

## **Orientalist Discourse in John Updike's *The Coup*: A Saidian/ Foucauldian Perspective**

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### **ABSTRACT**

This paper attempts to examine the Orientalist overtones of John Updike's novel *The Coup* (1978) within the framework of Edward Said's *Orientalism* (2003) and in light of Michel Foucault's theory of power and knowledge. The methodology of this research involves a textual analysis of the novel whereby significant passages from *The Coup* are scrutinized with regard to the following ideas: Orientalism as a political discourse, the East / West dichotomy, the distortion of Islam, free-flowing power and the role of the author. Emphasis is placed on the novel's Orientalist nuances and its misrepresentation of Islam, as well as the implications of the novel's Orientalism in embodying the notions of power, truth, hegemony, and the seemingly authoritative stance of the author. Thus, the significance of this research is twofold; at one level it embarks upon a practical application of the theories of Said and Foucault to a literary work. At another level, it offers a new perspective on Updike's novel, thereby disclosing the underlying anti-Islamic currents rippling throughout *The Coup*. Such a discursive analysis of the novel ties in formidably with the Islamophobia rampant throughout today's Western world.

**Keywords:** Updike, Said, Foucault, Orientalism, *The Coup*, Discourse.

### **Introduction**

In his novel *The Coup* (1978), John Updike (1932-2009) employs an Orientalist discourse to render a distorted image of Islam. He relies on stereotypes and misinterpretations of the holy Koran to endow his negative discourse with a tone of authority, knowledge, and expertise. This seemingly authentic stance provides Updike with the means to adopt a superior, Western voice of power in the creation of truth with regard to Islam as a religion, Africa as a nation and the East / West relationship as a dichotomy. In this paper the two researchers seek to reveal the nuances of Orientalist discourse in *The Coup* through the analysis of the novel within the critical frameworks of Edward Said's *Orientalism* and Michel Foucault's theory of power and knowledge. The methodology involved in the research relies on the textual analysis of pertinent passages from Updike's novel. Such an analysis entails highlighting the following concepts in the passages under consideration:

Orientalism as a political discourse, the East / West dichotomy, the distortion of Islam, free-flowing power and the role of the author. The significance of this research project lies in its attempt to present a practical demonstration of the theories of Said and Foucault. Furthermore, this research offers the reader new insights into Updike's novel through the disclosure of its anti-Islamic sentiments. In each of the subsequent sections, the researchers present the reader with the theoretical backdrop necessary to establish an association between the premises of Said and Foucault and the research point at hand. After such a connection is achieved, an in depth analysis of Updike's novel in light of the previous theoretical background ensues.

### **Orientalism as a Discourse:**

The analysis of the novel in this paper relies first and foremost on the concept of discourse as it appears in Foucault's theory of power and knowledge and in Said's *Orientalism*. Michel Foucault's (1926 – 1984) theory of discourse is a central concept in his analytical framework. Discourse means the utterance that suggests a hidden intention other than the presumably declared one. For Foucault, discourses are not only about what can be said and thought, but also who can speak, when, and with

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what authority. Various discourses do not only embody meaning and social relations, but they also constitute both subjectivity and power relations, thus achieving objectives through the concealment of underlying intentions. Therefore, the possibilities for meaning and definition are integrated through the political, social, and institutional position held by those who use them. In short, meanings arise not only from language but also from institutional practices and power relations.

According to Michael Kelly (1994) in the "Introduction" of *Critique and Power*, Foucault practices critique without universal norms but rather within a discourse defined by the axes of knowledge as well as power. This is also supported by Alan Sheridan (1980) who argues that Foucault was the first to introduce power in the analysis of discourse. Similarly William V. Spanos (2009) emphasizes that it is due to Foucault's brilliant contribution that the account of discourse arose.

It is indicated in "Orientalism" in *The Edward Said Reader* (2001b) that Foucault offered Said (1935 – 2003) a means for describing the relationship between knowledge and power over the Orient in his *Orientalism* written in 1978. Being an American of an Arab origin residing in the United States actually provided Said with the insight that is required to detect that there are huge and deeply rooted misconceptions about the East that are orchestrated and promoted by the powerful and dominating West. Drawing on the work of Foucault, Said viewed the writing on the Orient as a discourse. Said states in *Orientalism* (2003):

I have found it useful here to employ Michel Foucault's notion of a discourse, as described by him in *The Archaeology of Knowledge* and *Discipline and Punish*, to identify Orientalism. My contention is that without examining Orientalism as a discourse one cannot possibly understand the enormously systematic discipline by which European culture was able to manage – and even produce – the Orient politically, sociologically, militarily, ideologically, scientifically, and imaginatively during the post-Enlightenment period. Moreover, so authoritative a position did Orientalism have that I believe no one writing, thinking or acting on the Orient could do so without taking account of the limitations on thought and action imposed by Orientalism. In brief, because of Orientalism the Orient was not

(and is not) a free subject of thought or action. This is not to say that Orientalism unilaterally determines what can be said about the Orient, but that it is the whole network of interests inevitably brought to bear on (and therefore always involved in) any occasion when the peculiar entity "the Orient" is in question. How this happens is what this book tries to demonstrate. It also tries to show that European culture gained in strength and identity by setting itself off against the Orient as a sort of surrogate and even underground self. (p. 3)

It becomes clear from the passage above that Said emphasizes how Orientalism is a Western invention. He states that it is the Western discourse that gives the word the connotations that it holds today. Said goes on to say that without the study of Orientalism as a discourse, we cannot begin to understand how the Western culture was able to manage and produce the Orient. Said played the role of an eye opener and an adequate interpreter of the variously presumed discourses that were adopted by the West in order to "legitimize" their colonial schemes in the East.

