

## **Critical Evaluation of Colonial Shadow of America Over Middle East: With Specific Reference to John Updike's The Terrorist**

**By**

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### **Abstract**

The attacks of 9/11 was like a black day in the history of humanity and a never ending plea of sorrow and grief for the people of America, Terrorist by John Updike evaluates the after effect of 9/11 attacks and in the process many of the relevant points were raised in the novel related to 'Shadow Colonialism' of America in Muslim countries like Iraq, Afghanistan, Palestine, Israel, etc. This present study will evaluate the situation in terms of Updike's novel Terrorist and present a critical form of the so called Shadow Colonialism.

**Keywords:** Terrorism, John Updike, Terrorist, Shadow Colonialism.

### **Introduction**

The attack of 9/11 was not just a terrorist attack on the most powerful economy of the world rather it has changed the velocity and direction of measures taken to deal with the terrorist groups. Also the other power centers of the world joined hand to deal with the situations to come in future. Thousands of innocent people died in these attacks and left a gap in the life of their families that can never be filled with any other precious things. As a matter of fact these attacks had started a new line of debates the international arena of literature, a number of novels were written on these attacks, although the thought process was different in every second novel i.e. some have considered the reasons of these attacks as their plot and others have considered the after effects of the attacks. John Updike, one of the America's front line novelist also considered the theme of post-9/11 scenario and the related consequences of the same.

This is a well-known fact that the heat of this tragic event was felt all over the world and even many of the Muslim countries criticized the death of innocent people and also felt the pain and agony of all those who were out of their houses to contribute their efforts for the growth of world's most powerful economy i.e. at WTC and at pentagon. Like John Updike many of the other novelist also presented their novels like Falling Man in 2007 by Don DeLillo, The Garden of Last Days by Andre Waldman in 2010, The Yellow Birds by Kevin Powers' in 2013, the list is countless. All the above given novelist and authors had mentioned the impact of American military interventions right from Afghanistan to Iraq and also presented the state of Israeli conflict with other countries. Rather the descriptions were in the

for of narratives but then again the same has been quoted as one of the important aspects related to current scenario of these countries. Most of the authors had considered the political stature of the country under new dimension i.e. political unrest and political instability, then on the other hand, many of the authors had presented their views on comparison of living standards, thought process, willingness to get acquainted to the western culture, etc. even many of the authors stated that the 9/11 attacks were the exaggerated form of 'Islamic' terrorism. The researcher would like to state that most of the authors had taken the same background of the story and presented their point of view in a totally different format. In such a scenario *The Terrorist* by John Updike was different from these novels in a great sense the major thrust was given to the Israeli and Palestinian conflict and the interpretation of the same had been described in relation to post-9/11 attack and the war raised thereafter.

As far as the work of John Updike is concerned, his work is from some of the most renowned authorships; he delivered around 50 novels in the span of 61 years and had never compromised with the quality and standards of his plot. **Schiff (2014)** if we go by the title 'The Terrorist' was his 22<sup>nd</sup> novel and stood in frontline considering the tragedy of 9/11 for the first time. The main character of the novel was a 18years old young boy known as Ahmad Ashmawy Mulloy, he is an American whose Egyptian father has abandoned him along with his mother who was an American Irish. This happened to him at the age of three, he never enjoyed a normal lifestyle i.e. his mother was the only earning member but was not able to run the family on the basis of her income. Then her own private life was one of the biggest hurdle in the progress of the family. As a young man Ahmad use to visit the mosque in his area , his guiding star was an Imam, popularly known as Sheikh Rashid. This Imam has a great influence over Ahmad, rather he has inculcated his distorted views in the mind of Ahmad, this was very easy of Sheikh Rashid as Ahmad do not have parents and there was no one to guide him about the right and wrong. Sheikh Rashid succeeded to convince Ahmad to become a truck driver for the Chehab's family and then drive a truck load of explosives to attack the Lincoln Tunnel. On a positive note Jack Levy, who was a Jewish School counselor, tires to convenience Ahmad for completing his studies. As the story proceeds further, one can presume that Ahmad was under the influence of Sheikh and also under dilemma to follow Jack Levy or not. As the story moves towards it end and events/incidents started to sum up; Ahmad agreed to take a explosive laden truck for bombing the Lincoln Tunnel but finally he decides to decline the plans of Sheikh and he does this under the influence of Jack Levy.

