

The Goals and Discourses of Diana Abu-Jaber's *Crescent* and John Updike's *Terrorist*

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Abstract

The Arab community in the United States and the Arabs and Muslims in general all over the world have become the subject of many literary works in the West especially in the aftermath of the Gulf War and the tragic events of September 11, 2001. Diana Abu-Jaber's novel *Crescent* (2003) and John Updike's novel *Terrorist* (2000) are two good examples of such works. Despite the fact that the two writers deal almost with the same subject, i.e. the situation of Arab-Americans and other ethnic minorities in the U. S., they draw two contrasting images of the lives, aspirations and concerns of these minorities. While Updike depicts his Arab-American characters and the black community in a negative manner, Abu-Jaber presents a positive picture of these characters and those drawn from other ethnic minorities. The researcher argues that while Abu-Jaber utilizes the questions of identity, hybridity and multiculturalism to promote a greater degree of racial integration and coexistence, Updike uses these motifs to further deepen the conflict between ethnic minorities and the mainstream American culture. Abu-Jaber's approach is basically cultural and open-minded towards all humans while that of Updike is predominantly political and prejudiced against the Arabs, the Muslims and Islam. The writer concludes that the two writers use different discourses and have different aims and that America is in need for a better and a true understanding of the Arabs, Islam and the Muslims.

This paper aims at investigating the presentation of the image of Arab-Americans in Diana Abu-Jaber's *Crescent* (2003) and John Updike's *Terrorist* (2006). *Crescent* was written during the period of the embargo imposed on Iraq following the end of the Gulf War but had not been quite finished when the invasion of Iraq started in 2003. *Terrorist* was written in the aftermath of September 11, 2001 and makes specific references to its tragic events. Both novels are concerned with the life of Arab-Americans but with completely different objectives and discourses. Both novels deal with such questions as identity, ethnicity, color, hybridity and multiculturalism but again with different orientations and motives. Whereas Abu-Jaber's motives are mainly cultural,

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Updike's objectives are basically political. It should also be stated at the outset that this paper is not concerned with discourse analysis *per se* even though it contains the word "discourse" in its title. And that is why there is no reference to the most important studies on discourse analysis such as that of Norman Fairclough (2001) and many other important studies in this field. Here I use "discourse" in the sense that Michel Foucault uses it, that is to denote a coherent body of statements meant to define an object and to generate concepts with which to analyze it, i.e., legal discourse, medical, discourse, aesthetic discourse, etc. (Peck and Coyle: 142). In the current context, the term "discourse" is not meant to be identified with discourse analysis but rather to indicate the language and the texture of the two texts being discussed and the way the two writers use language in order to present their themes, concepts and characters and the way they divide reality in terms of binary opposites or dichotomies such as white/black, faithful/unfaithful, civilized/uncivilized, superior/inferior, etc.

In this paper I argue that the mainstream American writer John Updike and the Arab-American writer Diana Abu-Jaber offer two contrasting pictures of Arab-Americans who were born and grew up in the U. S. Whereas Abu-Jaber uses multiculturalism in order to create a sense of connection, harmony, sympathy and understanding among different cultural and ethnic entities, Updike employs it so as to create a gap or a rupture among the ethnic and cultural groups he depicts in his novel. As he clarifies in a previous interview, Updike draws upon multiculturalism and world literatures in order to augment the "versatility" of his works: "I tried to temper or flavor it [his Americanness] with a sense of world literature. And I think I've become a more versatile writer because of that" (Interview, 2000, [http:// www.salon.com/ 08/ features/ updike2.html](http://www.salon.com/08/features/updike2.html)). On the other hand, Abu-Jaber asserts that it is necessary for all Americans to try and open up to other cultures and to understand them better. In an interview with Angela Miyuki Mackintosh, she maintains: "I wish Americans were better informed about their dealings with the rest of the world... Americans are well-meaning— I believe in the fundamental benevolence of all people.... It is critical for all of us to actively educate ourselves about other cultures". In other words, each of the two writers uses his/her interest in multiculturalism and world literature for different purposes as will be made clear in the rest of this article.