Numerous studies have been conducted linking Updike with Orientalism. The majority of these researches have focused on Updike's more recent novel, *Terrorist* (2006) written in the wake of the 9/11 bombings whereas our current research reveals that Updike's anti-Islamic Orientalism has roots far back before the 9/11 attacks. For example, Herman (2015) attempts to place *Terrorist* within a recently developing American "cultural tradition" (p. 693) of terrorism novels, a trend that began after 9/11. For Herman, Updike departs from the dominant discourse of terrorism novels ascribed by Robert Appelbaum and Alexis Paknadel due to the empathic portrayal of Ahmad, a would-be suicide bomber and the protagonist of *Terrorist*.

In another exploration of *Terrorist* (2006), the two writers Pirnajmuddin and Salehnia (2012) delve into the Orientalist representations of the Muslim characters in the novel. By relying on Edward Said's exposition of Orientalist discourse, the two researchers reveal Updike's portrayal of Muslims as opposed to modernity and his representation of Islam as a backward religion. The focal point in the research by Pirnajmuddin and Salehnia is Updike's depiction of Islamic fundamentalism and its deep connection to terrorism. Our research is an attempt to explore Updike's Orientalist anti-Islamic tendencies

before the contemporary associations of Islam and terrorism that have arisen as the result of the 9/11 tragedy.

Orientalist stereotyping in *Terrorist* is once again examined in the article “Orientalist Feminism; Representations of Muslim Women in Two American Novels: *Terrorist* and *Falling Man*” by Marandi and Tari (2012). The two researchers conduct what Said terms a ‘contrapuntal’ reading of the two novels to reveal the effect of the 9/11 attacks in escalating the use of Orientalist imagery, specifically the romanticized description of Muslim women in American novels. According to Marandi and Tari, “Oriental women are considered to be seductive, submissive objects while their male counterparts are effeminate, stupid and violent” (2012, p. 6). Such an analysis of Orientalist stereotyping placed within a feminist backdrop further accentuates the East / West dichotomy by exposing the discrepancy in the representations of Western women versus the distorted depiction of Oriental Muslim women in Updike’s *Terrorist*. Feminist profiling of the sort utilized by Marandi and Tari (2012) above is not a primary point in our current research, but it may prove invaluable in future studies done on Updike’s *The Coup*.

In the article “Violence and the Faithful in Post-9/11 America: Updike’s *Terrorist*, Islam and the Specter of Exceptionalism”, the researcher Anna Hartnell (2015) establishes a link between Updike and the early Orientalists due to his emphasis on Arabic language as the means to understand the Oriental Other. Hartnell cites John Strawson’s examples of Updike’s numerous transliterations of the Koran in *Terrorist* as an indicator of his association between language and knowledge of the Other. For Updike, such transliterated extracts of the Koran not only serve as signs of his knowledge of the Oriental Islamic Other, but also as indicators of Islamic hostility towards non-believers. Our research will highlight similar transliterations and translations both from the Koran and the Arabic expressions that appear in *The Coup* in order to reveal Updike’s reliance on the language of the Oriental Other to establish a certain facade of expertise towards the Orient.

Updike’s Orientalist tendencies may be located within a long tradition of American Orientalism. Similar Orientalist images of Islam can be traced far back in American history. According to Timothy Marr (2006) in his book *The Cultural Roots of American Islamicism*, such images were employed “as a means to globalize the

authority of the cultural power of the United States” (Marr, 2006, p. 1). Marr continues to point out that Orientalist discourse also led to a sort of “romantic exoticism” (Marr, 2006, p. 13) which resulted from the creative richness of the hugely popular *Arabian Nights*, “a book as important as the Qur’an for its influence on Western attitudes towards Islam” (Marr, 2006, p. 13). Romantic Islamicism exhibits such notions as “eastern opulence, the fantastic supernaturalism of oriental tales, legends of Muslim chivalry, and images of indolent patriarchs enjoying captivating harems” (Marr, 2006, p. 13).

