



### Arab Muslim Characters in Khadra's Novel *the Sirens of Baghdad*

Dr. Ali Dakhil Naem

University of Sumer



[ali.dakhil@uos.edu.iq](mailto:ali.dakhil@uos.edu.iq)



<https://orcid.org/0009-0007-7837-0406>



<https://doi.org/10.32792/tqartj.v1i44.466>

Received 30/11/2023, Accepted 30/12/2023 , Published 30/12/2023.

#### Abstract

In this study, the researcher presented the American's views of Islam and Muslims in Khadra's Novel *The Sirens of Baghdad*. The image of Arab Muslim character is portrayed differently by the post-colonial novelists post September attacks 2001 on the World Trade Centre towers situated in New York City, USA. Since the accident, many American writers who represent the Western values have endeavored to stigmatize the picture of Arab Muslims through their writings using variant depictions to confirm their 'Others' as they consider the Arab Muslims their foes in the world. Consequently, the American writers perpetuate their previous negative picture to continue their domination upon the Arab Muslims, using post-colonial concepts in their portrayal. In contrast, the Arab writers try their best to depict the image of the Arab Muslim characters fairly as they have realistically witnessed and experienced the actual life events. Due to this, Orientalism, stereotyping, otherness and racism are the key concepts examined in this study related the *Sirens of Baghdad*. As many other Western and Arab writers have dealt with the same concepts previously, the current study examined and identified the concepts differently through this study concerning Arab Muslim characters from contrasting perspectives. Accordingly, the researcher adapted Said's Orientalism theory as a main method of analysis. The research findings revealed that the American novelists purposely reflected dark aspects of the Arab Muslim characters so as to show to the world that Islam is a religion that propagates oppression and violence. On the other hand, the Arab novelists successfully and realistically proved that it is the Westerners who most of the time oppress the Arab Muslims and murder a fairly good number of them on the basis of false and unfounded allegations. As a conclusion, the study proposes a framework of the portrayal of the Arab Muslim characters conceptualized by the post-colonial perspective. It is recommended that future research examines the reliability and authentication of the respective American novels that have distorted the Arab Muslim identity by using high level of fictitious representations that is very distant from reality and truth, so that the negative representations of the Arab Muslim characters can righteously be repudiated. Moreover, future research can explore cross-cultural studies related to the novel concerned and the like of them so as to highlight the psychological, cultural and societal representations of the two nations—the Arab and the Western.

**Keywords:** Orientalism, Arab Muslim, Westerners, post-colonial, otherness





### 1-Introduction

Post-colonial theory is one of the modern theories that appeared in 1970s as a reaction against the colonialists' discourses, which perpetuates the Colonial powers domination on the colonized people who are not given the opportunity to express themselves. Accordingly, theorists who come from the colonized nations establish postcolonial discourse to expose the real faces of the Western powers. Thus, it deals with the literature of both the colonizer and colonized people and their connections with each other culturally as Gaurin Viswanathan provides a definition of post-colonial studies: “it is the study of cultural interaction between the colonizing powers and the societies they colored, and traces this interaction often in literature, art, and human science of both societies.” (Stam, 2017).

When the Colonialists literary genre declined gradually, new literary genres appeared in the literary media to unmask Colonialism truths and methods for maintaining their presence in the colonized countries. Consequently, theorists belonging to colonized nations begin their faithful works to establish a new discourse to reveal the colonialist literary works through analyzing and deconstructing. Because they live in the colonialists' countries, Edward Said, Franz Fanon, Homi Bhabha and Gayatri Smith contribute widely to the appearances of the postcolonial discourse. Under the umbrella of post-colonialism, Orientalism theory has been made by Said as a result of his adoption to expose the fact of the Orientalists who look upon the ‘Orient’ including Arab Muslims in distorted lens. Said wrote his famous book 'Orientalism' (1978) which is considered as the most influential book in the field of postcolonial studies, emphasizing imperialism and the stereotypical views of the colonialists upon the 'Orient', which is a term used by them to name all the people of third world countries. In addition, he mentions that the dominant powers show high superiority and ignorance towards the colonized nations. Thus, the Westerners see the Orient as their antagonist. Consequently, they depict it negatively. As John McLeod points out: “The Orient is frequently described in a series of negative terms that serves to buttress a sense of the West's superiority and strength. If the West is assumed as the seat of knowledge and learning, then it will





follow that the Orient is the place of ignorance and naïveté” (McLeod, 2000: p. 41). Besides, Said focuses upon the stereotypical views of the colonialists upon the colonized he also tries to uncover the truth of the colonizers' attributes in Orientalism.” According to Said, Orientalism reveals more about the West and its fantasies than it does about the actual people, cultures, and history of the East; not simply a myth, it is “more particularly valuable as a sign of European-Atlantic power over the Orient than it is as a verdict discourse about the Orient” (Leitch, 2010, p. 1862).