To further illustrate the main discussion, this research draws upon the cultural studies critical approach, citizenship studies and the critical race theory as its main paradigms. Accordingly, the paper examines the interrelationships among race, gender, postcolonial studies, ethnic studies, politics and literature as presented in the two novels examined. As well known, cultural studies is a multidisciplinary and an all-inclusive critical approach that transcends boundaries and is also politically engaged. As a result, this research is concerned

with the power structures of society at large; it questions and critiques the inequalities within the power structures of the American society and the way the two writers seek to present the nature of the interracial, intercommunal and intercultural relationships. American society is multicultural and multiracial, perhaps more than any other society. That is why exploring such motifs as identity, hybridity, acculturation, citizenship, social equality/inequality and cultural assimilation becomes of paramount importance. The United States has various literatures, including African-American, Latino, American-Indian, Asian-American, Arab-American and mainstream American literature.

Another paradigm which is in place in this context is postcolonial theory. In many of his works, the Palestinian-born American critic and scholar Edward Said has written extensively on "Orientalism" or the Western discourse for dominating and restructuring the East by portraying the Oriental as "primitive", "irrational," "depraved" "child-like," "different," and "inferior" in contrast with the "advanced," "rational," "virtuous," "mature" "normal", "sophisticated" and "superior" Westerner. Said further reveals that a large number of individuals in the academic, literary, political, social and philosophical realms accept and employ this distinction between the East and the West in their theories, literary works and in their social and political description of the Orient. Said's concept of "Orientalism" is an important touchstone to the postcolonial critical approach, as he describes the stereotypical discourse about the East as constructed by the West, a discourse that tries to "other" the Easterners on the basis of Western anxieties and preoccupations. As we shall see in the ensuing discussion, Updike is no exception to this trend. By contrast, Abu-Jaber is not concerned with this way of presenting the East. Rather, she is more concerned with internationalizing and humanizing the whole issue by introducing her characters from different nationalities and different cultural backgrounds. Indeed, her novel can be best seen in the light of postmodern theory with its open-mindedness, comprehensibility, variety and multiplicity.

Recent ethnic and racial studies have challenged the traditional notion of race, dispelling the idea of racial or ethnic superiority. It has also been found that "race has no genetic markers" (Guerin et al, 2005: 287). Talking about American society, most studies predict that by the year 2050 white "Anglo-Americans will no longer be the majority, nor English necessarily the most widely spoken language" (ibid: 286-286). Moreover, we are told that "if interracial trends continue, Americans will be puzzled by race distinctions from the past since children of multicultural backgrounds may be the norm rather than the exception" (ibid: 287). In his article entitled "Race", Henry Louis Gates, Jr. (1986: 4) asserts that "race" is arbitrary: "We carelessly use language in such a way as to *will* this sense of *natural* difference into our formulations. To do so is

a pernicious act of language, one which exacerbates the complex problem of cultural or ethnic difference, rather than to assuage or redress it" (qtd. in Guerin: 288). Actually, the concept of race is still a critical feature of many societies, particularly American, and is full of contradictions, doubts and ambiguities. Many big questions pervade ethnic and cultural studies about the basic constituents of culture: Are some cultures superior or canonized? Whose culture should be accepted as the norm? Should one distance one-self from one's cultural roots or should they embrace the new cultural norms available in the mainstream culture? Should one have a unicultural, a bicultural or a multicultural identity? Is the pure-bred superior to or better than the hybrid? Furthermore, questions of the "Us" and the "Other," "minority" and "majority", "marginal" and "mainstream" still remain debatable and controversial. As we shall see, each of the two novels under discussion handles such questions as interracial relationships, multiculturalism, hybridity and US-born minorities from different and even opposing perspectives and different objectives.