The plot of the novel is based in USA and the post 9/11 scenario has also been explained according to life process of USA, but then again John Updike has also expressed the geographical terrain of war ridden Afghanistan (North Eastern Region Specifically), the conflict of Palestine and Israel; all these events were linked to the analysis of post 9/11 conditions in US and also the role of America in raging war or taking initiatives to suppress the same at different times is presented as the preface of the novel. The novel also indicates towards the geo-political aspects and colonial conflicts in the context of USA and its allied forces.

This present study will evaluate and assess the internal and external factors related to the attack of 9/11 and also critically analyze the colonial unrest and agitation. The researcher will also try to find some or the other relationship between this colonial conflict and impact of the same on the emergence of events like 9/11.

## Background of Present Study

**Said (1979)** stated that the Western concept of understanding Islam is a bit different from other countries of the world, even on the international fronts US has never easily accepted the compassion of Islam in real terms. For the number of orientalists in and around US have considered Islam as a society or a prototype. **Said (1979)**. The culture, civilization and background of the beliefs do have a legitimate system of acceptance, but not in the eyes of US. As far as the middle eastern countries of the world are concerned, US started to take interest in the conflicts and agitations arising in these countries just after the World War II. The reason behind this conflicts were numerous i.e. capturing of the silk route to China and India, gaining strategic position for future wars, establishing maximum control over the oil producing countries, etc. and for this the major requirement was to deal with the concurrent conflicts, if some amount of control is required.

**Kumar (2007)** stated that to a certain extent Islam is justified to US in the form where political and imperial interest of Muslims is not considerate. Then in terms of **Gregory (2004)** most of the self-appraised stories of US are based on the works that they have done to bring so called peace and safety in Muslim countries, and in between these stories there were a number of instances where the introduction of modernity was at the disposal of US, as a matter of fact the modernity being accepted in its real sense was not accepted by the East; rather a few parts of the same were incorporated. Many of the authors and thinkers, stated that the supremacy of US over the Eastern countries is self-constructive **Semati (2010)**; **Gafaithi (2008)** stated that celebration of Western supremacy was utilized further in a number of colonial projects in middle east, after 9/11 the rage of western wars in countries like Afghanistan and Iraq, etc. can be felt. After 9/11 America joined hand with Israel to deal with the common enemies and even terrorism. Here again the supremacy of America creped in i.e. most of the opponents were side lined but there was huge collateral damage and in name of dealing with this collateral damage again huge number of people were abstracted for no good reason. Deploying armies in Afghanistan, Palestine and Israel, etc. was justified to a certain extent but then again staying there and forcing the supremacy in political and social aspects is never justified. As stated by Gregory in 2004:

“Israeli troops turned their guns on Palestinian “targets” and not on Palestinian men, women, and children; American firepower destroyed Baghdad buildings and degraded the Iraqi military machine but never killed Iraqis.” (248)

The above given statement was the part of US strategy i.e. “Locating, Opposing and Casting out” Gregory explained this concepts in his own terms, he also stated that in case of opposing and casting out social and cultural aspects of the enemies was considered.

“Opposing’ mobilized a largely cultural register, in which antagonism was reduced to a conflict between a unitary Civilization and multiple barbarisms ‘Casting out’ mobilized a largely political-juridical register, in which not only armed opponents – al-Qaeda terrorists, Taliban troops, Palestinian fighters, Iraqi soldiers – but also civilians and refugees were reduced to the status of homines sacri. Their lives did not matter. The sovereign powers of the American, British, and Israeli states disavowed or suspended the law so that men, women,

and children were made outcasts, placed beyond the pale and beyond the privileges and protections of the Modern. (249)

## **Objective of the Study**

The main objective of this present study is to assess the American context of post 9/11 scenario and the state of 'War on Terrorism' waged by America. As stated in the above given matter, the shadow of colonialism has also been found in the process of this war against terrorism; this study will also evaluate the situation in real terms.

