Social Oppression and American Cultural Imperialism: The Crisis of the Muslim Minority Groups' Identity in *Terrorist* by John Updike

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ABSTRACT

Terrorist (2006) by John Updike has been classified within the post-9/11 novel genre where many American authors depict their counter-narratives to the horrific event of 9/11. The novel revolves around the life of a young teenager named Ahmad and his religious mentor, Shaikh Rashid, who are accused as terrorists. This study problematises the issue of the identity of Muslim characters in facing oppression using the concept of cultural imperialism by Iris Marion Young (1990), focussing on the social treatment of Muslim minority characters in America perceived as inferior to the entire American cultural mainstream. The objective of this study then is to examine the author's depictions of the American society as the cultural imperialism persecuting Muslim characters. The findings highlight the Muslim characters' inability to emulate the prevailing American cultural imperialism which oppresses them. As such, the study's originality lies in the interpretation of the aversive affinity between Muslim minority groups and American cultural imperialism from a social perspective. Thus, the social aspects of social oppression and the American cultural imperialism will be the core of the study's novelty regarding the view of Muslims in America in the years ensuing the events of 9/11.

Key words: Cultural Imperialism, John Updike, Muslim Identity, Oppression, *Terrorist*

INTRODUCTION

In light of recent global developments around the world, the very thorny issue of oppression has been discursively explored, debated and dissected in diverse humanity and literary studies. In particular, scholars in the arts and humanities have attempted to examine the most representative aspects of oppression reflected in various works of literature. Hence, there have been serious and critical interests in literary works that explore and reflect the atrocities of oppression and its drastic role in revealing its effects upon the oppressed people. In its broad meaning, oppression refers to the sense of "subjugation" that enables a specific group, whether ethnic or cultural, to gain a hegemonic dominance over another one. The implicative meaning of subjugation, here, is manifested in the context of oppression as approached in literary genres. Martin Hannibal and Lisa Mountford (2020), for instance, discuss the definition of oppression as a human practice by arguing that oppression is a kind of authority which utilises its power to cruelly mistreat inferior subjects. Such power imposes tormenting "burden" upon the inferior subjects in an unreasonable or unjust human practice. Hannibal and Mountford appropriate the definition of oppression in this non-humanistic sense and they further elaborate the definition of oppression to include "torture, inhuman or degrading treatment, and the use or threat of violence" (p. 103).

As can be clearly deduced, Hannibal and Mountford approach violence as the impetus of oppression. Yet, it is used negatively by some powerful culture or ethnic groups to persecute others who are less powerful. What we argue here is that human violent actions motivate oppression to a great extent for they are the synthetic factors leading to the emergence of oppression as a passive human phenomenon which must be mitigated. This is undertaken in order to allow the oppressed people to be rid of their existential ordeals caused by oppression.

The systematic and cultural paradigms of oppression are construed by literary authors in strict and extreme realistic fictional recounts to offer an eloquent treatment of human conflicts. In this respect, oppression is commonly initiated by powerful supremacy and its ambition to obtain an overwhelming control of the weak minority for diverse purposes, such as economy, imperialism and cultural hegemony among others. On the grounds of this claim, oppression encompasses lucid anthropological attributes, whereby "superior people inflict devastating plights upon the lower-class – or minority – people, and the mere practices of oppression of those lower in the rank order"; for example, race, gender and religion to name but a few, can be identified and

addressed (Szkudlarek, Romani, Caprar & Osland, 2020, p. 143). It could be inferred, here, that oppression is exerted by a powerful human majority against a certain minority. It accurately highlights the minority's anguish brought by the excessive persecutory practices of the superior majority. Therefore, oppression springs from this majority's unjustified and non-human despotism. In other words, oppression incarnates the absence of humanistic ambivalence between the powerful majority and the marginalised minority.

Tyrannising Muslims is one of the most important issues of oppression in the ensuing years of the 9/11attacks, where most studies have focused on the issue of the Muslim identity perceived as "terrorist", "fundamentalist" and "bloodthirsty" (Schonemann, 2013, para. 2). The necessity of studying Muslim oppression is ascribed to the significance of studying Muslim identity because the issues of Muslim oppression and Muslim identity are closely related in most recent literary studies. There are many fictional works that depict Muslim oppression and Muslim identity, which are very important issues in discussing post-9/11 attacks. Most worryingly, Muslims characters are often portrayed as marginalised and stereotyped (Kiran, 2013), and typically inferior to Americans in terms of social positions. Such literary works function as a means of conveying the true sense of the massive influential sequences of the attacks upon the American society, in particular, and the whole world, in general. On that account, the necessity of studying these works is of paramount importance because they depict the entire cultural scenes from 2001 onwards. Not surprisingly, Western literary works and fictional texts depict the images of Muslims as "erotic", "primitive", "ignorant" and "slave traders" among other many derisive terms (Ridouani, 2011, p. 8).

One of the literary works which conform to these negative stereotypes is *Harbor* (2004) by the contemporary American novelist, Lorraine Adams, centralising on the theme of the identities of Arabs and Muslims in America. Offering a panoramic view of how Muslim and Arab people are treated as minority groups in America, the novel's narrative events and incidents are all about the gradual formation of Arab and Muslim identities in America shortly after the 9/11 attacks. Likewise, terrorism has been the most crucial justification utilised by the American society to influence the Muslim and Arab identities, and the novel's "rhetorical device helps to understand the ideological dominant discourse which is linked to the issue of terrorism, and even enhances the negative attitudes towards terrorists" (Boubakri, 2014, p. 97). Here, the terrorist attacks are highlighted as the impetus for putting Muslim and Arab minorities on the verge of a social dilemma because Adams's "misrepresentation of the Arabic and Islamic identity also implicates that Arabs and Muslims live in dilemma" (Boubakri, 2014, p. 99). As such, the Muslim and Arab identities are formed according to the American collective view of Muslim minority as a cause of danger for their whole American security. Consequently, Muslim and Arab people are oppressed as they represent the source for evil and danger for the American social life.