The two novels can also be seen in the light the nascent critical race theory which is actually more applicable in the area of social research than in literary studies. Nevertheless, racial theory is a key concept in Edward Said's majestic book *Orientalism* (1978). This theory encompasses the white, black, brown and other colors, and looks at race relations with a view to promoting racial equality especially because its advocates are committed to racial and social justice. It is particularly relevant to American studies and the American society because of its multifarious racial and cultural make-ups. Indeed, the notion of race pervades Updike's *Terrorist* as shall be explained later; that is why critical race theory presents a useful paradigm in the discussion of this novel especially when the subjects of social and racial injustice, gender and power are brought into question.

Crescent interweaves a story of love and mutual understanding across different cultures and diverse ethnicities. The female protagonist of this novel, Sirine, is the only daughter of an Iraqi-American father and an Irish-American mother. Sirine's parents worked for humanitarian agencies around the world and died during one of those humanitarian missions. Living with her Iraqi-American uncle and working as a chef at Um-Nadia's café, Sirine meets with many Arab students, Arab expatriates and several other people from different nationalities. Among these frequent visitors to the café is the Iraqi-born professor of languages, Hanif or Han, with whom Sirine develops a love relationship that stirs her romantic passions and her nostalgia for her father's culture, language and Arab traditions and heritage. Featuring in the two parallel stories that constitute the novel, the fairy-tale story and Han-Sirine love story, Sirine develops with Han a love relationship tinged with a mixture of doubt and

certainty with no clear ending in sight as to whether or not the romantic relationship will continue in the future.

Though Sirine faces a problem regarding her hybridity, her being half-Arab and half-American, she is on other occasions keen on challenging the boundaries of identification. When asked what faith she belongs to, Sirine replies: "I suppose I don't actually have one.... Well, I believe in lots of things" (161). Although Sirine is conscious of her ethnic and cultural identity, she feels connected to other expatriates (Arabs, Turks, Iranians, Latinos and white Americans). Fadda-Conray rightly observes that "Sirine's interactive role helps build bridges of communication and understanding among Arab and non-Arab ethnic and cultural groups but suffers from the stringent dictates of her mainstream American society that insists on a clear and stringent demarcation of identity and citizenship" (6). Nevertheless, Sirine lives a kind of free, liberal and secular life that allows for cultural diversity and ethnic plurality. Nathan, on the other hand, is a white American who has a great interest in Arabic literature, and his translation of Ernest Hemingway into Arabic is indicative of his endeavor to cross boundaries and establish bridges between different cultures. He even finds a sense of self through traveling and living among other cultures, particularly Iraqi culture. Though he is a white American citizen, he is just like the other expatriates, suffering from loneliness and looking for communal life and belonging that the other expatriates are also seeking. As he tells Sirine: "I grew up half-wild. My parents divorced when I was a kid and all I knew about families was what I learned from watching other people. I went into the Middle East without any idea of who I was – there was no needle on my compass, you know? But the people in Iraq – this sounds dumb and romantic – but the thing is, they really seemed to know who they were" (77).

Crescent seems to have an open-minded view that transcends the barriers of color and ethnicity. Despite her anxiety about her origin, her identity and her color, Sirine ultimately defies the designations based on color, hybridity or ethnicity. "Unable to determine whether she is white or black, Sirine concludes that skin color, though significant, remains an erroneous and a slippery racial and ethnic marker" ("Yousef: 13). Sirine is finally reconciled to her view of herself as half-Arab, half-American. Most of the characters have different ethnic and cultural backgrounds; nevertheless, the writer tries to place them in a dialogue that is conducive to a mutually beneficial interaction and understanding. Throughout the novel, these divergent ethnic groups are brought together and interact through their shared experience of exile and alienation, regardless of race or color. On the whole, the novel shows how many of the demarcations of identity are often illusory. As Azis, the Syrian poet in the novel asserts, "I contain multitudes. I defy classification" (83). Nathan is American,

but he has close ties with the members of these minority groups. Like Sirine, he feels uncertain about his identity and often identifies himself with his love for Han's sister, Laila: "I wanted to marry her. But I was just a guest in her world—her parents, her brothers. I couldn't take her away" (321). Azis also diminishes the idea of differences between Arab-Americans and Latinos and dismisses the notion of stereotypes that categorize people into separate entities (227-228). In short, the novel resists the idea of stereotyping or categorization and posits instead the notion of ethnic communities communicating and coexisting with each other.