Continuing the Orientalists' views upon the Arab Muslim characters, the American writers depict them as alien, unfamiliar, blood thirsty, slave traders, extremist and fundamentalist after 9/11 attack in New York. “Whether communication has taken place in the preceding or recent centuries, the western part of the world maintains a continuous conceptualization of Arab and Muslim as alien” other "or rather" enemy "characters, although there have been some changes in both communication and credit terminology" (Nydell, M.K., 2018, p. 8). In return, Arab writers try their hard to represent the characteristics of their brothers in religion (Arab Muslim) fairly as they saw themselves the oppression falling upon them by the Americans after the attack. Definitely, the representation of the Arab Muslim characters is unclearly stated after the contrasted representations. As a result, this study will be conducted to show the different representations of the Arab Muslim characters in Khadra's Novel *The Sirens of Baghdad*, using Orientalism theory by Said as a main method of analysis.

This study perpetuates the novel which published after the attack in New York, America, on 11, September 2001. As the result of their significance in history, in addition to their crucial observation on how history has been represented, this novel explores the problems of identity and post-colonial nationalism. “Each of these novels presents a tale against the background of some historical case in colonial or post-colonial history” (Raymond, 2013). *The Sirens of Bagdad* is a novel by an Algerian writer who is currently living in Western country. The mentioned novel





tackles the story of the young Iraqi villager who joins the rebellions after the American invasion to Iraq. He leaves his studies because he witnessed a terrible act made by American soldiers in Baghdad and other locations in Iraq, such as a wedding attack on one of the outskirts of his village (Khadra, 2006).

### 2-Problem statement

There were a lot of encounters during the long history which took place between Western culture and Islam. It has produced a tradition of portraying, negative and self-serving ways, the Islamic religion and Muslim cultures. There is a lot of literature classified these stereotypes... Western image-makers, including religious governments, political institutions. They conceptualize for their consumer's images of Muslims or sometimes Arabs amusing and other times cruel or tragic ways. Sometimes the western picture-makers resort to the contrary opinion in the structure of their films to make the irony quite attention. For instance, a young Moroccan called Omar who turn his good benevolent intentions up-side-down when he becomes a real selfish and kidnapper. One of the amassed problems that the Western media preserve unanimous stereotypes for the Arab Muslims whether they are televised, printed or broadcasted. The Western media endeavor to impart legitimize with fault credibility. It is noticeable, therefore, that the Western media support all of the declares with "evidences", "arguments" and "facts" in order to demonstrate that the Arabs' "actions", "thought" and "intention" are demonic. Then, the Western media is responsible for infusing the Western public with biased and fabricated preconception about Arabs and Muslims. However, the current study is pioneer in terms of its methodology through the comparison study of the images of Arab Muslim characters projected in two counter-ideological collective of novels by adopting the theory of Orientalism by Edward Said to be the core theory for analysis, reinforced by the notions of Critical Discourse Analysis as an additional theory to augment the interpretations.

Hence, this current research seeks to address this research gap, in addition to enhancing knowledge within the comparative studies disciplines.



# Thi Qar Arts Journal

مجلة آداب ذي قار

P ISSN :2073-6584 | E ISSN:2709-796X

VOL1 NO 44



In summary, numerous writers have written works pertaining to the representation of the Arab Muslim characters in novels written by post-9/11 American and Arabic writers. Seeing that it is a delicate period where varying images are depicted to indicate realistic images of the catastrophic incidents, and a response to the requirements of their readers during the critical times. Consequently, numerous writers address such literary works from diverse viewpoints for the analysis of the writings, by means of Post-Colonial theory particularly Orientalism. Hence, subject matter revolving around Orientalism like stereotyping, the ‘otherness’, and racial discrimination are utilized as analytic subject matters in the analysis of current novels, which I will employ as examples in my research, discusses the methodology employed in this study—postcolonial theory. It reviews the concept of alterity and the colonial discourse as exemplified by Said (1978) in Orientalism. It explains how Said (1978) work is used as a template for the design of the study. In accordance to Abdullah (2016) who utilizes stereotyping in the analysis of the novel. Likewise, with Alireza and Khadmi (2015), who employ the Oriental representation to stigmatize the Arab Muslims by utilizing ‘framed’ set-up image in the depiction. Furthermore, Mohamad (2015) had also employed the notion of ‘otherness’ in his research of the aforementioned novels.