The Orientalist delineations of Islam outlined by Marr above resonate throughout Updike’s novel, *The Coup* (1978). Written during the socio-economic upheavals characteristic of the Cold War, *The Coup* depicts the consequences of the Cold War on Kush, an imaginary African country on the grip of political turmoil. Updike specifically conveys the dominance of the United States on this country and region as a whole. D. Quentin Miller (2001) explains the socio-economic framework surrounding the novel in the following passage:

As is the case in Updike’s other books written in the 1970s, *The Coup*’s underlying conflict is more complicated than the depolarization of the East and West. The Cold War front has in essence been fragmented; America and Russia confront each other covertly on African soil. Both superpowers exploit Kush and its people economically and militarily... American exploitation has the upper hand over Soviet military exploitation by the end of the novel. (p. 152-2)

Being a citizen of a Superpower situates Updike in the position of the dominant Westerner, enabling him to create an image of the Oriental that is in line with the “Romantic Islamicism” mentioned by Marr (2006, p. 13) above, and one that illustrates the theories of Said in *Orientalism* and Foucault’s premises of power and knowledge. In fact, Updike’s Orientalist discourse in *The Coup* (1978) manifests itself in his portrayal of the protagonist Ellellou as the power-hungry, tyrannical ruler with an insatiable appetite for women. Such an image is reminiscent of the Orientalist despotic Sultan with his string of Sultanas and concubines, a depiction Orientalists had been fascinated with for centuries. Ellellou overthrows his predecessor, another despot, King Edemu,

who with his throng of female victims embodies the modern African version of King Shahryar in *A Thousand and One Nights*. Ellellou rules the imaginary African province of Kush afterwards with an iron fist, oblivious to the sufferings of his people and denying them US aid, or as he sees it, gifts from "imperialist exploiters" (Updike, 1978, p. 16).

Ellellou, a supposedly practicing Muslim who never misses a prayer and is in the habit of quoting the holy Koran, tries to reinforce his Islamic / Marxist system by defying the capitalist interventions of the West, especially the US. He narrates memoirs of his reign, interspersed with recollections of his days as a college student in the US and amidst vivid descriptions of all his overt sexual conquests regarding his four wives, his mistresses, and concubines.

### **The East-West Dichotomy:**

Ellellou's antagonistic relationship with the West is wrought within the Orientalist discourse of this novel. The East / West experience in this novel illustrates the depiction of such a complex dynamic as it appears in Said's *Orientalism*. Drawing on the work of Foucault, Said viewed the ensemble of writing on the Orient as a discourse as he explains how the West or "Occident" has created its own image of the East based on false assumptions and romanticized images of the Orient. The essence of Said's argument in *Orientalism* is that Western academics wrote about the East based on preconceived beliefs and ideologies. To illustrate, the first Orientalists were the nineteenth century scholars, who translated the writings of the Orient into English based on the assumption that a truly effective colonial conquest required knowledge of the conquered nations.

Said also shows that while the early Orientalists were, to a certain extent, observers, the new Orientalists such as Lawrence of Arabia lived with the Easterners in order to learn more about them and how to rule them more easily because the main objective of the new Orientalists is to preserve the Orient and Islam under the control of the white man. Therefore, the idea of knowledge as power is present throughout Said's critique.

Said highlights in his book three major reasons for the negative and politicized view of the West toward the Arabs in general and Islam in specific being an important and distinctive cultural marker of the Orient. The first reason is the history of anti-Arab as well as anti-Islamic sentiment in the West going as far as the time of the

crusades. The second reason is the Arab-Israeli conflict and the Western support of Israel and Zionism. Third, the lack of any cultural position on the part of Arabs and the East has made it impossible for Westerners to identify with Islam in an impartial manner.

To explain, Said relates the writings of academicians to former misconceptions of the "exotic" Orient and reveals that those writings have a profound effect on the contemporary ideas that the superior West depends on when dealing with the inferior East illustrated by the Arab or Muslim worlds. Said poses the question of the effect of those influential readings of the East on the political relations between the West and the East that have developed from the past and until the present. Said wonders about the possibility for Middle Easterners, who live in the West like himself, to advocate the representation of Islam and Moslems in Western writings.

The West uses all kind of discourse to justify its existence in the East. A number of these discourses are, for instance, to spread civilization among those whom they consider primitive and inferior backward natives and to restore order in their countries since such naïve people live in a state of chaos. In fact, Said (2003) states that according to Occidentals, the Orientals had no history or culture independent of their colonial masters. Consequently, *Orientalism* (2003) shows that the true interests of the West in the East are shrouded with ready-made clichés and reductive stereotypes.

In *Oriental Enlightenment: The Encounter between Asian and Western Thought*, J. J. Clarke (1997) points out how for Said Orientalism is a result of a colonizing knowledge created by the conqueror to comprehend the conquered and designed to confirm the West's own identity as well as to enhance its cultural and political hegemony. Consequently, Orientalism is more an indicator of the power the West holds over the East than about the Orient itself. In return, this creates an image of the Orient and a body of knowledge about the Orient as a systematic study becoming the prototype for taking control of the East both politically and economically by the West.

According to Spanos (2009) in *The Legacy of Edward W. Said*, Foucault's genealogy of the discursive practices of the West and Said's genealogy of the discourse of Orientalism involve the specification of the centered circle and the marginalized binary, which privileges the first term as the symbol of beauty, perfection, and civilization; and thus justifies the "conquest",

"occupation", and "colonization" of the "inferior" second. He resumes by stating that more importantly, such an arrangement will also suggest a theory of knowledge and power relations that overcomes the disabling tendencies of each discourse.