Abu-Jaber utilizes the basic identity markers such as language, religion, traditions and food to bring together people from different cultural backgrounds. Throughout the novel, language is used as a means of building bridges of communication and creating a sense of familiarity among the characters. Moreover, "in-betweenness" and code-switching become major features of this postmodernist novel. Characters who code-switch move back and forth between English and Arabic or intersperse their predominantly English words and utterances with some Arabic words. For example, when describing the interior of a mosque to Sirine, Han uses the Arabic word *athan* in an attempt to get closer to the original Arabic concept and to establish a more intimate relationship with the addressee. In fact, the novel is replete with Arabic words such as *Habeebt*, *baklava*, *tabbouleh*, *ya elbi*, *miskilala*, *frekeh*, etc., most of which represent the names of types of Arabic food or words of endearment. It is also noticeable that when native Arabic-speakers use some of these words, they often add a few words in English in order to explain them as we can see in this conversation where the English equivalent of the Arabic word *mejnoona* is given as "crazy" as illustrated by the addresser.

"What do they call that again, the crazy woman tree?"

"The *mejnoona*. Love-crazy" (121).

And in this one where the English equivalent of the Arabic expression of endearment "ya elbi" is given immediately: "*Ya elbi*," he says. *My heart*" (133). Moreover, America is presented as a meeting place of different but harmonious characters, identities, languages and cultures and there is a crossing of boundaries between America and the Arab world and between America and the rest of the world. In the end, the novelist creates a lively picture of average, nostalgic, happy characters that enjoy their lives while empathizing with their cultures of origin and adapting to a mainstream American culture, a picture that is reminiscent of her other novel, *Arabian Jazz* (1993).

As an identity marker, food is also used in *Crescent* as a connector that draws to Um-Nadia's café not only the Arab characters but all the other

characters as well. As Abu-Jaber puts it in an interview with Andrea Shalal-Esa, "Food is such a great human connector, it's so intimate.... To me, [food] is the most immediate and powerful way of creating the metaphor of the hearth and a gathering place where the collective forms [sic]"(Interview with Andrea Shalal-Esa). Despite the feelings of exile and nostalgia that permeate the whole narrative, food sharing creates a sense of communal life that helps dissipate any feelings of alienation or loss. In fact, food brings different cultural and ethnic groups together, simultaneously working as a medium of unification and separation as we can see clearly in one of the roundtable talks that takes place between the characters drawn from different nationalities:

The conversation at the table meanders through the rest of the meal. While Nathan becomes moody and withdrawn, the rest of them talk about the foreign but not unpleasant experience of eating turkey, and the pleasure of the rice stuffing.... They gossip about the café customers and the professors at the university and then they start to talk about Middle Eastern politics, which upsets everyone. (186)

The result of such gatherings is both the creation of communal life and the assertion of independent identity. Actually, the impact of the food metaphor is further enhanced by the frequent references to native Arab culture and traditions as well as to indigenous myths and traditional storytelling represented by the Arabian-Nights-type story narrated by Sirine's uncle to dissipate her loneliness and to alleviate her feelings of nostalgia and alienation. Meanwhile, religion is not used in this novel as a divisive factor in any way. By and large, characters in this novel do not care about which religion they belong to or which ideology they follow. Throughout the novel, the writer's message is quite clear: empathize and build bridges of communication with the other whether coming from one's ethnic group or from outside it.