Similarly, *The Girl in the Tangerine Scarf* (2006) by Mohja Kahf approaches Muslim oppression in the American society from a slightly different perspective where it depicts the discriminatory and oppressive practices against Muslim identity as America embodies the "West" which, in turn, persecutes Muslim minority. In this case, America is the hegemonic social dominance that limits Muslim minority's potential to prosper and develop as Alkarawi and Bahar (2013) posit: "the West as a fetish sign of oppression in the eyes of hegemonic discourse" (p. 102). Therefore, the novel, as "a symbol of oppression", deals with the crisis of Muslim identity (Alkarawi & Bahar, 2013, p. 102). Significantly, the crisis lies in the Muslim protagonist's inability to formulate their existence as being equal to their American counterparts, where, in this sense, they could not impose their "autonomous identity" in the American society (Alkarawi & Bahar, 2013, p. 103). In this regard, the comprehensive notion of Muslim oppression is attributed to the issue of marinating autonomous identity. In other words, the Muslim minority must adapt to the American society for the sake of stability and identity autonomy in the ensuing years of 9/11 attacks.

Due to the gap of knowledge linking the issue of Muslim identity to oppression and cultural imperialism, the goal of this study, thus, is to address this contentious subject matter by analysing the novel *Terrorist* (2006) by John Updike (b. 1932). Focussing on the ways in which the Muslim minority and the American people live in a contradictory social atmosphere, we will examine the notion of cultural imperialism as an appropriation of oppression in the course of the novel. We hypothesise that oppression occurs in the aversive affinity between the novel's Muslim characters and their American counterparts. In fact, the concept of cultural imperialism encompasses the American hegemonic and comprehensive presence. Being so, the American society is perceived as the dominant culture since it hosts Muslim minority. In this way, Muslims are simply oppressed due to a momentous issue, namely the 9/11 attacks. As a rule of thumb, Muslims, whether in America or abroad, undergo discriminatory experience as they are treated from a new socio-cultural perspective as they are unanimously convicted of committing the attacks against America at the onset of the 21st century.

The aim of the current study, therefore, is to explore the role of social oppression in empowering the American cultural imperialism. That is, the American society perceives Muslim minority groups from a social perspective; whereby they are neglected and marginalised due to the American collective impression about Muslims as trouble-makers. Being so, the aim of the study lies in two inextricable notions regarding the position of Muslims in America. First, the traditional view of Muslims as foreigners who settle down in America for the sake of social prosperity. Yet, their ambitions are concerned with such prosperity fades as they are neglected by the American society since they represent the negative social threat against the Americans' security and stability. Here, social oppression will be elaborated in relation to the low social position of Muslim minority groups. Second, cultural imperialism will be polarised in the course of the analysis that specifically focuses on the social aspects of oppression and American cultural imperialism. In this sense, cultural imperialism will be limited to the American

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dominant social hegemony which exemplifies the social majoring that exerts its negative impact upon Muslim minority groups. Consequently, our study's problem lies in the way by which Updike meticulously depicts the contradictory social duality between the American cultural imperialism and Muslim minority groups. Thus, social aversive relations will be only accentuated in the analytical discussion which is rarely tackled in the previous academic studies conducted on the selected novel.

The purpose of the current study, then, is to examine the author's depictions of the social discrimination against Muslim minority characters in America. In the course of the analysis, the focus will be on the oppression of the Muslim characters in the American society by applying the concept of cultural imperialism and its related critical insights of oppression by the American political theorist and socialist feminist, Iris Marion Young (1949-2006). The study will analyse selected major Muslim and American characters based on the notion of cultural imperialism. On the one hand, the Muslim protagonist, Ahmad, is the core of the analysis since he embodies the cultural nexus of the Muslim minority in America. Furthermore, Shaikh Rashid will be the other Muslim character that plays an influential role in shaping Ahmad's mentality cornering the American society. Being taught by Shaikh Rashid, Ahmad develops loathing feelings regarding the American society as a place of cultural bias and discrimination against Muslims. As such, Ahmad, who aspires to complete his academic study, is thwarted by Shaikh Rashid's attitude towards that particular brand of American society. That is, he is taught and thwarted by Shaikh Rashid to be religiously pious and culturally conservative because he descends from a Muslim origin. On the other hand, the American cultural imperialism will be applied by analysing selected American characters, such as Jack Levy, who assists students to pursue their future careers. The issue of cultural imperialism appears when he attacks Ahmad's conservative attitudes, where Ahmad wants to be a truck driver instead of an academician due to his religious and cultural considerations of the academic liberal life.

With regards to the chosen conceptual framework, Young, in *Justice and the Politics of Difference* (1990), connects the concept of oppression with persecution or the sense of inferiority. Yet, she combines oppression with domination for the sake of clarifying the lurking motivation of oppression. The result of this oppression is injustice: "oppression and domination, …should be the primary terms for conceptualising injustice" (Young, 1990, p. 9). Having in mind the intricate peculiarities of oppression, Young contends that oppression leads to resisting social movements in order to put an end to such injustice: "the concept of oppression is central to the discourse of the contemporary emancipatory social movements" (p. 9). On the other hand, Young states that the concept of cultural imperialism is a kind of cultural dominance imposed upon the oppressed minority group: "cultural imperialism involves the universalisation of a dominant group's experience and culture, and its establishment as the norm" (p. 59). This study, via examining the author's depictions of the American society as the cultural imperialism persecuting Muslim characters, thus, will also investigate the relationship between the Muslim minority characters and the American society in light of oppression and cultural imperialism.