### ***The Case of Israeli-Palestine Conflict***

In the novel 'The Terrorist' the conflict of Israeli-Palestinian is stated with significance and at a number of instances. The character of Jack Levy, main character Ahmad and even the terrorist Muslims were somehow interlinked to this conflict. Reason and scenarios were different but still there was a chord attaching them. Updike has presented a number of Jewish and Muslim characters on the ground of geographical and political variations and the context of each character is different in its true nature.

The situational aspect of the novel states that the main character of Ahmad has been narrated many times about the Journey of Prophet Mohammad to the heaven and in the due course punishing and devastating all the non-Muslims in a view that they are not pure. Here Updike states the role of Al-Quds to elaborate the situation more fierce form. The character of Ahmad was so convinced with these narrations that he stopped listening to Levy's view on his academics and growing further in life. The impact of Sheikh Rashid on Ahmad was so strong that the behavior of Ahmad changed to a puppet that is acting on the instructions of Rashid.

As per the version of Jack Levy, Ahmad is required to regain his lost freedom; he says this in relation to last communication with Ahmad where he repeated 'Christianity' in negative sense and praised the efforts of Palestinians to bring down the same. Ahmad was of the view that Palestine was under the colonial effect of America and in the name of Islam Palestine should attain democracy; only way to do so is to ruin Christianity. Then at the juncture of high school graduation day of Ahmad, contradiction is shown in the speech given by the Muslim Imam and at the same time Levy is recalling the suffering of Jews in Israel. This contradiction is presented by the narrator, who states that:

"Levy studies the imam a slight, impeccable man embodying a belief system that not many years ago managed the deaths of, among others, hundreds of commuters from northern New Jersey. When Levy thinks of embattled Israel and of Europe's pathetically few remaining synagogues needing to be guarded by police day and night, his initial good will toward the imam dissolves: the man in his white garb sticks like a bone in the throat of the occasion.(112)

Then on the other hand, the terrorist stature of Palestinian resistance to the occupancy of Israel was understood by Ahmad in a sense that exploitation of women in Palestine as trophies of martyrdom and killing Americans in a bomb blast will make him a 'Shahid'. This sense of ideology diverted the mind of Ahmad and thousands of youngsters like him. The terrorist groups had taken the advantage of such a thought process and brainwashed Muslim boys to kill Americans for the revenge and become a 'Shahid' in the process. Somehow or the other, colonial shadow of America was responsible for the same to a certain extent.

### *The Situation of Iraq*

The first instance in relation to Iraq was presented in the novel at the time of interaction between Ahmad and Jack Levy, Ahmad was not willing to study further and Levy asks him to join US army as his Arabic language may become an asset for the army. But still Ahmad was of the opinion that the army will send him to kill his brothers in Iraq. Levy said that:

“[o]r to fight for your brothers, it could be. Not all Iraqis are insurgents, you know. Most aren't. They just want to get on with business. Civilization started there. They had an up-and-coming little country, until Saddam”. (41)

Ahmad was of the opinion that his ‘Brother’ are being slaughtered in Iraq and something or the other should be done to save them, on the other hand Levy stated that the US army is struggling in Iraq to bring peace and prosperity as there was a dearth of development in the country since the reign of Saddam. Author himself and many other critics states this concept as ‘Colonial Nostalgia’. Then another version of the same has been presented by the character of Habib Chehab who was in the favor of American colonialism, and he said to Ahmad that:

“[i]n this country [America], people have no fear of prison. Not like the Old World [the Arab world]. Not like the Saudis, not like Iraq before”(148)

Just before the conversation given above, Charlie, the son of Habib, says that:

“look at America abroad—war. They forced a country of Jews into Palestine, right into the throat of the Middle East, and now they’ve forced their way into Iraq, to make it a little U.S. and have the oil.” (147)

In the above context, Charlie was an undercover FBI agent and trying to gain the confidence of Ahmad, so he was taking the imperative in same manner. He was already recommended by Sheikh Rashid and was about to work with Ahmad in the process of bombing. He presented radical thoughts against the US initiative against terrorism and the concept of partial colonialism in oil exploring countries. Americas occupation of Iraq was a propaganda and substantially no good was brought to the country, people like Sheikh Rashid were raging this propaganda as true and solving their personal and political benefits in the shadow of the same.