Compared with *Crescent*, Updike's *Terrorist* draws a completely different picture of the Arabs and the Middle East as well as religion, color, ethnic origin, citizenship, hybridity and multiculturalism. Set in the fictive city of New Prospect which is a depressed town in New Jersey and home to a large Arab and black population, *Terrorist* is a novel that tells the story of a New Jersey teenager, Ahmad Ashmawy, the son of an Egyptian father and an Irish-American Catholic mother. As Updike puts it in a somewhat disparaging manner: "Ahmad is the product of a red-haired American mother, Irish by ancestry, and an Egyptian exchange student whose ancestors had been baked since the time of the Pharaohs in the muddy rice and flax fields of the overflowing Nile" (13). Apparently, the marriage was one of convenience rather than love. Speaking as Updike's mouthpiece, Ahmad recounts:

My father well knew that marrying an American citizen, however trashy and immoral she was, would gain him American citizenship, and so it did, but not American know-how, nor the network of acquaintance that leads to American prosperity. Having despaired of ever earning more than a menial living by the time I was three, he decamped. (35)

Now Ahmad is studying at high school, where Jack Levy, an American Jew, is his guidance counselor. At 11 and following the father's desertion of the family, Ahmad takes to an extreme version of Islam which leads him to choose what he deems as the "the straight path". Feeling very much in disgust with American life around him and prompted by his feelings of isolation and frustration and indoctrinated by the Yemeni shaikh/imam against the American values, Ahmad develops a suicidal tendency that would eventually lead him to an attempt to blow up the Lincoln Tunnel under the Hudson River. A struggle for Ahmad's soul, as it were, takes place between Levy and Shaikh Rashid, Ahmad's spiritual teacher and something of a father figure. The imam teaches Ahmad the Holy Koran and is keen on conveying to him some radical and extreme precepts that inspire hatred and a tendency to destroy those around him: "He [the imam] said the college track exposed me to corrupting influences – bad philosophy and bad literature. Western culture is Godless" (38). Ahmad is imbued with an austere and extreme format of Islam that leads him to regard contemptuously the self-indulgent society around him in the declining town of New Prospect, New Jersey. Picking up on the imam's words, Ahmad tells Jack Levy: "And because it [Western culture] has no God, it is obsessed with sex and luxury goods. Look at television, Mr. Levy, how it's always using sex to sell you things you don't need" (38).

After graduation from high school, Ahmad plans to become a truck driver, a vocation he chooses at the advice of his spiritual mentor and against the wishes of his school counselor. Jack tries to steer Ahmad away from his chosen path and toward community college. Ahmad's spiritual mentor secures for him a job at a furnishing store where he meets Charlie, who recruits him for the bombing plot but is later revealed to have been working under cover for the CIA. Ahmad's career as a truck driver eventually leads to an involvement in a plot to destroy an American bridge between New York and New Jersey and to kill as many infidels (non-Muslims) as possible.

Ahmad is finally deflected from his act by his guidance counselor at high school, Jack Levy. Alerted by Hermione Fogel, sister of Jack's wife and an assistant to the director at U. S. Department of Homeland Security, about Ahmad's involvement in a terrorist plot, Jack meets Ahmad just before he reaches the tunnel and succeeds in convincing him not to go through with the bombing: "Jack Levy realizes that he is in charge now. 'So,' he says. 'The

question becomes, What do we do now? Let's get this truck back to Jersey. They'll be happy to see it. And happy to see you, I regret to say. But you committed no crime..." (308). Ultimately, Ahmad is redeemed and the tunnel and the lives of many innocent citizens are saved.