Malini Schueller (1991) explores the power relations between the colonizer and colonized in *The Coup*, underscoring the need to view this novel from a political point of view. Even though Updike has been predominantly received as an apolitical writer due his recurring portrayal of spirituality in suburban America, his novel *The Coup* requires a political framework of analysis. Schueller (1991) focuses in his examination of *The Coup* on its imperialist discourse with regard to colonialist theory explaining that in this novel, "The reliance on satire and seemingly universal myths functions to legitimate an imperialist discourse that denies the political existence of the Third World" (Schueller, 1991, p.114). This current research project focuses more on the anti-Islamic repercussions of Updike's Orientalist discourse in his depiction of the East / West encounter.

The depiction of the ever-volatile relationship between East and West is of utmost significance in the implications of Updike's Orientalist discourse. The French colonizers have appointed the puppet ruler King Edemu who serves Western interests rather than those of his own people. Western exploitation of Africa as well as Ellellou's utter disdain for the US come to light early on in the novel when Ellellou mentions the exportation of peanuts westward, which is

shipped to Marseilles to become the basis of heavily perfumed and erotically contoured soaps designed not for [his] naturally fragrant and affectionate countrymen but for the antiseptic lavatories of America— America, that fountainhead of obscenity and glut. (Updike, 1978, p. 3)

In this opening passage, Ellellou continues the theme of the Eastern / Western conflict in his Orientalist allusions. He further elaborates in the passage wherein he renders an almost documentary portrayal of Kush and its capital Istiqlal

renamed in 1960, upon independence and on prior maps called Caillieville, in honor of the trans-Saharan traveler of 1828, who daubed his face

brown, learned pidgin Arabic, and achieved European celebrity by smuggling himself into a caravan from Timbuctoo to Fez and doing what hundreds of unsung Berbers had been doing for centuries. (Updike, 1978, p. 5)

Afterwards, Ellellou's defiance of the US in his refusal to allow any US aid to go to his people sets the scene for the East-West conflict. The resulting image is that of the despotic Oriental ruler who lets his people starve rather than reap the benefits of the West's seemingly benevolent gifts, albeit useless sugar-coated cereals and oil-sunken potato chips.

The East-West dichotomy evinces itself most noticeably in Ellellou's flashbacks of his days as a college student in the US, all of which are juxtaposed with a vivid depiction of his Saharan desert adventure as he attempts to escape Africa with his fourth wife Sheba to France. All references to the US (West) emphasize the notions of civilization, rationality, and technological advancement, whereas the passages describing Africa (East) foreground backwardness, violence, and desert life with its caravans, tents, and camels.

Ellellou renders a romanticized picture of the desert fantasy as he contemplates the stars during his desert voyage:

But O the desert stars! What propinquous glories! Tremulous globes overseeing our shadowy progress with their utter silence. More than chandeliers, chandeliers of chandeliers. Um al-Nujum, the Mother of the Stars... (Updike, 1978, p. 147)

The desert becomes a recurring motif in Ellellou's narrative, representative of his Oriental origins. The contrast between the crudeness of eastern desert life and the sophistication of western living is revealed in the following passage, narrated by Ellellou as he has a flashback to his college days in the US whilst on his desert exploit. Here, Ellellou has a double flashback; he recounts how he had recollected desert memories during his first encounter with the parents of his second wife, the American Candace Cunningham. In this scene from his past, he marvels at the "white woodwork" of the Cunningham home, its "tightness" and "finish" (Updike, 1978, p. 150). When he is offered a glass of water, it reminds him of the dryness of the desert and the near-

impossible task of attaining water there:

Mrs. Cunningham returned with the water, in a glass with a silver rim, and I thought of desert water holes, the brackishness, the camel prints in the mud, the bacterial slime... (Updike, 1978, p. 155)

The image of the Orient, created by the Occident transforms into a truth that the Oriental himself begins to internalize. Ellellou unconsciously draws a contrast between his desert world in the east and this newly-acquired western reality wherein he has been thrust. The disparity of East and West is reiterated in the words of Candace in a scene prior to Ellellou's escape from Kush. Candace is fed up with life in Kush and has become disillusioned with Ellellou's idealistic Islamic philosophy which she terms as "kismet crap" (Updike, 1978, p. 120). She begins ranting, expressing her wish to go back to American civilization instead of staying on the "hellhole" (Updike, p. 121) in which she now finds herself. She exclaims how she longs to return to her country:

Where you can have a drink of water without lifting out the centipedes first and bowing toward smelly Mecca five times a day and having to kick starving kids out of your way every time you walk the goat. (Updike, 1978, p. 122)

Once again the dryness of the eastern desert is brought to the forefront; water and, consequently, life is associated with the west whereas for Candace Africa is a place she loathes. She continues her outburst, crying out:

I hate this place. I hate the heat, the bugs, the mud. Nothing *lasts* here, and nothing changes. The clothes when you wash them dry like cardboard. A dead rat on the floor is a skeleton by noon. I'm thirsty all the time. (Updike, 1978, p. 124, Italics in original)

By articulating such an arid, backward image of Africa in the voice of an embittered wife, Updike makes such references almost justifiable. Even the attack on Mecca above, the symbol of Islam, can be understood as the expression of this oppressed woman's frustrations. Updike here disguises this insult to Islam by voicing it in the words of a frustrated, abandoned wife.