LITERATURE REVIEW

John Updike, born in 1932, was an American contemporary novelist, short story writer and poet who won the Pulitzer Prize for Fiction twice, in 1982 and 1991, and other prestigious awards as well. His style is diverse due to his writing in different genres including short stories, novels, memoirs, poems, essays and critical reviews. Updike's literary career spanned more than fifty years dealing with different genres and different themes. Being a prolific author, Updike left a massive literary trove. In terms of prose, he wrote more than thirty novels; among them are *The poorhouse fair* (1959), *Of the farm* (1965), *Couples* (1968) *Marry me* (1977), *The coup* (1978), *Brazil* (1994), *Villages* (2004), and *Terrorist* (2006) (Mambrol, 2018). In "John Updike's Secret" (2005), Morris Dickstein elaborates on Updike's style and literary language "Updike brings to each subject not only a copiousness of language, a sense that it can encompass almost anything, but an overflowing of tenderness of feeling, a rich sensibility, and a restless, probing analytic gift" (p. 16). In addition, Dickstein observes that Updike focuses on the personal experience in his writing, providing a sense of genuineness and honesty to his literary output. Furthermore, Updike has dealt with multiple themes related to urban life in the American society, such as sex, death and religion. In this regard, critics have noticed that religion prefigures dominantly in Updike's fiction, where they note the emergence of faith impeded in his language (Boswell, 2001).

Terrorist follows the life of a young teenage named Ahmad Ashmawy Mulloy who is a Muslim born in America. His mother, Teresa Mulloy, is a careless mother who does not look after her son. Ahmad's unnamed father left his family a long time ago and we only know about him from other characters. Meanwhile, Jack Levy is the school counselor who tries to convince Ahmad to go to a community college and also has a love affair with Ahmad's mother, Teresa, that lasted for three months. Shaikh Rashid is Ahmad's religious mentor who pushes him towards becoming a terrorist while Charlie Chehab is Ahmad's new co-worker at a furniture shop who tries to convince Ahmad to become involved in a bombing plot. Later on, we discover that Charlie is an undercover CIA agent.

Although notable research has been carried on Updike's literary works, where most of them have concentrated on his novel, *Terrorist*, and on his character, Ahmed, specifically, there is yet to be a critical empirical study on *Terrorist* that examines Updike's depictions of the persecution of Muslim characters under the concept of American cultural imperialism. For instance, in "Exploring John Updike's *Terrorist* as a Neo-Orientalist Narrative of the Arabo-Islamic World" (2016), Arif and Ahmad analyse *Terrorist* as a neo-Orientalist literary text stigmatising Muslims as violent and barbarians who hate the Western culture at a deep-rooted basis implicating their religion Islam as the source of this troubled relationship. This view is posited based on the

deconstructionist approach of the binary opposition of 'us' versus 'them' which had coloured the interaction between Islam and the Western world as exemplified in *Terrorist*. To fully account for the neo-Orientalist schemes in the novel, the Critical Discourse Analysis methodology is applied to amplify a textual analysis of the novel following a three-phase reading approach.

The first phase submits to the text without any judgment, the second is reading with a critical eye to discover the fore-grounded assumption behind the text, and the third phase is reading with the author's perspective in mind trying to dis-cover his perspective to the subject matter, which is called 'framing'. Moreover, the Muslim characters have been con-structed one-dimensional, naïve, irresponsible and stereo-typical violent Muslims echoing the mainstream media in their emphasis of the presupposed violent Islamic doctrines.

However, the novel has also been analysed in terms of its neo-Orientalist inclination foregrounding Edward Said's concepts in his discussion of Orientalism as the mainstream discourse in Western culture. Our study, however, takes on a different lens in reading *Terrorist* from the viewpoint of cultural imperialism. Furthermore, our study focuses on Up-dike's portrayals of Muslim characters in the aftermath of 9/11 event, taking into account the oppression and discrimi-nation they face in the American society.

From another perspective, in "Differentiation and Im-perfectionality in John Updike's *Terrorist*" (2018), Alos-man, Mydin and Hashim explore the binary representations of Muslim characters in *Terrorist* by arguing that the novel clearly exhibits misguided and stereotypical images of Mus-lims and Islam in general. In order to show this troubled re-lationship, the psychology of (im)perfection and the lens of Orientalism are applied including exploring the themes of religious differences, exotic differences and optimised dif-ferences in order to unravel the stereotypical images of Mus-lims that plague the text. In addition, the Muslim characters in the novel are identified as being placed in comparison to their Christian and Jewish counterparts in which Muslims are given the attributes of irresponsibility, violent mindset and antagonistic to scientific progression. On the other hand, the Christian and Jewish characters are found to be presented as caring, peaceful and committed to scientific progression. This duality is argued as accentuating the hidden Orientalist discourse encumbered in *Terrorist*. While the scholars have relied on the psychological lens to examine the Updike's por-trayals of Muslims, we, however, explore the oppression that the Muslim characters face using the lens of cultural impe-rialism, which gives a broader analysis of this troubled and misguided representations of Muslim and Islam in general.

METHODOLOGY AND CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORKS

This study applies a hermeneutic textual analysis method-ology to analyse *Terrorist* by Updike. The methodological approach is based on a socio-cultural view to the selected work. In the course of the analysis, the study provides a tex-tual analysis of the novel's setting, narrative points of view and characters. Besides, it also applies the concept of cultural

imperialism and its related critical insights of oppression by Young. Through applying these concepts, the study utilises racial arguments to address several social and cultural issues, such as persecutory oppression and inferiority, as depicted in the novel. Therefore, the study's basic focus is on the effects of American subjugation of Muslim characters via oppres-sion and, at the same time, how the Muslim characters are oppressed by their American counterparts as prevalent in the expatriate Muslim society. For this reason, social oppression and cultural imperialism are both explored in tandem in the main methodology.

