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Orientalism in Updike's Terrorist

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Abstract

The title of the study aims to explore the concept of Orientalism from a selected western novel by Updike entitled Terrorist via comparative qualitative research methods. As a result, the Orient should not be educated and should be under the hegemony of the Westerners. The Orient should be under the influence of Europocentrism, however, not all the attempts by the West had succeeded. In conclusion, through Sheikh Rashid's interpretation of the Holy Quran, Ahmad was convinced to follow the terrorist's path.

Keywords: Orientalism, Updike, Terrorist, Muslim, Culture.

Orientalismo en el terrorista de Updike

Resumen

El título del estudio tiene como objetivo explorar el concepto de orientalismo de una novela occidental seleccionada por Updike titulada Terrorista a través de métodos comparativos de investigación cualitativa. Como resultado, el Oriente no debe ser educado y debe

estar bajo la hegemonía de los occidentales. Oriente debería estar bajo la influencia del europocentrismo, sin embargo, no todos los intentos de Occidente habían tenido éxito. En conclusión, a través de la interpretación de Sheikh Rashid del Sagrado Corán, Ahmad estaba convencido de seguir el camino del terrorista.

Palabras clave: Orientalismo, Updike, Terrorista, Musulmán, Cultura.

1. INTRODUCTION

UPDIKE's (2006) *Terrorist* posits its postcolonial studies based on the premise of Orientalism theory. It gives a significant insight into how Americans practiced prosecution and lived under the pressure of fear after the 9/11 incident. It is a novel that explicitly focuses on a potential suicide bomber who is a Muslim-Arab. It tells the story of Ahmad Ashmawy, who is an eighteen-year-old Egyptian American about to graduate from high school, and who is drawn first to Islam, and then to Islamic movement in order to be a terrorist (HERMAN, 2015). The novelist presents to the readers that facts are manipulated, on one side, to achieve certain political interests and on the other side, to persecute people of a religious minority. The protagonist of the novel is a Muslim, and his father is an Arab who left the protagonist's mother; Teresa when he was a child. Ahmad left high school and become a truck driver under Shaikh Rashid's influence, who is Ahmad's spiritual advisor. Rashid is the significant figure in this novel who instigates Ahmad to be radicalized.

The indoctrination of radicalism was achieved when he finds Ahmad akin to a fertile ground for planting seeds of radicalism. He found Ahmad to be a believer in Islam at the age of eleven. Through significant events in his life, Ahmad chooses to redeem himself and be radicalized when he discovers that his sexual desires must be repressed as instructed in the Islamic religion. Ahmad sheds light on the Western fear of Islam, but he associates that fear of the Western misunderstanding of Islam. The Western world considers Islam as problematic not because of the real essence of Islam, but because Islam is viewed as the main counterforce to Western civilization (MANQOUSH, YUSOF & HASHIM, 2014).

Thus, the reason behind the radicalization of Ahmad is the result of persuasions by the sinister cleric Shaikh Rashid, who might have a link with the government to achieve an ideology. Perhaps, Ahmad is targeted by the government as a pawn to represent terrorists and who practices acts of terrorism. Ahmad is shown to be a hypnotized individual; brainwashed because of racial ideology. BANERJEE (2008) theorizes the cultural meaning that race may in fact hold. Hence, the paper explores the concept of Orientalism considering Updike's protagonist.

2. METHODOLOGY

HUSSAIN (2005) views Oriental culture(s) as instances to view Islamic and Arabic countries as diasporic in nature from the Western

lens. Orientalism is one of the elements of postcolonialism. It is a movement against Islamic. Arabic and Muslims Post-colonial theory, which is predicated upon territorial enclosure. Postcolonialism capitalizes on Muslims and Arabs as objects. UPDIKE's (2006) terrorist provides a clear insight pertaining to how Arabs and Islamic people, and their beliefs are portrayed by the Westerners. Ahmad, the protagonist, rejects ladies to suppress his desires and is also influenced by his father's action of deserting his mother when he was a child. From an Islamic and Arabic post-colonial viewpoint, the novel's adage portrayed the people of the Islamic faith, on the Arabic creed and Muslims in a Muslim society which oblige to edge the talk. Regardless, in its positive delineation of a moderate and the perceived to be unessential Islamic and Arabic people in the United States of America, the novel upgrades toward a post-colonial diagram, yet one in which Islamic and Arabic people subordinates women.