However, the present study is pioneer in terms of its methodology through the comparison study of the images of Arab Muslim characters projected in two counter-ideological collective of novels by adopting the theory of Orientalism by Edward Said to be the core theory for analysis, reinforced by the notions of Critical Discourse Analysis as an additional theory to augment the interpretations. Hence, this current research seeks to address this research gap, in addition to enhancing knowledge within the comparative studies disciplines.



This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License.



After 11 September attack, in 2001 in New York, the picture of the Arab Muslim character was unfairly represented by Western writers and especially the American who continue to portray them negatively. Accordingly, they depicted them as other, antagonist, enemy, erotic, criminals, extremists, bloodthirsty, jihadists, and fundamentalist in their literary work (novels). Using Orientalists' perspectives to perpetuate their domination upon the Arab Muslim after the assaults in U. S., the American writers stigmatize them deeply and unfairly though Arab Muslim are deeply affected by the attack." As a result of creating this prejudice and hate toward Muslims, a binary opposition was established between Muslim and non-Muslim groups or societies. Shortly after, Muslims were categorized as "them" and presented as a threat to "us." (Ahmed & Matthes, 2017, p. 222).

Contrary to what the American writers have alleged, Arab writers try to get rid of the distorted picture, depicting the Arab Muslim characters positively and fairly as they witnessed the events in reality. So, the present study comes as an attempt to uncover the negative depiction, deception, and unreality of these characteristics through analyzing and identifying the representation of Arab Muslim characters and comparing it with image of Arab Muslim character in two Arab novels by Khadra and Halaby. Most of the previous studies have focused on the analysis of the Orient in American and Western literature such as Shabanirad, (2015), Aldukhina (2015), Alireza and Khademi (2015), Mohamad (2015), and Mikbal M, Alosman, Raihana M. M. and Ruzy Suliza Hashim (2018).

Therefore, it can be concluded that a few studies, so far have been conducted to focus on the comparative analysis of the representations of Arab Muslim character into two ideological groups of literary works. Consequently, shedding light on how the Orient in general and Arab Muslim in particular are portrayed is rendered to be research gap not addressed before. Drawing upon Said's Orientalism theory and supported by critical discourse analysis concepts of ideology,





identity and power. This study sets out to fill the gap by analyzing and comparing the representation of Arab Muslim characters in selected novels.

### 3-Theoretical framework

Many post-colonialists interested in inherited thoughts of European superiority upon non-Europeans citizens and the spread all of these thoughts during direct or indirect means in terms of cultural reproductive systems such as educational institutions and frameworks (Said, 1978). So, post-colonialism looks for exposing the raw experimental impacts and the conceptual assumptions of the colonizers on the colonized countries. In this sense, post-colonialism formulates non-western shapes of discourse as a means of challenging the West an instance is “The Question of ‘White Studies’” (Multiworld, 2003). This attempt at making a new form of challenge thus uses discursive practices which question the very ‘rationality’ of the West rather than suggesting ‘more rational or true’ solutions to the problems of colonialism and imperial. Post-colonialism attempts to change the directions in which both the west and non-Western citizens traditionally over the world. It fractures the old perspective to enable new and diverse voices to describe and represent cultures and difference. Bhabha (1994) assures that colonialism works within the dimensions of time, history and space. The time and history dimensions are interested with geographical sides; The third one is a re-formulation cultural concepts which comes to be considered as the new form of the world during the shaping of knowledge in long-standing coercive power dynamics.

Fanon (1967) proposes that new Western colonialism brought about a normative division between whites and black. This is the reason behind the former is superior over the latter in terms of possession of power, right to reach to explanation and create knowledge and the right to shape





aspects of the internal and external life of a colonized black society. Smith in (1995) has challenged the “legacy of colonialism” when she states by saying that “Can the Subaltern Speak?”. Her concentrate was on the political marginalize on cultural discourses of the and prevailed citizen being prevailed and powerful i.e. Western cultures. She illustrates the representation of the Subaltern as an essentialist ‘Other’ to Europe which is unknown identity and disempowered when it comes to defining itself. She states that Western intellectuals and institutions concealed the Subalterns’ experiences by muting their voices individually and collectively. Also, Young states that “post-colonialism is neither western nor non-western, but a dialectical product of interaction between the two, articulating new counterpoints of insurgency from the long-running power struggles that predate and post-date colonialism” (Young,2001, p. 68). Anyhow, it is continually the conflict between the West and East.