The parchedness of the African desert contrasts with Ellellou's memories of Wisconsin with its rivers of lemonade rickies, lime phosphates that dripped their fizzing overflow into the chrome chips of ice, 7-Ups paler than water itself, and that mysterious dark challenger to the imperial Coke, the swarthy, enigmatic Pepsi. (Updike, 1978, p. 132) This abundance of cold beverages that Ellellou recounts from his college days in the US is in sharp opposition with sandy dunes and scorching sun described in Ellellou's desert escape. Furthermore, the primitive "maddening slapping of tent flaps in the mindless wind ...the snuffing voices of stoic camels" (Updike, 1978, p. 135) underscore the East / West discrepancy as such desert images clash with the civilized cafes, "luncheonettes, ice-cream parlors and bars" (Updike, 1978, p. 135) all of which Ellellou recalls during his desert voyage.

The imbalanced view of the East / West encounter resonates with the words of Said in this regard. In *Orientalism* (2003) Said argues that the reason behind the tense relationship between the West and East is due to an unequal distribution of power whether political, intellectual, or cultural among them. The portrayal of the East's image in the eyes of the West is constructed to the disadvantage of the former since any Westerner cannot liberate himself from the accumulating misconceptions pertaining to the East.

Foucault (2000) believes that history, which bears and determines us, is related to power and not to meaning because every action and historical event is an exercise in the exchange of power. Foucault explains his concept of history in the following interview cited in *Power*:

The problem is at once to distinguish among events, to differentiate the networks and levels to which they belong, and to reconstitute the lines along which they are connected and engender one another. From this follows a refusal of analyses couched in terms of the symbolic field or the domain of signifying structures, and a recourse to analyses in terms of genealogy of relations of force, strategic developments, and tactics. Here I believe one's point of reference should not be to the great model of language [*langue*] and signs but, rather, to that of war and battle. The history that bears and determines us has the form of a war rather than that of a language – relations of power, not relations of meaning. History has no

"meaning", though this is not to say that it is absurd or incoherent. On the contrary, it is intelligible and should be susceptible of analysis down to the smallest detail – but this is in accordance with the intelligibility of struggles, of strategies and tactics. Neither the dialect, as the logic of contradictions, nor semiotics, as the structure of communication, can account for the intrinsic intelligibility of conflicts. (2000, p. 116)

Said (2003) concentrates on the historical dimension of the Western colonial and imperial interests in the East from which stemmed the idea of the East becoming the "other". He states that the location of the Orient is close to Europe and that it is the source of Europe's civilizations and languages in the sense that the Orient provides Europeans with a contrasting culture through which they can identify themselves through negations. He argues that Orientalism can be found in the Western depictions of Arab cultures in accordance with the representation of the Arab as illogical, untrustworthy, anti-Western, dishonest, and most importantly prototypical and biologically inferior, and that Orientalist scholarship takes the blame for this propaganda.

Due to the imbalance of power between East and West, the representation of Oriental culture in Western literature has been distorted wherein the Western author has created a warped image of the Oriental which, in turn, has become a truth. The distortion of Islam, discussed below, manifests the core of the cultural misrepresentation of the East in the eyes of the West.

### **The Distortion of Islam:**

Throughout history, a major source of uneasiness for Westerners has been the concept of jihad, or holy war. Mansutti (2011) explains how Updike takes the idea of jihad personally, particularly his examination of suicide bombers in his more recent novel *The Terrorist* (2006) by saying that "Updike admitted he wrote *Terrorist* out of a twofold fit of entitlement: not only did he happen to be in Brooklyn visiting a relative on September 11, 2001 and directly witness the collapse of the Twin Towers." (Mansutti, 2011, p. 107). Mansutti quotes Updike in an interview with Alan Smudge stating: "I was qualified to speak about why young men are willing to become suicide bombers. I can kind of understand it, and I'm not sure too many Americans can" (Smudge, 2006, as cited in Mansutti, 2011, p.107-8).

In *The Coup*, a reference is made to jihad in an early scene between Ellellou and his predecessor King Edemu. Upon being accused by Ellellou of displaying a "pretense of Islam" (Updike, 1978, p. 18) whilst still retaining a belief in the "terror and torture" of the Grionde, Edemu retorts, stressing the sincerity of his belief in Islam as a "beautifully practical religion" (Updike, 1978, p. 18). However, Edemu does not stop there but rather elaborates further, stating:

But as to cruelty, the rain forest beyond the river holds none as rigorous as the fury of a jihad. I am blind, but not so blind as those righteous whose eyes roll upward, who kill and are killed to gain a Paradise of shade trees as I hear in the Book. (Updike, 1978, p. 18)

The words of Edemu paint a morbid picture of the jihadist, depicted here as a narrow-minded killing machine whose only aim is to gain Paradise at any cost. Such a homicidal mindset is alleged to be linked to the teachings of the Book or the Koran. The character of Edemu may most likely serve as a mouthpiece for Updike in this clear misinterpretation of the jihadist mentality.