KRIEBERNEGG (2018) states that Updike's work is a representation of the Muslim-Arabs of the Post-9/11 era. The novel does not give an idea about Ahmad's destiny; however, it gives an insight into how terrorism has been attached and connotes to Muslims and Arabs after the said 9/11 attack. Updike's Terrorist might be viewed as non-traditional in depicting Arab-Muslims character, but it shows that terrorism is inherent to Islamists movements; which supports or advocates Islamic fundamentalism. Sheikh Rashid is a cleric representing Muslims who befriends a fundamentalist from Yemen. He teaches Ahmad Arabic language and introduces Ahmad to a CIA agent from Lebanon, who had initially refused Ahmad at the

beginning. Sheikh Rashid was the person responsible for giving Ahmad instructions about Islam, and had used religion to convince Ahmad to conduct acts of salvation in light of his Islamic interpretations, but is however viewed as a terrorist act by the Western world.

Updike's approach of writing is to put forward the effect of religion in shaping the culture of Muslim-Arabs character. The protagonist in the novel; Ahmad chooses Islam as an identity or as a refuge and sanctuary to overcome his feeling of loss over his father's act of deserting his mother and himself. The absence of his father has a significant impact on his life. It is a dilemma for him to seek an environment to construct his identity. This is achieved through Sheikh Rashid who persuades him that religion is more important than ethnicity in shaping identity.

3. RESULTS

Jniyene depicts the Arab-American image by dramatizing the Arab's dilemma of interpreting religion. This is illustrated through the interpretation of religion that allows the Arab-Muslim character; Ahmad to deliberate about executing a suicide attack against innocent American people. The justification of doing such an act correspondent to what prophet Abraham had done when he had a revelation to sacrifice his own son. However, at the end of the novel, Ahmad had a change of mind and heart and gives priority to people's lives at the

expense of his faith. HERMAN (2015) theorizes that Updike has taken a risk when he wrote a novel that portrays Arab-Americans through the protagonist Ahmad, as a potential threat to Americans; such threat is not so much against security, but it is against the American culture. This study takes note that Ahmad emotes feelings of frustration when he sees the exposed body parts of the girls in high school, which goes against the tenets of Islam that advocates modesty and the obligation for women to cover the awrah. Such a view creates a sense of isolation associating with the feeling of the minority in the Arab-Muslims psyche which is considered as a threat to destroy their spirituality. Thus, the novel is considered as an exploration of the connection between Islamic roots and terrorism after the 9/11 attack.

Early Orientalism is concerned with the geographical levels that seek to enhance the relationship between the Orient and Europe for the sake of resources and the market. As cited in Lodge & Nigel, said theorizes that the Oriental-European relationship was determined by an unstoppable European expansion in search of market, resources and colonies by rejecting the scholarly discourse to an imperial institution. The main Orientalists had interpreted nineteenth-century work of the Orient into English, in light of the doubt pertaining to the genuinely compelling provincial triumph and it was considered essential in learning about the defeated groups of people. These thoughts of ideas as power is reachable by Said's postulations. The West went to claim the land of the Orients through the revelations and thoughts forwarded by the orient researchers as the West was undergoing a dynamic stage.

The most outstanding finding with regards to the research developments made by the Orientalist researchers is that of the Orient itself. What is viewed as the Orient is that it is an enormous district, one that proliferates a huge expanse of societies and nations? It incorporates the majority of Asia, in addition to the Middle East. The portrayal of this single Situate which can be contemplated as a durable entirety and entity is an exceptionally significant finding amongst the most ground-breaking achievements by the Orientalist researchers. It is an essential image of a prototypical Oriental — an organic second rate that is socially in reverse and perpetual — to be portrayed in overwhelming instances and at the sexual levels.