For the purpose of enriching the interpretations of the analysis of selected novels, the researcher employed CDA structure constructed by Van Dijk, which is called “the ideological square model” (Van Dijk 1998a, 1998b) as supplementary methods to analyze the four novels. The opposition the frame of “us” (related to the concepts of (good) and “them” (related to the concept of (bad), in this model acted as guiding principle for us. “We identified the concealed attitudinal stances of the newspaper editors and analyzed how certain aspects of the uprisings were emphasized and others were de-emphasized through the functional moves of this model (Van Dijk, 1989). This model also enabled us to categorize positive and negative representations of the protestors and the authorities” (Afzal& & Harun, 2015, p.245). We investigate the way how “complementary strategies... the positive representation of one group and the negative representation of the other” (Van Dijk, 1993) that have been depicted throughout the novels after 9/11 attack, which is a model advocated by researchers to point out such frameworks with a view of pinpointing “its evaluative principles or functional moves” (Van Dijk, 1998b, 2004).

#### 4-Arab Muslims







*The Sirens of Baghdad* is a novel that goes back in time and takes the reader by the hand to identify the path taken by the young protagonist. Eventually, it turns him into a person full of hate. The Iraqi young man, who does not have a name in the novel, but tells its events with the first person, grew up in his desert village "Kafr Quraan" in peace and security till the war took place. On one night, a group of American soldiers stormed the village's houses in search of weapons assaulted and insulted its residents and members, causing the shy boy's violent shock that he did not recover from. As he saw with his own eyes, his family insulted and their dignity violated. Khadra says: "Dignity is a mainstay in Arab societies. Dignity is the only wealth for the poor, and without it a person cannot live. When dignity is taken away, a person is lost." (Bouhassoun, 2016).

The Iraqi young man is filled with frustration and despair, decides to go to the capital, Baghdad, for revenge. Sidon is easy to fall into the nets of extremism, like other frustrated youth. It is noticeable about a central idea in Khadra's novel, who says, "All these young people dream about is actually getting a suitable job, finding a wife and starting a house." (Halaby, 2007). Unfortunately, Arab governments that think only of themselves do not shy away from lying and deceiving, neglecting young people who are full of determination and energy. On their side, young people do not understand why they are deprived of the right to contribute to building their countries, and they turn to extremism as a political response as Yasimna Khadra says.

### **5-Khadra's Identification of the Arab Muslim Characters in *The Sirens of Baghdad***

Realistic happenings have inspired the production of Khadra's *The Sirens of Baghdad*. Here, the novelist presents the Arab Muslim character as he actually examined it in reality. It is one that has been hated by the Westerners who have placed it within the domain of the Other stereotyped as a terrorist. For instance, the American occupying forces behave in Iraq as if they were the owners of the country. Khadra has presented a portrayal of the Arab Muslim character as represented by the unnamed narrator who has lost many and various invaluable things because of the occupation of





Iraq. Besides, he has lost his dignity in that the American forces have humiliated his father in the presence of his countrymen.

*The Sirens of Baghdad* shows that the Westerners have identified the portrayal of the Arab Muslim characters with the Other that should be fought because, they think, he/she is inimical to them—a terrorist and racist—forgetting the fact that they are in a position to defend themselves against the occupying forces. In this novel, the novelist depicts the aftermaths of the American attack against Iraq in 2003. Actually, the novel shows that the American forces are the terrorist due to the fact that they have occupied Iraq and tortured its innocent people. In this novel, the equation of Van Dijk shows that the positive (I)—the Arab Muslim characters and the negative (them)—the American forces.

Once again, the Americans do not realize the fallacy that it is they who are to be considered the terrorists, not the Arab Muslims because they have occupied Iraq and killed millions of its people, not to mention bereaving millions of mothers and orphaning millions of children. Therefore, as Khadra shows in this novel, the Iraqis are in a position to protect their country and nation. Khadra addresses Said's maxim of Orientalism that advocate the notion that the struggle of the Arab Muslims against the Occident is mainly the result of destitution, illiteracy and demise that have been caused by the imperialist countries, and therefore the Arab Muslim finds it necessary to defend himself against those negative aspects of life that have inflicted him in one way or another. Hence, those who try to maintain their existence in their own countries are called fundamentalists, extremists and terrorists by the torturing and oppressing forces.





As a matter of fact, the modern world has already witnessed the concept of terrorism that has been created by the Westerners who consider any force to face them as being terrorists. Many and various conferences were held to deal with the definition of terrorism. *The Sirens of Baghdad* simply illustrates the answers to such questions as these. The novel illustrates the sociological and psychological representations forcing the Arab Muslim to be fundamentalist fighting the Occident. Throughout the identification of the portrayal of the Arab Muslim characters, Khadra manages to condemn the wrong allegations of the West concerning the situation of the Arab Muslims who have already been depicted as innocent people trying to maintain their right to survive in this world and live peacefully in their own countries. It has already been shown why the protagonist wants to be a fundamentalist fighting the Occident. Therefore, the novelist tries to specify the source of terrorism and the factors that may feed it in the Arab world. It is the factors of poverty, racism, stereotyping and oppression that lead the Arab Muslim such as the protagonist to be fundamentalist (Bouhassoun, 2016: p. 1).