Oppression and Cultural Imperialism

The concepts of oppression and cultural imperialism are discussed in different critical fields. John Tomlinson, in *Cultural imperialism: A critical introduction* (2002), ar-gues that the West strives for the internalisation of cer-tain viewpoints related to its dominant ideologies. Tom-linson stresses the idea that, "[c]ultural imperialism is a critical discourse which operates by presenting the cul-tures whose autonomy it defends in its own (dominant) Western cultural terms. It is a discourse caught up in ironies that flow from its position of discursive power" (p. 13). In this context, Tomlinson accentuates the pri-vacy of cultures in which cultural imperialism "implies a sense of the sovereignty of particular cultures: the idea that 'how life is lived' is a judgment to be made by the particular collectivity that possesses culture, and no one else" (p. 17). Correspondingly, James Petras, earlier, in "Cultural imperialism in the late 20th century" (1993) refers to the systematic oppression of cultural imperial-ism as it seeks to interpret and interfere with the cultural aspects of different societies in the Third World. Petras argues, "[i]n relation to the Third World, cultural impe-rialism can be defined as the systematic penetration and domination of the cultural life of the popular classes by the ruling class of the West in order to reorder the val-ues, behaviour, institutions and identity of the oppressed peoples to conform with the interests of the imperial classes" (p. 140).

Similarly, Stephanie Rohac argues in *Cultural diversity versus US cultural imperialism: The film industry* (2007) that "[t]he title US cultural imperialism may also come up from the US government methods pressuring foreign governments and institutions to disseminate US films and TV programmes which promote the US way of life, in detail business norms, political and cultural values" (p. 4). In the same regard, Bethany Avalos, in her dis-sertation *A regretted legacy? Literary and cultural re-sponses to U.S. imperialism in Hawaii and Puerto Rico* (2019), studies the Hawaiian and Puerto Rican literature that respond to the American cultural imperialism, and contends that the American cultural imperialism, "sells its role as an imperial power to the American populace, the U.S commodified its island territories as paradise and created a social and cultural fascination with other-ness through which it sees itself as both superior to and desirous or envious of the Other" (p. 6).

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Earlier, in *Failure of American and Soviet cultural imperialism in German universities, 1945-1990 (*2013), Natalia Tsvetkova discusses the influence of America and the Soviet Union on German universities during the Cold War as both superpowers have tried to exert its influence upon the educational system in Germany after the end of World War II (1939-1945). Tsvetkova argues, "[r]esponse theory and reception studies are shifting the theme of cultural expansion to the theme of local resistance to it, and to the theme of the fate of peripheral cultures and indigenous populations who are molded under its influence and domination" (p. 62). She proposes that the goal of cultural imperialism is to mould the weaker culture into specific constraints. Thus, the constriction of minorities into ready-made stigmas is a trademark of cultural imperialism.

Before proceeding to how the Muslim characters in *Terrorist* are portrayed as being persecuted under American cultural imperialism, we first discuss the concepts of oppression and cultural imperialism in terms of Young's critical points of view. Young argues, in *Justice and the politics of difference* (1990), that the concept of oppression is connected to the cultural aspects of society, where oppression is an indication of the several cultural movements that have shaped the cultural features of the concepts. Here, these movements are diverse; yet, they all have social characteristics as Young states: "the concept of oppression is central to the discourse of the contemporary emancipatory social movements whose perspectives inspire the critical questions of this book. Yet there exists no sustained theoretical analysis of the concept of oppression as understood by these movements" (p. 9). In this sense, the concept of oppression is an incarnation of society and has an ability to create a persecutory treatment to some minority groups. That is, the general implication of oppression relates to society due to the fact that society plays an integral part in creating oppression among the minority groups. In essence, oppression has a theoretical insight concerning the gradual development of the oppressed minority groups.

The concept of oppression, therefore, emanates from the social movements which are theoretical in nature. These movements, hence, result in the construction of oppression as a detrimental fact against a specific minority group. Being so, it could be easily assumed that oppression is inherently a concept developed out of other social theories. For this reason, Young keeps a persistent emphasis on oppression as a social phenomenon resulting in the degradation of such persecuted groups: "oppression happens to social groups. But philosophy and social theory typically lack a viable concept of the social group. Notably in the context of affirmative action debate, some philosophers and policymakers even refuse to acknowledge the reality of social groups, a denial that often reinforces group oppressions" (p. 9). Young, accordingly, alludes to the social facets of oppression because some policymakers could participate in creating oppression and making it a social crisis. In an interesting way, Young contends that the policymakers

are also parts of society which form the basic premise of oppression and its aims is to belittle the vitality of any minority group. Consequently, the oppressed minority groups will be despondent and unable to co-exist with the main society. That is, they will remain as a minority group as a result of the dominant culture's omnipresence. Young proposes that this social state is the bitter reality of the oppressed minority group per se.

Young also adds that the concept of oppression is a process that develops out of the oppressors' skillful creation of oppression. Oppressors, argues Young, forge a negative relationship between them and the oppressed minority group. Therefore, they could not accept or comply with one another's social regulations or rules. This is because they have a sense of aversion and they do not perceive each other on the grounds of humanistic needs. Instead, they challenge each other on the grounds of ethnic roots and persecution. In this case, oppression becomes institutionalised, where it is skillfully created by the oppressors as Young comments: "oppression consists in systematic institutional processes which prevent some people from learning and using satisfying and expansive skills in socially recognised settings, or institutionalised social processes which inhibit people's ability to play and communicate with others or to express their feelings and perspective on social life in contexts where others can listen" (p. 38). As Young indicates, the concept of oppression originates in the institutionalised meanings regarding its effects upon minority groups. As such, the minority groups turn to be devoid of its rights or equality to the oppressors. Additionally, the oppressors do not allow the oppressed minority to express their feelings or needs as they are deprived of their right to speak and they are also deprived of the freedom of speech. This means that they could not communicate with each other and their social relations remains dormant and ineffective since they are in severe cultural discord (Marsiglia, Kulis & Lechuga-Pena, 2021).