The talk and visual symbolism of Orientalism are associated with thoughts of intensity and prevalence, planned at first to boost the colonization mission with respect to the West, and continued through a wide assortment of talks and approaches. The discourse is the basis for development. The effeminate and feeble Orient anticipates the predominance of the West. It is an exposed and unintelligent entirety that exists for, and regarding, its Western partner. The significance of such a development is to make a solitary topic where none existed, a gathering of already implicit ideas of the other. Since the idea of the Orient is made by the Orientalist, it exists exclusively for him or her. Its character is characterized by the researcher who gives it life (HUSSAIN, 2005).

Edward Said's evaluation is to scrutinize the arrangement of convictions known as Orientalism frames, which is a vital foundation for postcolonial studies. His work features the errors of a wide

assortment of suppositions, as it doubts different standards of thought which are acknowledged on individual, scholastic, and political dimensions.

The Orient connotes an organized set of stereotyped images surrounded by political horizons where the West learns about the Orient and is connected to Western awareness about the Orient. The Orient dwells for the West. It is constructed by and in connection to the West. It is an identical representation of what is mediocre and the juxtapositioning of the Orient as the outsider (other) by the Occidental West (ABDELHAQ, 2016). Orientalism is a vision of being Orientalised, and it studies the goals, points of view, and ideological inclinations apparently suited to the Orient. It is the depiction of the Orient as communicated by the whole arrangement of thoughts.

The Oriental presents the individual viewed along with such reasoning. The man is depicted as effeminate, weak and strangely perilous. His sexuality is regarded as dangerous to white Western women. It is noticed that the Western women are both anxious to be ruled and strikingly weird for the orient. The Oriental is a secluded picture that gives a generalization across social and national boundaries (HUNTINGTON, 2002). Dormant Orientalism is considered as the unobservant, unapproachable emphasis on what the Orient meant. Its fundamental substance is static and consistent. The Orient is seen as discrete, flighty, on the contrary, quietly unique and latent. It is inclined towards imperialism and remote from advancement. It presents the woman as possessing a vulnerable and recumbent personality.

It is contrary to the West, thus it is considered as the non-Western other, as the conquerable, and the substandard (HASSAN, 2002). Orientalism incorporates changes and data in learning about the Orient and in addition, it is an approach that is constructed in Orientalist considerations. It is the articulation in words and activities of Latent Orientalism. SAID (2001) theorizes that Orientalism could be uttered in the current Western delineations of Bedouin communities. The images of Arab are perceived as nonsensical, threatening, deceitful and aggressive to the Westerners. They are stereotyped as untrustworthy and these are the highly probable prototypical perceived Orientalist images conjured. These perceptions are trusted achievements created by the Occident.

Orientalism as one of the features of Post-Colonial theory reflects the wrongly perceived ideas held by the Western culture towards Arab-Muslims. Said says that the hegemony of the West is to connect Anthropocentrism with Eurocentrism. This juxtapositioning is examined and noted by events unfolding in the novel when Ahmad, as an orient character or who is considered to represent the Orient on UPDIKE's (2006) *Terrorist* was induced to commit certain acts. He was brainwashed by a group who was serving Western interests under the guise of enacting salvation and Islamic concerns. Ahmad, the protagonist was persuaded to drive a suicide truck bomb with the intent of killing innocent people who merely have a different belief.

The mosque, the humblest of the several in New Prospect, occupies the second floor above a nail salon and a check-cashing facility, in a row of small shops that includes a dusty-windowed pawn

shop, a second-hand bookstore, a shoe-repair man and sandal-maker, a Chinese laundry down a little flight of steps, a pizza joint, and a grocery store specializing in Middle Eastern foods—dried lentils and fava beans, hummus and halvah, falafel and couscous and tabouli moldering in plain printed packages that look strange, in their lack of pictures and bold lettering, to Ahmad's American eyes (UPDIKE, 2006).

The narrator gives an insight into how the mosque isolates Ahmad from the external world. Ahmad is an individual who is negatively affected by the surrounding community, which differs from what he believes in. On the one hand, Ahmad views the mosque as a weird place through the presence of Shaikh Rashid who serves as the interpreter of the holy Al-Quran. Simultaneously however, Ahmad feels disgusted by the American culture; and for this reason, Ahmad feels rejoiced when Sheikh Rashid asks him if he is willing to be a martyr (HERMAN, 2015). Ahmad's guardian at high school is a Jewish- American; Jack Levy who endeavours hard to stop Ahmad in executing his plan. He persuades Ahmad that Americans, Arab-Americans, and Jewish Americans are equal and possess many similarities in this country in an attempt to dissuade him from executing his plan.