It is an act of terror when the occupying forces haphazardly bomb the wedding party of the Haitems and kill a number of innocent men, women and children—an event that crystallizes the idea of fundamentalism in the mind of the protagonist so as to avenge the offenders. The American forces have just acted in this way according to some false allegations and suspicions, and this is the main reason why they have tried to present their apology to the Haitems. It can be suggested that to act according to some suspicions and kill a great number of people without any sound verifications is considered against the will of God first and against the international laws. It has been made clear that religion and nationality have nothing to deal with the cause resultant in fundamentalism. It the tyrannies of the occupying forces that cause the nations to defend themselves and their countries. Hence, terrorism is ever associated with imperialism.





### 6-Discussion of the Findings on the Portrayal of Arab Muslim Characters by Arab American Writers After 9/11 Attack in Khadra's *The Sirens of Baghdad*

In *The Sirens of Baghdad*, Khadra attempts to accurately represent what seems to him to be realistic throughout his experience that he has got when watching how the occupying forces behave in his country. They treat his people in such a way as if they were animals. They appear to be void of any humane traits that may characterize them as human beings. They destroyed cities, killed hundred thousands of people with cold blood and humiliated the owners of the land in many and various horrible ways that were unbearable to the Arab Muslims who had their own dignity as one of the supreme values. Khadra has managed to draw a realistic picture of what happened in Baghdad after it had been occupied by the American forces whose behavior was characterized by stereotyping all its people as terrorists and racist at the time they are not.

### 7-Portrayal of Arab Muslim Characters in Khadra's *The Sirens of Baghdad*

*The Sirens of Baghdad* is a realistic novel in that its action has been inspired by actual events are identical to the ones lived by the novelist himself—Khadra whose depiction of its action comes in favor of the Arab Muslims living in Iraq who have been horrified by the American occupying forces. Those forces represented by the US army have wrongly and iniquitously dealt with the innocent Arab Muslims. Due to their racist and extremist aspirations toward the Arab Muslims, the members of the U.S. army have an aggressive attitude toward them and have stereotyped them into the Other in an Arab environment that should be treated in a bad manner. *The Sirens of Baghdad* presents the Arab Muslim identity as it has been deformed by the Occident. When measured against Said's oriental maxims, the novel shows how the Westerners represented by the US army have oppressed the Arab Muslims in their countries, for they feel that they are foreigners, second-rate citizens, terrorists and racist in the country in which they are indigenous at the time they should not be called by these epithets.





*The Sirens of Baghdad* unfolds the violence and humiliation to which the Arab Muslim characters are exposed for no reason except that they are Arab Muslims insofar as the American troops consider every one, of them, innocent as such, a terrorist trying to fight them. The American culture shows that the phenomenon of terrorism finds its origin in the Arab Muslims considered to be extremist fighting the Westerners whom they believe to be sacrilegious and blasphemous. The novel depicts serious aspects of the aftermaths created by the American war against Iraq. It shows how the American troops transgress human rights and attack the innocent Iraqi citizens in one way or another. Therefore, the novel shows that it is the Americans that should be considered terrorist insofar as they attack innocent citizens living in their own land. It is the Americans that are considered to be the extremists fighting Islam and the Arab Muslims as well, not to mention the fact that the Americans have occupied Iraq and usurped its riches.

It is no wonder that an Arab Bedouin revolts against those who try to injure his dignity by means of stripping the clothes of his father and make him naked among his follow men—an act requires revenge on the part of the oppressed. Hence, the unnamed protagonist in *The Sirens of Baghdad* tends to be a terrorist to avenge the shameful situation of his father in which the American troops have shown his testicles to the public of his own country—an act that looks dishonorable to Bedouins. (Bouhassoun, 2016, pp. 1-2). Despite the fact that the unnamed protagonist and his people have been humiliated and killed in *The Sirens of Baghdad*, he does not take decisive steps towards revenge (Azzeddine Bouhassoun, 2016, p. 2).

