings, but Updike does it in a single sentence. After so many instances of discrimination in *Terrorist*, for Updike, women have no hope in Islam, as the Secretary believes that Muslims cannot offer anything but “more Taliban—more oppression of women” (Updike 258).

The concept of “marriage in heaven” with six-dozen virgins is itself a stereotype, which these Orientalists use to depict Islam and Muslims as sensualists. The implication is that if Muslims die in jihad for Islam, the most sought after objective is the virgins. Sensuality, sexuality and issues of gender are all complementary in the Orientalization of Islam and Muslims. Said considered “the sensuality of the Orient,” (Said 205) “and “excess of libidinous passions” (Said 262) as recurring topos in the discursive Orientalist discourse. Like other othering practices, the issues of gender and sexuality could hardly be avoided in Orientalist discourse, as there are so many perceived differences.

As Kate Zebiri points out, this aspect became the main point of difference, as Islam was attacked for its “alleged moral laxity and sensuality” in the early centuries of Muslim-Christian encounters (Zebiri, 2011, 175). Multiple marriages of the Prophet, Quran’s depiction of a sensual paradise as discussed, and polygamy were some recurring topos to Orientalize Islam and Muslims as sensual. Updike also plays on the sensual trope in his depiction of Islam and Muslims.

Ahmad suffers from a similar conflict between the needs of his body and the dictates of his religion. He is tempted by lustful girls, especially his sexually inviting friend Joryleen, but resists by calling them devils, as they might take away his God. At a later stage when Charlie arranges a date between Ahmad and Joryleen, Lying naked beside her, he thinks “of all those intestines, and stomach and things, packed in” (Updike, 2007, 225). The sexual relationship of his mother and Levy, and thinking about the unpleasant meeting of their bodies disgust him. In the context of the novel, this critic of American obsession with sex is seemingly transformed by the sexual encounter with Joryleen. Updike, surprisingly, spares Ahmad any qualms or guilt about his seemingly sinful act when he can come up with all sorts of references from the Quran in trivial issues. Instead, the narrator describes Ahmad to have experienced paradise, “a convulsive transformation, a vaulting inversion of his knotted self ... which occurs when the soul passes at death into Paradise” (Updike, 2007, 226).

The repression of sexual desire is a constant theme in the novel. Ahmad suffers from a body/mind conflict when it comes to sex. This conflict in his sex life is instigated by the bigger physical/metaphysical and material/spiritual divide between the West and Islam. Muslim men’s sex lives are a manifestation of that conflict between their physical body needs and spiritual restraints. He has a bodily desire for women, but cannot forgo the hope of large-eyed virgins in paradise. If the conflict is resolved, as it happens for a short period of time for Ahmad, it is implied that violent instincts leading to terrorism could be diluted. Updike tries to convey that if the sexual desires of terrorists were satiated, terrorism would stop. More generally, he says that sexual depravity leads to violence and terrorism. Contrary to Said’s argument that Orientalist discourse depicts Muslims as “oversexed degenerates” (Said, 2003, 286), Ahmad is “undersexed.” He is extreme and would bring extreme results. He is oversexed so he is depraved. He is violent because he is oversexed. The terrorists’ narratives are symptomatic of Orientalism’s lack of personal histories. They do not have any past. Ahmad’s history is missing. We do not know anything about his past sexual life or affairs. It’s either the Quran or the sayings of the prophet or Updike himself who speak for Ahmad. As there is no other way, Updike resorts to psychoanalysis to understand “the Muslim male suffering from unresolved issues around sexuality and masculinity” (Morey and Yaqin, 2001, 140). Even the psychoanalytical approach is not objective because of the lyrical authorial commentaries of the author, which is already tainted by his prejudiced and biased views about Islam and Muslims.

The fictional narrative started in different settings but arrive at similar conclusion, as the route taken and strategies used are the same. In *Terrorist*, Updike wanted to go inside the mind of the “Other” to understand it better against an instinctive response to September 11, which tended to reduce it to our own smallness according to Updike. But the strategies he uses are the same Orientalist
strategies used by Orientalists. Once started, the road of othering takes you nowhere but further alienation, stereotyping and differentiating. Anna Hartnell considers *Terrorist* to be a departure from a typical “victim” narrative towards a “perpetrator” narrative as it throws light on “them” instead of “us” (Hartnell, 2012, 478). And while it is true that the novel sheds light on the terrorist narrative, the pivot is always turned towards favoring the West. This interaction with the “Other” is not different from any other Orientalist narrative, as typical Orientalist tropes are employed to intensify the estrangement. Gray agrees that *Terrorist* is an unimaginative attempt, as the author fails to go inside the skin of the “Other” (Gray, 2009, 136). Updike tries to answer the question of Why do they hate us? What’s to hate? The novel does not answer it but creates more questions and confusions.

Updike’s Muslim characters are uniformly one-dimensional and stereotypical—fanatic, violent, death-driven life-haters, and sensual chauvinists. Along these lines of thought, Islam and the West have irreconcilable differences, which mostly result in Islam’s violent irruption against the West. Updike supports these Islamic irruptions among Muslims by citing from the Quran and sayings of the prophet without any recognition of interpretative subtleties. As shown by the characterization of Ahmad, Updike has reflected himself in his characters by using orientalist strategies as evidenced by his take on Islam and Muslims. The novel is a typical Orientalist narrative, embellished with lyrical authorial commentary and impaired by ventriloquism in his engagement with the Other. His characters are straightforwardly fanatic and unsubtle, leaving nothing to imagination. The only thing new here is the subject of Islam and to exemplify its adherence to violence and jihad.