Young, moreover, discusses the atrocious features of oppression by elaborating that people's understanding of oppression is more geared towards it as a manifestation of injustice and inequality. People, Young suggests, have a strong predilection to grasp the lurking meaning of oppression in terms of injustice because the concept is sometimes used interchangeably with injustice by many detractors or critical commentators. To reinforce her view, she cites a number of oppressed ethnicities that are treated unequally, such as ethnicities in the South African society, which suffers from oppression due to the tyrannical rule overwhelming the entire nation. As Young comments:

> One reason that many people would not use the term oppression to describe injustice in our society is that they do not understand the term in the same way as do new social movements. In its traditional usage, oppression means the exercise of tyranny by a ruling group. Thus, many Americans would agree with radicals in applying the term oppression to the situation of Black South Africans under apartheid. (p. 40)

In this example – and many other cases – the social dimension of the concept of oppression remains the most powerful. Here, Young accentuates the role of society in the bulk of her critical arguments about oppression by citing the South African case, for example, as it is the society that is responsible for creating oppression. This is because society is considered as the primary source of oppression and paves the way for the tyrannical rulers to dominate their social life. In time, such tyranny gets very oppressive and it makes minority groups more afflicted with sufferings, deprivation and poor life conditions. Similarly, in our study, we focus on Updike's portrayals of the Muslim minority group in America and how it is socially oppressed. In the novel, the American society is depicted as trying to obliterate the Muslim minority groups on the grounds that Muslims are merely terrorists.

Coupled with oppression, Young contends that the concept of cultural imperialism as the nexus of oppression includes the persecutory people who have a great power to harness and restrict the social mobilisation of the minority group. In most cases, the concept of oppression indicates the tangible antagonistic relationship between the oppressed people and their oppressors. Consequently, Young argues that the critical notions of the concept of cultural imperialism "delimit people's material lives, including but not restricted to the resources they have access to and the concrete opportunities they have or do not have to develop and exercise their capacities. These kinds of oppression are a matter of concrete power in relation to others—of who benefits from whom, and who is dispensable" (p. 58). In light of this argument, the most obvious critical token of the concept of cultural imperialism is power. That is, the oppressors are blessed with gigantic social power to be superior over the minority groups. In this study, the American society will be interpreted as the incarnation of a powerful cultural presence that does not consider the limited and restricted presence of the Muslim minority groups. Furthermore, society plays a decisive role in determining the meaning of cultural imperialism.

Young, in addition, explicates the critical implications of the concept of cultural imperialism. Notwithstanding this, cultural imperialism is a sort of experience undergone by the oppressed individuals. For this reason, these individuals are considered as the "Other" minor entity that is a subject of oppression in a dehumanising way, where they are the foreign Other that should be mistreated due to their possible harm to the whole social order. Young suggests that cultural imperialism means "to experience how the dominant meanings of a society render the particular perspective of one's own group invisible at the same time as they stereotype one's group and mark it out as the Other" (pp. 58-59). In this sense, the concept of cultural imperialism is the core of oppression since it dehumanises the minority groups and its potential to survive oppression. Similarly, our study will explore cultural imperialism as the source of destructive oppression, where we hypothesise that the Muslim minority groups are surrounded by the American cultural imperialism that renders them a harsh life as they originate from the Eastern culture.

Young proposes that the universal attributes of the concept of cultural imperialism makes it applicable to all literary works dealing with the issue of oppression. In particular, literary works present a number of characters and settings that embody the true sense of cultural imperialism in its pertinent conceptualisation of oppression. Furthermore, the concept of cultural imperialism includes the phenomena of the whimsical existence of minority groups. Here, the concept of cultural imperialism produces oppression in order to be rid of the foreign minority groups: "cultural imperialism involves the universalisation of a dominant group's experience and culture, and its establishment as the norm…. As a consequence, the dominant cultural products of the society, that is, those most widely disseminated, express the experience, values, goals, and achievements of these groups" (Young, 1990, p. 59). The universal features of the concept of cultural imperialism are very vital for grasping the essence of oppression in literary works. To connect this to our study, the concept of cultural imperialism relates to the American dominant society, which we hypothsise oppresses and mistreats Muslim minor groups as detrimental entities. Such discriminatory act is the core conceptual appropriation of cultural imperialism argued by Young in discussing the universal attributes of cultural imperialism. To put it another way, cultural imperialism appears in literary works in terms of their mistreatment of minority groups. In like manner, the American cultural imperialism mistreats Muslim minority as a whole because the American society erroneously believes that Muslims are responsible for the 9/11 attacks. The result is depressing: Muslim minority groups undergo harmful social discrimination and marginalisation due to the oppressive reactions of the American cultural imperialism.

Another distinctive aspect of the concept of cultural imperialism is the cultural encounters. Young suggests that the oppressors and the oppressed minority groups do not undergo antagonistic confrontation except when they encounter each other in a specific occasion. Such occasion is a kind of accident that makes the minority groups less powerful than the dominant one. Cultural imperialism, consequently, empowers the dominant social group and it offers cultural imperialism with justifications and sound reasons to oppress the minority groups. Accordingly, cultural imperialism is a confrontation between the oppressed minority groups and the dominant groups, and this conformation is reinforced by the social norms of cultural imperialism: "an encounter with other groups, however, can challenge the dominant group's claim to universality. The dominant group reinforces its position by bringing the other groups under the measure of its dominant norms" (Young, 1990, p. 59). Young, therefore, refers to the significance of cultural imperialism to the oppressors that are empowered with their dominant culture. Our analysis thus will

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hopefully shed light on the encounter between Muslim characters and the American cultural imperialism. This means that Muslim minority groups begin to be treated differently after the attacks of 9/11, where they are no longer accepted as equal to their American peers. Therefore, they must be oppressed in order to mitigate their possible further attacks.