Unlike Abu-Jaber, Updike does not present the Arab-Muslim characters with any sense of belonging to the county they live in. This may well indicate that they are not entitled to a full American identity or American citizenship. Arabs are shown as seeking American citizenship for convenience or for personal and short-term interests without being devoted to the American nation. All that Ahmad's father cared about was to get an "American citizenship" (35). The question of citizenship remains for Ahmad as enigmatic as ever. Ahmad is an Arab-American who feels trapped between opposing designations. Is he an American? An Arab? Or both? Ahmad resorts to Islam as a means of looking for and consequently asserting his identity after he realizes he is fatherless, isolated and alienated at school and in his own social milieu. Actually, Islam becomes for him an alternative identity that he hopes would compensate for his feelings of isolation from family and society. Undoubtedly, Ahmad experiences some feelings of exile and alienation in the country in which he was born and bred. Nevertheless, Ahmad is not very much concerned about his identity or his hybridity as Sirine is in *Crescent*. For the writer, all that matters is that Ahmad is a "fanatic" Arab or Muslim in spite of his American birth and upbringing.

Throughout his novel, Updike seems to be working off stereotypes; his portrayal of Ahmad and other Arab characters in general is stereotypical and lacks psychological depth. As Arabs, Ahmad and the Yemeni shaikh are depicted as being brutes, primitive, unintelligent, murderers and suicide bombers. Ahmad persistently views Americans as being lascivious and materialistic, and never wavers from this preordained opinion. Both he and the shaikh are disaffected with mainstream American culture and both of them are against all forms of American life and all ideas of progress and modern technology. Reiterating the imam's words, Ahmad exclaims: "My teacher at the mosque says that all unbelievers are our enemies. The prophet said that eventually all unbelievers must be destroyed" (68). Updike makes Ahmad an ascetic religious man with a strong determination to condemn and attack what he considers American lasciviousness and moral and spiritual decadence. One wonders why an 18-year old Islamist born and bred in the U. S. should develop these feelings of bigotry, animosity and finally chooses to commit suicide in a manner that would kill as many people as possible and in the name of Islam:

"Dear boy, I have not coerced you, have I?"

"Why, no, master. How could you?"

I mean, you have volunteered out of the fullness of your faith?"

"Yes, and out of hatred of those ho mock and ignore God".

(270)

Attributing Ahmad's inclinations to hatred, violence and destruction to the teachings of Islam and to his Islamic doctrine is stereotypical and prejudiced. Moderate Islam or Islam proper does not encourage such acts of behavior. Rather, Islam is more inclined toward moderation, reasoning, control and understanding when dealing with other faiths or doctrines. Actually, what Updike is doing in this novel is reminiscent of what Edward Said and Homi Bhabha had said about the West's stereotypical images of the Orient in order to distort its real entity and ultimately to control it (Said, *Orientalism*: 300; Bhabha, "Of Mimicry and Man 1984:284, 312).

The portrayal of the other Arab characters, especially Charlie Chehab, is also predominantly stereotypical and negative. Charlie is hypocritical, deceptive and violence-prone despite his claim to being a devout Muslim. Together with the Yemeni imam/shaikh, Charlie insinuates Ahmad through Islam teachings to drive the truck full of fertilizer and racing fuel to blow the Lincoln Tunnel. What Ahmad considered to be a promising job, ultimately led him into a terrorist plot through the misguidance of Charlie, his presumed best and closet friend. Charlie also expresses what appear to be deep-rooted anti-American sentiments (147) but he turns out to be an FBI undercover agent at the end. Indeed, All Arab-American characters, with the possible exception of Charlie's father, are presented as being inassimilable and unable to adapt to the American way of life. Ahmad's father, the imam, Charlie and Ahmad himself are all presented as being disoriented with regard to their American identity. As a minority, Arabs are shown as "fanatic", uncivilized, hostile and dangerous people who continuously pose a threat to American and Western civilization. The most conspicuous example, in addition to Ahmad, is of course the Yemeni imam who is presented as being treacherous, anti-American, prone to violence and against any sort of progress or modernity. For the Secretary, all imams "preach terrible things against America, but some of them go beyond that. I mean, in advocating violence against the state" 134).