The narrative ends in a practice that Versluys calls “narrative perpetual motion” (Versluys, 2009, 161). It means that the narrative has gone one round and other rounds can follow infinitely. Updike’s *Terrorist* has a similar sentence at the beginning and end of the novel. It starts with Ahmad thinking, “These devils seek to take away my God” (3), and ends with a similar one in the past tense when Ahmad thinks once again “These devils have taken away my God” (Updike, 2007, 310). Americans are his devils who are still devils and “insects” (Updike, 2007: 310) for him at the end, even though he aborts his mission. The novel has ascertained his fears, thus making it a vicious cycle. It has come one full circle to the same position from where it started. There is a repetitive cycle without closure or resolutions. As a consequence, the implication is that the novel does not allow for any growth in understanding terrorism, Islam or the “Other.” Consequently, we are left “with a sense of pathetic distance still separating “us” from an Orient destined to bear its foreignness as a mark of its permanent estrangement from the West” (Said, 1993, 244).

**Conclusion**

While September 11 spurred the Western world to examine its complacency over its treatment of the East, the first impulse in fiction by American authors to deal with the Other was Orientalist. An Orientalist stand from an American standpoint was realized with John Updike’s *Terrorist*. The novel portrays the fictional terrorists embedded in an Orientalist discourse, thus connecting them with Islam. There is not even a single instance about the possibilities of any meaningful engagement between the two civilizations. Instead, it emphasizes the message that such a possibility is delusional due to the fact that the two are essentially different and enemy towards each other. The collective religion is perceived to unequivocally condemn individuality. Islam is represented and contained as an irrational religion, which believes, and lives in a backward past whereas the rational West believes in modernity, progress, democracies, and liberties. Collective Islamic society is regarded as defeated, revanchist, tyrannical, repressive, while Muslims are replicas of the same collectivity. These negative stereotypes are then set in opposition to the West’s advancement in science and technology, its futurity, progress, democracy, and liberalism. The differences between the West and Islam and Islam’s hatred for West’s advancement and riches are themes highlighted. As discussed in accordance with Said’s Orientalism, Islam’s hatred is not simply due to West’s advancement, but due to concrete instances of interventions, specific depredations,
and exploitations. This discourse of hate against Islam and Muslims emanating from a “Clash of Civilization” mindset has significantly contributed to conflicts. The logical response of Westerners to stereotypical death-loving Jihadist Muslims will be hate, anxiety, and fear. Under its influence, Muslims as well as people of other ethnicities have suffered discrimination, imprisonment, exile and torture in the post-September 11 West. The discourse has intensified as it grows and feeds on instances like September 11, because Orientalists find evidence to support their claims. As discussed, instead of seeing terrorism for what it is - a desperate and isolated act - orientalist narratives reinforces it as a part of a pattern of anti-West sentiment as they do not differentiate between terrorists and their religion. A reclusive and shy individual, Ahmad in Terrorist could have been treated like any other individual with familial, social, sexual or financial problems, but he becomes a stereotype when his character is developed within a religious discourse. His hostile feelings are portrayed as a mirror of Islam. It seems that individual ills and secular terminologies prove inefficient to describe so much hate. It’s also the reason for the failed engagement, as the narrative uses religious binaries to connect its characters’ individual ills with their ideologies. The result is that individualities are always sacrificed to project uniformed and monolithic collective entities of Islam and Muslims. There are so many aspects to these characters and their past, but these have been completely avoided to make them stick to the stereotype. The manipulation of the religious script to find the reasons for their hate is unjustifiable.

These limitations in Terrorist, along with the manifest belief in the opposition between Islam and the West, compel the author to use strategies, symbols, and images to stereotype the Other. Updike called Muslims enemies, and Islam a totalitarian and fascist religion. It would be too optimistic to expect something good to come out of Terrorist thanks to Updike’s obvious hatred for Islam and Muslims. On the other hand, it would be cynical to expect a non-partisan and less biased approach from the less privileged and less educated when seasoned scholars come up with such wild stereotypes. The disastrous result is that all Muslim characters in this narrative are uniformly one-dimensional – fanatic villains, vicious, death-driven life-haters, and carnal bigots. There is nothing new, but the author merely transfers his hatred to his characters. Even the end of his narrative does not have a sense of closure or hopes of future resolution; however, there is an ominous prediction of cycles of hate and violence. Nothing new is learned in the story, as the Other stands further distanced since the narrative started. The only thing positive in this novel in terms of September 11 novel is that a process of engagement with Islam, though negative, has, at least, been initiated. It’s true that it still favors the West by following Orientalist strategies, but it also seems to be the precursor to the next trend in engaging with the conflict. Keeping in view the bad receptions of such novels, there does not seem to be any future fictional contribution that can be made in terms of explicit Orientalism. In any case, the media performs that function better than other representations, as it has imbued the true spirit of Orientalism in its coverage of terrorism, especially after September 11. However, the last 17 years have witnessed a crystallization of patterns in the media to stereotype Islam and Muslims, thus creating a ubiquitous sense of conflicts and fears in the West.

REFERENCES


Orientalism in John Updike’s Novel Terrorist