Historically speaking, the Arab fictional art of the post-colonial era addresses the Iraqi resistance that has done its best against the American occupying forces so as to bring about liberty for the Iraqi nation, which the American invading forces have considered terrorist actions done against





them. In his literatures of Orientalism, Said unfolds the fact that the Arab Muslims always endeavor to struggle against the Occident; this struggle, according to Said has been inspired by the extremist degrees of destitution caused by the American occupying forces. The American occupation is therefore conducive to poverty, illiteracy and disease that will definitely lead to the deaths of millions of innocent people—a fact ignored by the American forces that look for only for their interest and safety in the occupied country such as Iraq. Hence, the US always tries to reinforce the conflict between the Orient and the Occident, so that she can preserve her position as the most powerful country in the world. As a counteractive to the American fictional arts' allegations, Khadra's *The Sirens of Baghdad* delves into the quintessence of what the Americans may call the rightful resistance as being terrorism or fundamentalism in the post-2003 colonial era. As already explained, the novel possesses a tinge of realism for its actions are analogous to those lived by the author himself. Besides, the novel unfolds facts about why some Arab Muslims transform into extremist fundamentalists: their aim is to fight the invaders and this is one of the human rights pertaining to the right of the self-determination of nations as incurred by the U.N. Khadra has been mainly concerned with to delve into the causes that result in extremity against the Occident. Hence, self-determination and self-defense of the invaded nations have been wrongly called by the Americans as being terrorism.

As a matter of fact, the question of terrorism has become a universal cause, for the whole world demands an explanation for the causes behind becoming a terrorist. Khadra's *The Sirens of Baghdad* can be taken as the best example to answer such a question as this—the cause for an Arab Muslim who tries to make a suicidal operation against the Westerners. The novel sheds light on the psychological and sociological effects on the Arab Muslims—effects created by the invading forces upon them due to the latter's viewpoint that the former are extremists, fundamentalist, racist and terrorist that should be treated as an Other inimical to their aspirations. Hence, the novel can be considered a course of correcting the World's viewpoint concerning the Arab Muslims. Therefore, the novel is an attempt to condemn the false allegations of the Westerners as far as the





standpoint of the Arab Muslims. The unnamed narrator of the novel has realistically witnessed its events. He turns into a fundamentalist because he has been humiliated by the American forces that have uncovered the genitals of his father, which is an action that is regarded as a grave scandal of a Bedouin among his fellow men, not to mention the many demises caused by the American troops and his deprivation of his future career as a bachelor. Besides, the size of destruction caused by them has been very tremendous.

[the] novelist, tries to identify the origins of terrorism in an identity crisis in the Arab world with an imbrication of political and economic failure. The encounter with the different Other in an international environment, a fast moving technological world, from a national to a gender identity issues, the malaise bred by an archaic mentality. (Bouhassoun, 2016: p. 1)

The unnamed narrator, the protagonist, has not only been humiliated and deprived of his education, but he has also been deprived of his beloved, Nawal, whom he has loved most at the University of Baghdad. Hence, there are significant reasons why a person such as the protagonist turns into a fundamentalist. It is therefore the terrorism of the US troops that is resultant in the appearance of fundamentalist to fight their wrongdoings. Most important is the fact that the protagonist's dreams are all gone:

I was just on the point of declaring myself and unveiling to her the prospect of a bright future, when strange fireworks lit up the sky over Baghdad. The sirens echoed in the silence of the night, the most passionate love affairs dissolved in tears and blood. The university was abandoned to vandals, and my dreams were destroyed, too. I went back to Kafar Karam, wild-eyed





and distraught, and I didn't return to Baghdad. (The Sirens of Baghdad, 2007, p. 19)

Due to the iniquitous actions done against the unnamed narrator and most of the villagers in his village such the killing of the innocent disabled boy Sulayman, the blacksmith's son and the bombing of the wedding party of the Haitems, not to mention the killing of a great number of the villagers the protagonist ultimately decides to avenge the wrongdoers who have upon suspicion regarded all the villagers as terrorists: "On the evening news, there was talk of an American drone alleged to have detected some suspicious signals coming from in or around the reception hall. The nature of these suspicious signals was not revealed" (Kahdra, The Sirens of Baghdad, 2007, p. 98). From the logical perspective, the American forces should have prepared concrete evidence that there were terrorists among the visitors of the wedding party, so that they could have rightly taken a right decision to bomb it. Their action done against the wedding party according to mere suspicions is against not only logic but also against revealed religions. Their action is made against biblical teachings. Their apology to the Haitems is of no avail and is a proof for unduly suspicion. According to Rane (2010), a scholar of theology, suspicion is an abhorred practice on the part of the Christian and it is an unloved habit that is wrongly practiced. He quotes St. Paul who says in 1 Corinthians 13:7, and as follows:

'Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. and the very least that Paul means when he says love believes all things and hopes all things, the very least that he means is that we should not be unduly suspicious about other people's motives, you don't like people to second-guess our motives. You don't like it when people impute to you motives that are not there, so you shouldn't do that to others either. (Rane, 2010).