Jack Levy says hey, come on, we are all Americans here. That is the idea, did not they tell you that at Central High? Irish- Americans, African- Americans and Jewish- Americans; there are even Arab-Americans. KRIEBERNEGG (2018) argues that in Updike's novel, we do not notice elaboration about Islamic fundamentalism as an outsider

threat, but it is a projection of terrorist phenomena affected by religion developed inside the United States. Said theorized that the West attempts to instigate unrest not only on cultural, racial or historical levels but also on political levels as well. The close affinity between politics and Western Orientalism that flourished was an object of the study. Updike's *Terrorist* is an instance which manifests the concept of Orientalism as opposing to any reformation in Islamic thought. The following extract presents how Ahmad the Orient views the surroundings under the effect of religious education when he proceeds with his intended terrorist attack as a justification to his deed. The following extract shows the fact: I am with those, Ahmad says slowly, who are with God.

Ahmad attempts to encourage himself to take part in such a deed. The extract shows that Ahmad tries to satisfy himself with something he could not understand from the instruction he received from Shaikh Rashid. Such an instruction makes him feel that he is on God's side, and what he is undertaking is for God's sake. Perhaps, his way of thinking was affected by what he had witnessed around him, such as immodest girls who display their bodies to entice men. HERMAN (2015) argues The rampant sexuality of his fellow students disgusts him: All day long, at Central High School, girls sway and sneer and expose their soft bodies and alluring hair. For Ahmad, these instances might be just that has driven him to execute a suicide attack attempt.

The novel forwards the notion that the Orientalist Movement had coerced Ahmad through persuasion to be a representative for the

Orient, to abandon school in order to be a truck driver. This meant that the Orient should not be educated and should be under the hegemony of the Westerners. The Orient should be under the influence of Europocentrism, however, not all the attempts by the West had succeeded. This is manifested in the following extract:

It seems that every sleazy reporter and headline-grabbing House Democrat who wants to can triumphantly brandish knives, blackjacks, and loaded revolvers which have successfully ridden through the X-ray scanners of carry-on luggage.

The extract shows how the Government agents had masterminded the attack operation and endeavors to execute the terrorist act through a pawn. They worked on an oriental character Ahmad, to demonstrate that in the aftermath of the intended suicide attack, the action was made on their part. This is in the event that they could not apprehend the perpetrators. They are acutely conscious of public perception of terrorist-prevention methods and how the Government Department will appear if an attack takes place. The extract shows the frustration of the case conducted by the agency and proves the ineffectiveness of the Department in achieving its goal in victimizing and framing a person (in this instance the Orient) who is merely a human being.

4. CONCLUSION

Orientalism is one of the elements of the postcolonial approach. It reflects how the Westerns view the Orient through the inspection of

the Orient's' culture, dogmas and social affairs. Updike's novel *Terrorist* is an embodiment of the Eastern or Oriental character Ahmad; whose mode of thinking is at variance to the society he lives in. Sheikh Rashid has a great influence on Ahmad. He endeavors to transform Ahmad from a normal citizen into a terrorist. His malicious evil intention is achieved through the indoctrination of the misinterpreted holy Quran; inspired by the department the sheikh is an accomplice of. Such an act provides insight and a window to the workings of the West in their attempts to misrepresent the Orient as barbarians and terrorists.

This will then be a justification for them to colonize the Orient or the East for the sake of their vested interests, cultural hegemony and exploitation of natural resources. According to the analysis of the novel, it is noted that Ahmad is not a terrorist by nature. However, through Sheikh Rashid's interpretation of the Holy Quran, Ahmad was convinced to follow the terrorist's path. Ahmad is confronted by Jack Levy who is his guidance counselor on the roadside before he could even execute the plan. He was then persuaded by Jack to abandon the intended act. Ensuing the incident, Ahmad realizes that God does not want him to kill innocent people. Moving forward, it is recommended that for future studies, the novel can be analyzed or researched from the racist or stereotypical lenses.

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