The novel adopts a sarcastic tone in a later scene wherein Ellellou embarks upon reinforcing a "cultural, ethical, and political purity in Kush" (Updike, 1978, p. 83). He goes to extreme lengths to purify Kush of western influence to the point where such action becomes comical. Soldiers comb the vicinity and confiscate any transistor radios, cassette players, four-track hi fi rigs and any musical instrument other than the traditional tambourine. "Any man caught urinating in a standing position, instead of squatting in the manner of Mohamet and his followers, was detained and interrogated until the offender could prove he was a pagan and not a Christian" (Updike, 1978, p. 83).

Not only does this passage mock Islam as an extremist religion that focuses on trifles, but it also links Islam with base, human, and biological functions, thereby belittling Islam's value as a religion of peace and spirituality. In an earlier episode a similar association between base human physicality and Islam is depicted. After one of Ellellou's intimate trysts with his newly-crowned desert concubine Kutunda, he explains to the reader, "He was awoken at dawn by twin sharp needs: to urinate and to pray. His duties performed, he lay besides the woman" (Updike, 1978, p. 81). This juxtaposition of

references to Islam with sordid aspects of humanity distorts the image of Islam as one of elevated sacredness and instead reduces it to a debased level of human existence.

Another furtive attack on Islam can be seen in a debate that arises between Ellellou and his first wife, Kadongolimi, regarding religious belief. Upon her assertion that Ellellou's abandonment of the old African gods lies at the root of the hardships that have befallen Kush, he retorts that he believes in the "true God...the owner of the Day of Judgment." (Updike, 1978, p. 95). Kadongolimi responds, "This God of Mohamet is a no-God, an eraser of gods; He cannot be believed in, for He has no attributes and is nowhere" (Updike, 1978, p. 95-6). These words reduce Islam as a comprehensive religion and instead restrict it to one man, Prophet Mohammad, peace be upon him. Moreover, this scene insinuates a lack of genuine faith on the part of the people of Kush. This nihilistic image of Mohammad's God diminishes Islam as a true faith and portrays Muslims as blind followers of Mohammad. The overshadowing of Islam by its prophet brings to mind Said's words regarding the term "Mohammedans" (Said, 2003, p. 66), used by Orientalists to designate Muslims.

The distortion and misunderstanding of Islam which *Orientalism* tackles is originally related to the scholarship of the West, which does not promote a better understanding of Islam. For many Westerners, the Islamic society is still viewed and comprehended in terms of the West's Oriental history, which depicts Muslim as the heathen violent fighters of the crusades since Muslims in the West are not recognized as followers of a religion that shares a lot of mutual grounds with Judaism and Christianity. In his article "Islam as News", Said (2001a) mentions *The Coup* as an example of how the "longstanding attitude" in Western writing towards Islam, has been "uniform...Muslims [have been] depicted as oil suppliers, terrorists... and more recently as blood-thirsty mobs" (p. 172).

In present times, it is apparent that Said's theory of how the West perceives the East is particularly evident in the policy of the United States of America in the Middle East. After the fall of the Soviet Union as a world power, the attention of the United States was focused upon the Muslims living in the Middle East, and the conclusion of this examination is almost always that these Arabs are the "other" people, who are not like the West since they have strange and unexplained values and beliefs. Therefore,

the society of these people is in comparison inevitably inferior.

These concepts are the foundation for ideologies and policies developed by the Occident. Said finds that the hold that these beliefs have on the mind is increased by institutions built around them especially political propaganda in the present time. He draws attention to the fact that any objective scholarly study about the East has to be based on a culturally consistent region or area in which the Orient ought to be given a voice.

#### **Free-flowing Power:**

David Lodge (1988) states in "Michel Foucault" that the main interest of Foucault is examining truth and power and how they engage in the history of human experience. In *Michel Foucault: Form and Power*, Dan Beer (2002) explains that power for Foucault exists as a free flowing and multi-dimensional formation out of which restrictive forms of power are produced. Power is presented by Foucault as if having its own specific forms and shapes and as being capable of movement and transformation since it is treated as a living, growing, and developing organism.

Beer (2002) elaborates by explaining that Foucault uses the essential term "*le pouvoir*", which meanings in French are limited to either physical capability or to connotations related to political authority. He argues, however, that the English translation of power seems more multi layered in comparison to the original French term. As a result, Foucault is attempting to redefine the term by showing that it transcends its conventional association with politics. This, in turn, reinforces the point that the varied vocabularies that Foucault utilizes hint that power has no focal point since it has no substance and is unstable as well as constantly changing. It also suggests that it cannot be controlled by one individual or group such as politicians, militaries, or scientists, and that it cannot be used for the good of all.

Barry Smart (1986) explains that the term hegemony signifies one form of relationship that exists between a leading group and a subordinate one in relation to force and consent. Hegemony affects the minds of individuals as well as their cultural practices, thereby influencing the psychic and physical reality of the human subject. Elizabeth J. Bellamy (1992) argues that the impact of hegemony affects the psychology of the individual. Therefore, in the sphere of hegemony the subordinate group gives in to the dominant one through social



practices and beliefs, of which they are unaware.