Young, furthermore, approaches the issue of identity in her discussion of the concept of cultural imperialism suggesting that the concept of cultural imperialism encompasses the expression of identity, namely the oppressed people could express their effectiveness of their identity as they are naturally endowed with the normality of their rights to express their needs to be equal to another social group. However, cultural imperialism does not freely allow them to ask for their needs or express their identity effectiveness. This is achieved by the dominant culture's insistence on creating radical differences between it and the minority groups, and the minority groups become the embodiment of the "Other" that is persecuted. As Young comments:

Since only the dominant group's cultural expressions receive wide dissemination, their cultural expressions become the normal, or the universal, and thereby the unremarkable. Given the normality of its own cultural expressions and identity, the dominant group constructs the differences which some groups are exhibited as lacking and negated. These groups become marked as Other. (p. 59)

As such, the concept of cultural imperialism involves the low position of the oppressed minority groups. The dominant social groups, on the other hand, are the manifestation of cultural imperialism.

STUDY QUESTION

The study tries to answer the following question:
- How does Updike depict the American society as the cultural imperialism persecuting Muslim characters in the selected novel?

ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

Social Oppression and American Cultural Imperialism: The Tribulations of Muslim Identity in the American Society

In *Justice and the politics of difference* (1990), Young comments on the enduring and multifarious effects of cultural imperialism on the minorities' point of views, "the oppressed group's own experience and interpretation of social life finds little expression that touches the dominant culture, while that same culture imposes on the oppressed group its experience and interpretation of social life" (p. 60). Therefore, the concept of cultural imperialism encompasses the oppressed people and their oppressors. Similarly, Updike's *Terrorist* begins with the young protagonist, Ahmad, commenting on the American way of life. Although Ahmad is an American citizen, he appears to have originated from another place. In the following textual evidence, he is walking in his high school telling himself that the Americans are:

"full of lust and fear and infatuation with things that can be bought. Infidels, they think safety lies in accumulation of the things of this world, and in the corrupting diversions of the television set. They are slaves to images, false ones of happiness and affluence." (Updike, 2012, p. 3)

Clearly, in this seemingly anxious relationship with the American society, Ahmad pronounces his emotional and psychological alienations from his surroundings. It is striking to see an 18-year-old with such a heavy critique on the pitfalls of the American capitalist society. Nevertheless, Ahmad is not presented as a communist, but as a devoted Muslim with Arabic background since his father is from Egypt and on a student exchange programme who eventually married his Irish mother.

It appears from the above evidence that the American cultural imperialism has taken its toll on Ahmad as he is not able to fit in the society, where the narration refers to Ahmad's religion as a blocking factor of Ahmad's integration in the American society. In this regard, American cultural imperialism tries to systematically wipe out competing ideologies within the American culture. It is one face of oppression that the Muslim minority face in the American society. In this sense, Ahmad's interpretation of the American society finds less tolerance since his point of views are mocked later on in the novel as they have proved to be misguiding and misleading. As Young asserts, American cultural imperialism internalises its own dominant ideology and tries to trivialise the other minorities' perspectives.

Young also comments on the relationship between cultural imperialism and setting fixed viewpoints about other cultures and minorities, "[t]hose living under cultural imperialism find themselves defined from the outside, positioned, placed, by a network of dominant meanings they experience as arising from elsewhere, from those with whom they do not identify and who do not identify with them" (p. 59). However, the Muslim minority living under the American cultural imperialism finds themselves defined negatively by sources outside their community which alienates them from the rest of the society. Similarly, in the following textual evidence, Shaikh Rashid, who is supposed to be the *Imam* of the mosque, who holds a religious leadership position in the local Muslim community and is the spiritual mentor of Ahmad, preaches the following segment of ceremony to Ahmad,

"The cockroaches that slither out from the baseboard and from beneath the sink—do you pity them? The flies that buzz around the food on the table, walking on it with the dirty feet that have just danced on feces and carrion—do you pity them?" (Updike, 2012, p. 41)

Here, Shaikh Rashid is trying to convince Ahmad that the infidels are worthless beings who are not worthy of pity and mercy. The hateful speech in this conversation amplifies the stereotypical image of Muslims as ruthless killers who do not view other nations and cultures with mercy or pity. It sets boundaries between Muslims and non-Muslims in the American society. Moreover, the fact that this hateful speech is coming from an *Imam*, who is supposed to be well-versed in Islamic traditions and ways of thinking, adds to the magnitude of separation between the Muslim minority and the rest of the American society. In our view,

alienating the Muslim minority in such a way is in line with setting misguided allusions about Islamic traditions and presents the reason for oppressing Muslim in America. The oppression they face transfer false stereotypes and disseminate them as coming from religious authorities such as in this case Shaikh Rashid who is an *Imam* and a spiritual mentor of Ahmad.