Rane adds that suspicion according to Jesus is something useless and that it is conducive to no good, it is of no help for humans and it is of no avail to the life of man, for it “only makes relationships harder and not better” (Rane, 2010).

The unduly suspicion is further substantiated by R. W. L Moberly (2009) who says that he is mainly concerned with the context of suspicion as set in Genesis 22 and that that point is a significant yet serious issue dealt with by the prophet Abraham: “In general terms, a Christian theologian should not be quick to dismiss a hermeneutic of suspicion, for the prime reason that it represents a kind of secularized counterpart to the dogma of original sin” (Moberly, 2009). The prohibition of suspicion is also advocated by the Holy Qur’an: “O you who believe! Avoid most suspicion—some suspicion is sinful. And do not spy on one another, nor backbite one another (Holy Qur’an, 49: 12). Thus, suspicion should be shunned as far as possible, for some suspicion is a crime: suspicion in some cases is a sin as is the case with the notion that the Americans have suspected the existence of some terrorist in the Haitems’ house, which makes them bomb it and kill a fairly good number of innocent people. They should have first verified the situation before taking any negative step toward them. Spying is prohibited either.

In fact, *The Sirens of Baghdad* can be regarded a novel of revenge in which the protagonist wants to avenge the dishonor afflicted his family and his fellow men, which has been caused by the American troops. The unnamed protagonist’s situation is reminiscent of William Shakespeare’s Hamlet in which the innocent protagonist tries to avenge the murder of his father. The protagonist has himself witnessed that the American troops have killed many villagers, humiliated his father through unfolding his genitals to the public. It seems that the novelist wants here to unfold the reasons behind the notion that an Arab Muslim becomes a fundamentalist. The protagonist has the right to fight the American troops or the nation to which they belong as a matter of vengeance: “the protagonist...sounds innocent and virgin. The identity issue gravitates around





a feminine delicate, narcissistic and emotional character, rotates around a loss of values, a metamorphosis into a human-phallus thing as a narcissistic metaphor...and the birth of a terrorist” (Bouhassoun, 2016, p. 2). It has been made clear by the novelist that when an Arab Muslim is treated with humiliation at the time that his dignity is so much worthy that he is ready to sacrifice his life for the sake of restoring it. The violation of the Arabs’ traditions and conventions, not to mention humiliation and the many insults and killings that have inflicted them are all to result in the appearance of fundamentalists trying to preserve their dignity. As already indicated, it has been unfolded that it has not been a matter of religion or nationality or culture that pushes a Muslim to the domain of fundamentalism as the Westerners may allege. All the catastrophes caused by the American troops have contributed to the psychological development of the protagonist who decisively wants to harm the Westerners as a fundamentalist, for all the causes “start with psychological development into adulthood and the relation between spirit and body. Local tyrannies and absence of communication are other reasons too in addition to the economic and development failures as well as the betrayal of the West” (Bouhassoun, 2016: p. 4).

It can be surmised that *The Sirens of Baghdad* exposes an investigation in the formation of a fanatic extremist, unfolding the psychological, sociological and the circumstantial representations of the protagonist. Despite the fact that the protagonist’s decision to fight the west is justifiable, he does not take any negative action against the Western innocent citizens, due to his belief that he is a tolerant Muslim who should not harm the innocent.

### Conclusion

In conclusion, by means of analyzing themes and characters in *The Sirens of Baghdad*, the objective of this study has been fulfilled in that this section has pointed out, through a comparison, the difference between the American novelists’ presentation of the Arab Muslims and the Arab novelists’ presentation of them. The presentation of the Arab Muslim characters that figure out in





American and Arab novels have been benchmarked according to Van Dijk's maxims of the theory of power and ideology and according to Said' maxims of Orientalism. In the American novels under consideration the Arab Muslim characters have been presented according the positive (I) representative of the Occidental people depicted as being innocent and are in a position to receive the Arab Muslim strikes and at the same time try to defend themselves against them by considering them the Other that should be eliminated from the Western domain. Likewise, the Arab novels preset the Arab Muslim people as being innocent are in a position to defend themselves against the enmity of the Occident. The difference between the American novels and the Arab ones is that the former depends on fictitious characters and happenings, whereas the latter depend on realistic representation of character and action insofar as the novelists concerned have lived the events in actual life and actually witnessed how the Arab Muslim characters have been treated by the occupying country. Therefore, the standpoint of the Arab novelists is invulnerable because it is based on reality, while that of the American is vulnerable because it is based on imagination. As seen throughout the American novels, the Westerners always try to show themselves as being superior to other ethnicities, especially the Arab Muslims who always feel that they are treated as identities that have been socially separated from the actual American society, which may make themselves alienated and estranged from the real domain in which they find themselves in. In the Arab novels, the Arab Muslim characters are treated in terms of the Other that has been stereotyped into racist and terrorist identities. This is what Said explains in his treatise of Orientalism.