It is stated in *The Edward Said Reader* (2001b) that *Orientalism* was perceived by some to offer a possibility of "writing back", (Said, 2001b, p. 67) of giving voice to their experiences that were silenced by cultural hegemony in the West. In any society that is not a totalitarian one, a certain cultural leadership becomes dominant and this is interpreted as hegemony. Consequently, since the relationship between the Occident and the Orient is a relationship of power and dominance, it is also a relationship of varying degrees of a complex hegemony.

Foucault's notion of power as a free-flowing entity appears vehemently in Updike's novel. Control of Kush flows in diverse directions; it does not lie in the hands of individuals but rather fluctuates amongst a variety of institutions, ideologies and infrastructures. The French colonists' puppet ruler, King Edemu, is overthrown by Ellelou and his Islamist / Marxist political system. Such an ideology does not alleviate the suffering of the drought-stricken people, thus paving the way for Ezana's capitalism. All the while, power surges into the manifold avenues of Western colonialists, imperialists, and socialists, namely the French, Americans, and the Russians. The individuals who appear to be in power are actually fronts or facilitators for Western interests and thought systems.

#### **The Role of the Author:**

In "What is An Author?" Foucault (1986) links the author's function to the institutional system that encompasses, determines, and articulates the universe of discourses. The author's role is not one of a real individual since it can give rise simultaneously to several selves and objects. For Foucault (1986), the manner in which discourses are articulated according to social relationships could be better understood in the activity of the author's function.

In this respect, Said (2003) states in *Orientalism* that no production of knowledge in the human sciences can ever ignore its author's involvement as a human subject in his own circumstances. That is why it must be true for a Westerner studying the Orient that he comes up against the Orient as a Westerner first then as an individual second. Furthermore, Said (2003) in *Orientalism* says that narrative rather than vision is employed in interpreting the geographical landscape known as the Orient, which covers a big part of the world. In that sense, a historian and a scholar would not depend on a

panoramic view of half of the world, which constitutes the East, but rather on a concentrated type of history that does not permit space for the dynamic variety of human experience.

Updike enwraps his Orientalist discourse with an aura of authority through his extensive references to the holy Koran, his utilization of Arabic, Muslim phrases and his protagonist's vivid descriptions of the African terrain. The novel's Orientalism is intricately interwoven with the historical / geographical discourse and its seemingly documentary-like tone. Updike provides the reader with accurately detailed facts and figures to gain a certain degree of knowledge and, in turn, the power of his created truths.

References to the holy Koran accompany Ellelou's narrative; he habitually quotes verses from the Book in accordance with his situation. Such quotations from the holy Koran are for the most part taken out of context by Updike and completely misrepresentative of their true meaning. An example of this kind of misquotation comes to light in the fire scene in the first chapter. Ellelou sets fire to the mountain of US aid in a show of defiance, and an American aid worker commits suicide by throwing himself into the fire. Ellelou tries to find solace in the words of the Koran for this tragic scene:

I checked my heart's tremor with some verses from the Book, that foresees all and thereby encloses all: On that day men shall become like scattered moths and mountains like tufts of carded wool. On that day there shall be downcast faces, of men broken and worn out, burnt by scorching fire, drinking from a seething fountain. On that day there shall be radiant faces, of men well-pleased with their labors, in a lofty garden. (Updike, 1978, p. 43, Italics in original)

The verses quoted by Ellelou here refer to tumultuous events on Judgment Day. By associating these verses with the violent scene at hand and the appalling death of the American, Updike reinforces the stereotypical image of Islam in the West as a religion of terror and violence. This prejudiced portrayal of Islam seems to be substantiated by Updike's use of words from the Koran; however, these verses do not refer to worldly mishaps and violence but rather to the chaos and turmoil of Judgment Day.

In another instance, Ellelou quotes the Koran during

a visit to Kutunda, his desert mistress. Here Updike juxtaposes Koranic verses with passages of overtly graphic sexual scenes between Ellellou and Kutunda. As Kutunda parades her recent purchases to her benefactor, “her heels thumped in the manner specifically enjoined by the twenty-fourth sura, *And let them not stamp their feet in walking so as to reveal their hidden trinkets*” (Updike, 1978, p. 79, Italics in original). Ellellou elaborates further, quoting more parts from the same sura: “*Unclean women are for unclean men, and unclean men are for unclean women*” (Updike, 1978, p. 79, Italics in original).

By placing Koranic verses pertaining to the relationships between men and women side by side with vivid depictions of Ellellou’s intimate sessions with Kutunda, Updike portrays Islam as a religion of physicality rather than otherworldly purity. Such a depiction diminishes the representation of Islam in the eyes of Western readers. The author here attempts to create an image of Muslims as debased individuals in constant pursuit of animalistic desires.

In addition to the Updike’s association of the holy Koran with degenerate aspects of humanity, he makes a mockery of the five Muslim prayers by placing them within sordid contexts full of repugnance and at times buffoonery. Updike claims an authoritative stance in adopting the Arabic names for these holy prayers, namely, *salat as-subh*, *salat az-zuhr*, *salat il asr*, *salat il maghreb* and *salat al ’isha*. By designating the Arabic, Islamic terms for such prayers, Updike obscures his prejudiced, Orientalist discourse with an air of reliability and truthfulness.