### *Scenario of Afghanistan*

Afghanistan is having a strategic advantage in terms of war situations and has been ridden by conflicts within the country. In case of Afghanistan, the concept of colonial shadow can be explained in terms of geographical reach of US in the country and also its intervention in the political matter. The interference of US in Afghanistan was never covert, as it was made public a long ago. The situation can be understood in the words of Charlie, who says that:

“They are enemy soldiers. They are dangerous men. They wish to destroy America. That is what they say to reporters, even though they are better fed by us than ever by Taliban. They think Nine-Eleven was a great joke. It is war for them. It is jihad. That is what they say themselves. What they expect, Americans to lie down flat under feet and make no self-defense? Even Bin Laden, he expects being fought back. “(149)



The stories from the prisoners of Guantanamo Bay, remained the point of discussion for years and most of the prisoners were quoted as ‘war prisoners’ although there was no solid evidence against the same. Charlie said all this to gain the trust of Ahmad and take him into his own imperative. Updike as clearly mentioned in his novel that the US war in Afghanistan was reaction to the 9/11 attacks and by means of this was the colonial shadow of US over Afghanistan attracted media to a certain extent. Another quote from the novel states the situation more clearly:

“I love this damn country so much I can't imagine why anybody would want to bring it down. What do these people have to offer instead? More Taliban—more oppression of women, more blowing up statues of Buddha. The mullahs in northern Nigeria are telling people not to let their children be given polio vaccine, and then the kids are brought in paralyzed to the health-aid clinic! They wait until they're totally paralyzed to bring them in, after they've gone all the way with the local mumbo-jumbo,” (258)

The terrorist attacks on the American soil had caused the death of thousands of innocent American citizens and the silence of the army officials in this regards is explained by Updike as the background of 9/11 attacks. The geographical and political background of the attacks and the ‘over explained’ reasons of the same were not able to convince the readers and even the people who were involved in the process. The presentation of the characters as terrorists and the humanitarian agencies involved in pacifying the effect have been portrayed in the novel to a great extent. The character of home secretary presents Taliban as the group behind the attacks, the name of Al-Qaeda and its supreme leader were the status quo as far as these attacks are concerned. After the attacks, rage of war vested upon Afghanistan was related to the demolition of Taliban and bringing peace and prosperity in Afghanistan, but till the recent past American army was not able to do so and after the return of army Taliban again emerged and took the control over Kabul. Can this be considered as the failure of US as a country or strength of Taliban as a Muslim militant group? Whatsoever, Updike has presumed the current situation in his novel and at that time it was considered only as fiction.

### ***Thought Process of Ahmad as American Muslim Youth***

Updike has presented the Muslim youth as mindless entities and of fanatic nature, there are two main character of the novel i.e. Ahmad and Charlie, both the are Muslim but Ahmad is presented as fanatic character and Charlie is presented as a person having higher order of thinking and looking forward to the betterment of his country. Ahmad is a typical example of terrorist active on American soil and the character of Sheikh provoke them in the name of Islam to punish all the non-Muslims. These two characters are standing at the two far fledged ends of a river and not suppose to meet ever. But hats off to Updike who has brought these characters to an adjoining state and even presented them working together. In the words of **Trudy (2006)** there is one weakness of the novel i.e. only the Muslim characters are getting influenced by the people like Sheikh and they are the obvious character to get manipulated. To a certain extent this stands true because the Muslim boys (being American citizen) are easy to target and easily get motivated in the name of Islam. Ahmad is one such character, but just before the explosion he changed his mind and went on a back foot.

## Conclusion

In the script of *The Terrorist* Palestine, Iraq and Afghanistan are the main pillars of the plot and most of the characters use to discuss these countries in one form or the other i.e. Ahmad, Charlie, Habib, Home secretary, etc. they all are having their own perspectives in this regard and the characters like Sheikh are willing to bring down the state of America on their terms, as a matter of fact the benefits are personal but then again they use to motivate the young Muslims against America and put them to destructive work. The novel presents the after effect of 9/11 attacks and the 'invasion' of US army to different Muslim countries in the name of bringing peace and prosperity. Rather there are very few examples where the US army succeeded to do so but then again the effect of 'Shadow of Colonialism' was presented in the form of a propaganda and people started to believe on the same. The context of colonialism was explained in the novel as a dilemma between attaining control and not attaining control over the said Muslim countries.

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