As a racial group, Arabs are also denigrated and disparaged. Apparently Siding with the ruffian Tylenol Jones, who is Joryleen's boyfriend, the narrator often empowers Tylenol to use the term "Arab" in a derogative sense as can be evident in these few examples from Tylenol's railings against Arabs, particularly his rival Ahmad: "Hey, Arab" he says (15); "You are an Arab. You don't go there" (97); "black Muslims I don't diss, but you, not black, you not anything but a poor shithead. You no raghead, you a *shithead*" (16). Virtually, all Arabs or Muslims are portrayed with an obvious racial prejudice or bias. From the

Secretary's viewpoint, the "so-called Arab-Americans" have replaced the whites in the cities and in the factories, and most of them live on the state's welfare and "have too many rights and not enough duties" (260-261).

However, it is worth noting that the novel is critical not only of Arabs, Islam and Muslims. It is also critical of Americans in many respects. It contains a fervid criticism of many facets of modern American life both in moral and material terms and concentrates on images of decay that the inhabitants of the city of New Prospect live in. Referring to the Secretary who is responsible for home security, the omniscient narrator elaborates: "His task is to protect in spite of itself a nation of nearly three hundred million anarchic souls, their millions of daily irrational impulse and self-indulgent actions ..." (44). Speaking to his mistress Terry who is also Ahmad's mother, Jack Levy exclaims: "All I'm saying is that kids like Ahmad need to have something they don't get from society any more. Society doesn't let them be innocent any more. The crazy Arabs are right—hedonism, nihilism, that's all we offer..." (205). Moreover, it is also worth pointing out that Updike is not totally demonizing his Arab characters. In fact, Ahmad turns out to be one of the sympathetic characters the reader can find in any narrative especially when we see him suffering at the hands of his rival in the love for the American girl Joryleen or when he is finally persuaded to give up his attempted destructive plot.

Likewise, Updike's depiction of colored characters is largely based on ethnic and racial stereotypes. Like the Arab minority, black people are portrayed in a highly negative manner throughout the novel and are presented from a stereotypical perspective. Blacks are shown as an inferior group while the whites are the superior group. Dissatisfied with the current state of affairs, the omniscient narrator complains:

The majority of security personnel were recruited from the minorities, and many women, especially older women, recoiled from the intrusion of black or brown fingers into their purses. The dozing giant of American racism, lulled by decades of official liberal singsong, stirred anew as African-Americans and Hispanics who (it was often complained) "can't even speak English properly," acquired the authority to frisk, to question to delay, to grant or deny admission and the permission to fly.

(45-46)

In the city of New Prospect, whites are treated as the elite, and colored people are treated as intruders, drug traffickers or troublemakers (12).

As a matter of fact, there is strong emphasis on race, hybridity and racial classification. Almost all characters are presented in terms of their color or ethnic origin. For example, there is special emphasis on Ahmad's color, mixed origin and Arab descent. He is described as being "a dun-colored boy" (34), "dark"(36) a "black Muslim"(37 and "the product of a white American mother and an Egyptian exchange student" (34). On entering the church, Ahmad is received by "a plumb descendant of slaves [I.e. a 'black man'] "(50). As Mita Bannerjee observes, "Updike presents his own suspect, Ahmad Ashmawy, in racist terms by dwelling on his skin color and his religious practice (19). Ahmad's father is also referred to as "dark, darker than I [Ahmad]" (36) and Muslims are identified as "Blacks". In contrast with the minorities in *Crescent*, who are presented positively, irrespective of their color or ethnic origin, the minorities in *Terrorist*, blacks and Arabs alike, are presented from largely negative ethnic and racial perspectives. In downtown New Prospect, the white suburbans who come to the restaurants are advised to leave the area because of the potential danger coming from the black population: "At night, after a few choice ethnic restaurants have discharged their suburban clientele, a police car will stop and question white pedestrians, on the assumption that they are looking for a drug deal or else need to be advised on the dangers of this environment" (12). Ironically, in the imaginary city of New Prospect in New Jersey, the majority of the residents are blacks and the whites are a tiny minority. However, Blacks are shown as the cause of many problems; they are linked to crime and corruption and many of them end up in jail (148). In spit of their being the majority, they are treated as strangers or intruders.