Ellellou performs his *salat as-subh* after setting up his mistress Kutunda “in an apartment above a basket weaving shop whose real dealings were in hashish and khat” (Updike, 1978, p. 48). This morning prayer is done amidst the sounds of “the banging of calabashes and scraping of warm ashes and the unwrapping of hashish packets” (Updike, 1978, p. 49). In a previous scene, Ellellou and his men perform *salat az-zuhr* (the noon prayer) “and fell asleep in the shade of a ledge, where lizards came to skitter across us” (Updike, 1978, p. 28). A few pages before the scene above, Ellellou explains that he and his men “were awakened well after the time of *salat il-asr* ... by a young woman, naked but for her pointed nosepiece (Updike, 1978, p. 22, Italics in original). As Ellellou visits his doomed predecessor in a prior episode, the call to *salat il-magreb* is heard at

which the ill-fated King addresses Ellellou stating, “Go to the mosque. The president must display his faith” (Updike, 1978, p. 20). The most debased scene of all is left for *salat al-’isha* (the night prayer) as Ellellou performs this prayer surrounded by a group of drunken Russian soldiers one of whom “playfully planted a foot in Mtsea’s backside” (Updike, 1978, p. 25) as they knelt down in their prayer.

Updike’s extensive use of Arabic phrases and his continuous references to Koranic verses, as well as his vivid description of the African, Muslim way of life all embellish him with a semblance of authority with regard to the subject matter of this novel, thus entitling him to the power of his generated truth. Furthermore, Updike adopts a historical documentary-type of tone in his depiction of the African landscape to further reinforce his seemingly authoritative standpoint. Therefore, Updike conveys a condescending Western attitude in relation to Oriental existence.

The preceding analysis of the novel reveals how Updike’s Orientalist discourse presents a biased image of Islam and Africa and an imbalanced view of the East / West dichotomy. The theoretical frameworks utilized by the two researchers provide insight into the hidden intentions behind the discourse within this novel. The textual scrutiny of *The Coup* in accordance with the theories of Said and Foucault accentuates the following notions: the Orientalist inferences of the novel, the misrepresentation of Islam, the fluctuations of power and the superficially imposing tone of the author. This practical application of the critical precepts of Said and Foucault serves to disclose the underlying implications of the novel’s Orientalist discourse. It becomes evident how Updike’s reliance on prejudiced stereotypes of Muslims and his contortion of iconic Islamic ideals further expand the gap between Easterners and Westerners, Muslims and non-Muslims.

In *The Coup* Updike displays the tropes of the initial Orientalists in his creation of a distorted image of an inferior Oriental Other in order to reinforce the Western position as the dominant counterpart. This early novel by Updike is an attempt to assert the authority of the West, specifically The United States, as a superpower that surpasses the Soviet Union in its control over the Orient. Updike’s anti-Islamicism in *The Coup* springs from an innate rivalry between the United States and the former Soviet Union to gain command of the Eastern world. His antagonism against Islam in his more recent novel

*Terrorist* and the connection that this later novel establishes between Islam and terrorism both bring to light a deep fear of the Oriental Islamic Other. In the past, Orientalist discourse was a means to establish superiority;

nowadays it has become more of a defense mechanism for the West in the quest to regain the global upper hand once again.

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## الخطاب الاستشراقي في رواية الانقلاب لجون ابدايك ضمن الإطار النظري لادوارد سعيد وميشيل فوكو

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### ملخص

تهدف هذه الدراسة الى إبراز الخطاب الاستشراقي في رواية (The Coup (1978 للكاتب الامريكي جون ابدايك، وذلك من خلال تحليل الرواية في اطار كتاب الاستشراق (2003) للكاتب إدوارد سعيد ومن منظور نظرية القوة والمعرفة لميشيل فوكو. وقد اعتمدت الدراسة على التحليل النصي لرواية ابدايك حيث تمّ تناول الفقرات التي تمثل الافكار التالية: الاستشراق كخطاب سياسي وعلاقة الغرب بالشرق وتشويه صورة الاسلام والتدفق الحر للقوة وتظاهر الكاتب بأنه خبير في الشؤون الاسلامية. لذا فإن أهمية هذه الدراسة لها وجهان: من أنها تطبيق عملي لنظريات سعيد وفوكو، وأنها تقدم نظرة جديدة لرواية ابدايك، إذ تم الكشف عن افكارها المضادة للاسلام. وقد ركزت الدراسة على الخطاب الاستشراقي في هذه الرواية ودور هذا الخطاب في تشويه صورة الإسلام. كما تناولت مفاهيم القوة والحقيقة والهيمنة ودور المؤلف، إذ كان التحليل الخطابي لهذه الرواية على صلة وثيقة مع تخوف الغرب من الإسلام (Islamophobia) في العصر الحالي.

الكلمات الدالة: ابدايك، سعيد، فوكو، الإستشراق، رواية "الإنقلاب"، الخطاب.

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