As to *The Sirens of Baghdad*, it appears that the Arab Muslims have been identified by the same attributes made by the American novelists, this time they are identified as terrorists by the American forces invading their country. The unnamed narrator finds himself obliged to quit the university and face an unknown fare due to the fact that the American forces have reached his village and badly treated his family and his countrymen They have been also stereotyped as terrorist with racist aspirations and therefore they have been oppressed. Similarly, the Arab Muslims, though having an American nationality, have met the same fate in that they have been





stereotyped and put within the domain of the Other. During the aftermaths of that damned attacks, Jassim and Salwa find themselves rejected and unwanted by the American society and they thusly decide to return to their home promise. They have been interrogated by the FBI due to the fact that they are simply Americans of Arab and Muslim origins.

### References

- Ahmed, S. & Matthes, J. (2017). Media Representation of Muslims and Islam from 2000 to 2015: A Metaanalysis, *International Communication Gazette*, 79, (3), 219–244.
- Aldukhina, I. A. A. (2015). The Representation of Islam and Muslims in Don DeLillo's *Falling Man*. Al-Nasser University. Vol, 1 No.1, 1-14. Available at > wp content > uploads > download-manager-files > the ...access on the 19th of October, 2019.
- Alireza, A., &Khademi, A. (2015). Representation of Islam in Post 9/11 English Novels. *Research Journal of Language, Literature and Humanities*, 2(8), 1-13.
- Alosman, M. I. M., Raihanah, M. M., &Hashim, R. S. (2018). Differentiation and Imperfectionality in John Updike's *Terrorist*. 3L: Language, Linguistics, Liter Alosman M. Ikbal M. et. al., (2019). "Architected Enemies in Don DeLillo's *Falling Man*." *GJAT | JULY 2019 | VOLUME 9 ISSUE 1 | 23* ISSN : 2232-0474 | E-ISSN : 2232-0482 [www.gjat.my](http://www.gjat.my).
- Bhabha, H. (1994). *The location of culture*" London in New York: Routledge.
- Bouhassoun, A. (2016.). "Terrorism and Literature: The Case of Yasmina Khadra's *The Sirens of Baghdad*." file:///C:/Users/abdular/Desktop/The%20sirens%20of%20baghdad
- Fanon, F. (1967). *Black Skin, White Masks*, . tr. by Charles Lam Markmann. New York: Grove Press.
- Leitch, Vincent B. *The Norton Anthology of Theory and Criticism*. New York, London: W. W. Norton& company, Second Edition, 2010.
- McLeod, John. ( 2000) *Beginning post -colonialism*. Manchester: Manchester University press,
- Mohamad, L. (2015). *Burden of valour: the hero and the terrorist-villain in post-9/11 popular fiction*.
- Multiworld, N. (2003). *Textbooks as Missiles*. Kamiriithu: The Multiworld Newsletter
- Nydell, M.K., 2018. *Understanding Arabs: A guide for modern times*. Hachette UK. Visualisation when implementing a new technology (Master's thesis, University Twente).



# Thi Qar Arts Journal

مجلة آداب ذي قار

P ISSN :2073-6584 | E ISSN:2709-796X

VOL1 NO 44



- Rane, H. (2010). "Islam and Contemporary Civilisation: Evolvign Ideas." Transforming Relations (Carlton: Melbourne University Press, 2010): 75-99.
- Said, E. W. (1978). Orientalism. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul Ltd
- Smith, C. (2013). Anti-Islamic Sentiment and Media Framing during the 9/11 Decade, Journal of Religion & Society, 15, 1-15.
- Stam, R. (2017). Film theory: an introduction. John Wiley & Sons.
- Van Dijk. T. (1989). News as Discourse. New York: Lawrence Erlbaum.
- Van Dijk, T. (1998). Ideology and discourse A Multidisciplinary Introduction. Barcelona: Pompeu Fabra University.
- Van Dijk (1993). Discourse and Manipulation. Journal of Discourse & Society, 17 (3), Pp.360-361
- Young, R. J. (2001). Post-colonialism: An Historical Introduction. Oxford: Blackwell.



This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License.

# Thi Qar Arts Journal

مجلة آداب ذي قار

P ISSN :2073-6584 | E ISSN:2709-796X

VOL1 NO 44



المجلة الإلكترونية للآداب



This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License.