Moreover, in this following textual evidence, the narrator describes the encounter between Ahmad and his *Imam* Shaikh Rashid. Both Ahmad and Shaikh Rashid are discussing the meaning of the Prophet's saying which describes hellfire and how it consumes the infidels, "He seeks to soften the Prophet's words, to make them blend with human reason, but they were not meant to blend: they invade our human softness like a sword" (Updike, 2012, p. 5). The narrator portrays Shaikh Rashid as trying to give a different interpretation to the Prophet's saying so as to soften the supposedly harshness of the description of hell in the *Hadith*, a collection of traditions containing sayings of the Prophet Muhammad which, with accounts of his daily practice (the *Sunnah*), constitute the major source of guidance for Muslims apart from the *Qur'an*. Ahmad is not convinced of Shaikh Rashid's interpretation and is convinced instead of the direct meaning of the Prophet's saying. Nevertheless, the narrator has negatively alluded to the misguided interpretation and, at the same time, has given judgmental opinion in this issue. The narrator's opinion coincides with pre-determined judgment about Islamic tradition which arises from a misleading Western point of view, and has also collided with American cultural imperialism in determining and defining Islamic traditions and perspectives. In this context, cultural imperialism, as discussed earlier by Young, sets judgmental opinions in terms of what is wrong and what is right. The protagonist Ahmad and the Muslim minority in the American society are being defined according to the American cultural imperialism

Young also discusses the oppression of cultural imperialism contending that, "[t]o experience cultural imperialism means to experience how the dominant meanings of a society render the particular perspective of one's own group invisible at the same time as they stereotype one's group and mark it out as the Other" (pp. 58-59). However, the oppression of the Arab and Muslim minorities arises from the alienation they experience as a result of cultural imperialism which seeks to identify them as outsiders who pose a threat to the national security of America. In the following textual evidence, the narrator stigmatises the Arabs in general as siding with the ruthless German dictator Adolf Hitler (1889-1945), "the unspeakable but considerably successful and still, at least in the Arab world, admired Adolf Hitler" (Updike, 2012, p. 13). Working in line with stigmatising the Arab world and the Arab minority in America, the narrator demonises the Arab and Muslim minorities by connecting them with Hitler. It is yet another misleading and misguiding comment that distills hatred towards them. In this sense, this is the face of oppression as it misleads readers and shapes false perceptions of the Muslim minority. In this respect, it coincides with the traditional sense of the American cultural imperialism as it stigmatises minorities in the American society.

References to Arabs and Muslim minorities as terrorists are dispersed throughout the novel. In the following textual evidence, Beth and her husband, Jack Levy, who is the Jewish protagonist and the one who rescues Ahmad at the end of the novel, are discussing the issue of raising the terrorist alarm in America by the Secretary of Homeland Security. Beth and Jack engage in the following conversation, "[t]hey would never bomb the desert," Beth goes on, arguing as if they are a few debating points away from going to Albuquerque, "[t]hat's right: they, as you call them, love the desert" (Updike, 2012, p. 18). Jack and Beth plan to visit their son who lives in Albuquerque which is a desert place in Mexico. In the above exchange, the reference of the pronoun 'they' clearly refers to the Arabs without mentioning them. It is a well-known fact that Arabs are associated with the desert. We argue here, then, that the reference to Arabs in such a way demonises and stigmatises them as terrorists which further adds to the stereotypical images of Arabs and Muslims in the American society.

Similarly, in the following textual evidence, Jack, who is also a school counselor, is having a session with Ahmad about his future plans after graduation from high school. Jack notices that Ahmad is a clever boy with high grades but is appalled by Ahmad's wish to become a truck driver. Jack thinks that a college track for Ahmad is more suitable for him. Moreover, Jack is worried about the fact that Shaikh Rashid has advised Ahmad to become a truck driver. He says to Ahmad, "a bright boy like you, in a diverse and tolerant society like this one, needs to confront a variety of viewpoints" (Updike, 2012, p. 21). One of the things that worries Jack is Ahmad's pious outlook towards his environment, and he thinks a liberal perspective would be more beneficial to Ahmad in his future. In this regard, the imposition of Jack's opinion negates his comment about his tolerant society and delimits Ahmad's position as insignificant and possibly misleading as the narrative of the novel shows later. As discussed above, Young argues that American cultural imperialism sets the norms to be followed without taking into consideration the peculiarities of different cultures and minorities living in America.

Young describes the shortsightedness of such a society as, "[t]hese stereotypes so permeate the society that they are not noticed as contestable. Just as everyone knows that the earth goes around the sun, so everyone knows that gay people are promiscuous, that Indians are alcoholics, and that women are good with children. White males, on the other hand, insofar as they escape group marking, can be individuals" (p. 59). Assigning certain stereotypes to specific minority or ethnic group has been identified as a hallmark of American cultural imperialism. In particular, the effect of these stereotypes affects individuals who belong to those minorities to function well and to fully integrate within their society. In the novel, Joryleen, a young African American girl, invites Ahmad to attend her singing with a choir at the church. She is attracted to Ahmad as she views him as attractive, but he tries to distance himself from her as he views intimate relationships between men and women as sinful. Nevertheless, Ahmad is intrigued to go and visit the church to hear Joryleen singing. At the church, Ahmad sits next to an African American fam-

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ily and the narrator describes the situation as follows, "one of them looking up into Ahmad's face like a bug-eyed dog wondering if this human being is worth begging at" (Updike, 2012, p. 32). In this scene, the alienation of Ahmad from the environment cannot be mistaken since he is relegated to a lesser position. This depiction presents Ahmad as a ruthless human being who is not capable of being merciful. In this regard, we argue that this alienation corresponds to the effects of cultural imperialism which delimits and defines minorities according to specific standards which arises from a set of stereotypes that are fixed and ingrained within the society.

In discussing cultural imperialism as one facet of oppression, Young argues, "[g]iven the normality of its own cultural expressions and identity, the dominant group constructs the differences which some groups exhibit as lack and negation. These groups become marked as Other" (p. 59). During the course of the novel, Jack and Terry, Ahmad's Irish mother, start a love relationship which continues for three months. During their meetings, they discuss their past experiences with Jack asking Terry why she has married an Arab man in which she responds, "But I was young and in love—in love mostly with him being, you know, exotic, third world, put-upon, and my marrying him showing how liberal and liberated I was" (Updike, 2012, p. 48). Sentimentalising the East and the third world communities are set in accordance with failing her marriage since Omar, Ahmad's father, has left his wife, Terry, and the young boy without saying good-bye. The carelessness of the father is set in sharp contrast to Ahmad's responsible manners. Terry's fascination with the exotic East depicted through Omar proves to be misleading and her liberal views have not been helpful in her choice of partner. However, the Muslim minority is marked as the Other which is inferior to the Western culture and in need of cultivation. Therefore, we argue that the oppression of cultural imperialism arises in this incident from putting forth borders between what is considered civilised and advanced which is, in this case, the Western culture, and what is considered barbaric and of lower status.

In one of their meetings, Jack asks Terry about her views on Ahmad's religion in which she says, "Islam meant nothing to me—less than nothing, to be accurate: it had a negative rating" (Updike, 2012, p. 47). This is despite the fact that, in another part in the novel, Terry confirms that Ahmad's religion corresponds to his upright manners. Given the fact that Terry has been a neglectful mother in terms of raising Ahmad negates her comment about Islam. Terry, ironically, confirms the idea that Ahmad has been well raised as he grew up, "He's pleased with himself, earning money, and, I don't know, maybe I'm imagining this, more open to new ideas, not closed into this very, in my opinion, limited and intolerant belief system. He's getting fresh input" (Updike, 2012, p. 90). Here, we note how Terry has failed to notice the positive effects of going to the mosque where he has been raised to become a responsible young man.

Young affirms the negative effects of cultural imperialism in the form of 'double consciousness' which "arises when the oppressed subject refuses to coincide with these devalued, objectified and stereotyped visions of herself or himself. While the subject desires recognition as human, capable of activity, full of hope and possibility, she receives from the dominant culture only the judgment that she is different, marked, or inferior" (p. 60). Similarly, in the novel, the Muslim minority feels the heavy burden of cultural imperialism in the form of stripping their traditions and their sense of identity causing deep and lasting social oppression. In the following textual evidence, Charlie Chehab laments the negative effects of the American society while talking to Ahmad, "They take from Muslims their traditions and a sense of themselves, the pride in themselves that all men are entitled to" (Updike, 2012, p. 103). Clearly, Charley's critique corresponds to the status of the Muslim minority in the American society. In this sense, as argued by Young, American cultural imperialism has a negative influence upon the lives of Muslims.

CONCLUSION

The study accentuated the oppression of the Muslim minority in the American society that exemplifies the very notion of cultural imperialism. Through the hermeneutic textual analysis, the novel has been found to appropriate the view of oppression through the lens of cultural imperialism because it has the same effect of depriving Muslims of being independent. The Muslim minority is examined in light of its attempt to break away from the social norms of America due to their mistreatment of the Muslim minority groups. This is achieved through shedding light upon the cultural transformation of the protagonist, Ahmad, who is taught at the hands of his tutor, Shaikh Rashid. As a loyal disciple, Ahmad heeds Shaikh Rashid's advice as a way of thought in his life. As such, he develops an antagonistic attitude towards the American cultural imperialism. Therefore, he lives in isolation in order to escape the American discrimination exerted upon his Muslim minority group since he descends from a Muslim family. The study, accordingly, accentuated Ahmad's avoidance of the American cultural imperialism to be safe of its effect upon his culture. The analysis, consequently, revealed Updike's meticulous depiction of the American cultural imperialism as evidence of the oppression of the Muslim minority groups in America. In a critical way, the study approached the relationship between cultural imperialism and oppression on the grounds of the cultural discrepancies between them.

Furthermore, the interpretations of the relationship between Muslim minority groups and American cultural imperialism were identified in terms of the social discussion of oppression. That is, the sense of oppression, depicted in the course of the novel, relates to the ways in which the American individuals treat their Muslim counterparts. Jack, we conclude, strenuously tries to thwart Ahmad's isolation from the American society and convinces him to indulge in the core of the American society in order to be rid of his inherited ideas about the American people as enemies. In this way, Updike portrays Jack as an embodiment of cultural imperialism that attempts to make Muslim groups dissolve in the crux of the American society. He also sheds light on the narrative appropriation of Jack's personality as a stereotype of the American cultural imperialism which oppresses Muslim

minority groups by having transformed into the essence of the American society. Thus, the study identified the social peculiarities of the cultural bias between Ahmad and Jack by attributing it to Young's critical conceptualisation of cultural imperialism as a manifestation of social oppression.

The aim of this study, accordingly, was to explore the social duality between Muslim minority groups and the American cultural imperialism. In this respect, the analysis of this duality has shed light on the perception of Muslims as inherent danger threatening the peaceful stability of the American society. By exploring this duality, the study pinpointed Updike's precise depiction of the low position of Muslim minority groups that are severely oppressed by the American cultural imperialism. Strikingly, the study unravelled the social attributes of this oppression in order to demonstrate how Updike depicts the critical social conditions in which the Muslim minority groups lived, especially after the occurrence of post 9/11 attacks. In this manner, the study merged the literary attributes of the novel with the social implications of oppression practised against Muslims in the American society. Such social oppression was revealed as the essence of the American hegemonic cultural imperils that undermine the ability of the Muslim minority groups to thrive. Accordingly, the discussion of social oppression was reinforced by Young's critical insights about the role of oppression in degrading any ethnic groups. Thus, the goal of the study was to accentuate Muslims as the foreign ethnic group that has fallen victim to the oppressive American cultural imperialism due to religious matters related to 9/11 events. Further research on this combative subject matter can be undertaken by applying Homi K. Bhabha's concepts of hybridity and third space in order to explore how Muslim characters in Updike's novel negotiate their identity based on postcolonial theory.

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