On the whole, Updike has a low opinion of Arabs, Muslims and blacks. Many blacks in the novel are Muslims and they are treated as a second-class minority and Muslims and Arabs are shown as being obsessed with the intention of inflicting suffering and harm on others. In its broader context, the novel concentrates on the animosity between the Arabs and the Americans, the whites and the blacks. Furthermore, it contains a severe attack against Arab-Muslim societies for what it sees as their backwardness, lack of democracy, abrogation of women's rights and their prejudiced views about Western civilization. For the imam, "women are animals easily led" (10); for both the imam and Ahmad, "movies are sinful and stupid" (144) and both of them hate "the American way" (39). Arab-Americans are described as terrorists and most of them are inherently "fanatic," crazy and scary (93). Even Arabic language is condemned. Despite the fact that Arabic is well known for its florid and beautiful style of writing, for the Secretary, "there's something weird about the language—it makes them feeble-minded, somehow" (259).

By and large, Updike does not present the doctrine of Islam in an objective and fair manner while understanding Islam properly is what is really needed in order to come to terms with the Muslims in the U. S. and all over the world. Actually, Updike shows neither a transparent nor a convincing picture of Islam. For one thing, Ahmad does not speak as a teenager who was born and grew up in America but as a born terrorist who was brainwashed and trained to become a suicide-bomber. Ahmad is blindly following the instructions of the imam and never stops to reflect on his suicidal mission that would lead to the killing of hundreds of people were it to succeed. A basic Islamic concept, "Jihad" is viewed as being synonymous with terrorism as it is taken to mean the sheer desire to kill in order to be closer to God and to be in Paradise in the company of "*huriyyat*" or "houris" (305). Similarly, the basic Muslim concept of "in-betweenness" or moderation is not included in the presentation of Islam. Even in his reference to the views of the renowned Egyptian cleric Sayyed Qutub, Updike is far from being fair or objective. He tells us, for example, that for Qutub, Americans are "far from God's piety" and are, therefore, "legitimate targets for assassination" (302), which is obviously a misconceived and a stereotypical statement. Furthermore, the fact that Ahmad's father (an Arab by birth) and mother (of Irish origin) belong to nationalities often associated with fundamentalism and terrorism indicates how Ahmad is conceived of as a born terrorist and not as an American raised and bred in the U. S.

In so doing, Updike seems to be relying heavily on ethnic and religious stereotypes. Instead of going down to the roots of the problem, Updike makes no connection between Ahmad's willingness to take part in a terrorist plot and the U. S. policies in the Middle East. Instead of addressing current Arab-American relations in an objective or positive manner, Updike presents them in terms of "clash of civilizations" or a conflict of religions, to use Samuel Huntington's terminology ("Clash of Civilizations"). In fact, Updike's position is in line with some right-wing American politicians or political scientists such as Samuel Huntington who argues in his political treatise that the primary axis of conflict in the future would be along cultural and religious lines, with China and Islam posing the most serious threats to Western civilization. In this novel, Islam is shown as being diametrically opposed to Christianity, a subject which Updike had already treated in his African novel *The Coup* (1978). In short, the whole novel revolves around the notion of polarities or dichotomies. As Lev Grossman succinctly puts it, "In this novel [i.e. *Terrorist*] there is an obvious conflict between Moslem and Christian, East and West" (1).

Updike seems to have taken his cue from the September 11 attacks in 2001 which contributed to the mobilizing of American public opinion against Arabs and Muslims inside and outside the U. S. One of the consequences of this

reaction was a surge in works of literature and the media depicting the Arabs and the Muslims from an utterly negative if not a hostile viewpoint. In many of these works, Islam and terrorism became almost synonymous and the Muslims and Arabs were presented as prone to violence and hatred against Western nations. Undoubtedly, the acts of September 11 cannot be condoned, but Updike does not try to explore the potential causes of the conflict nor does he bother to show how to solve the outstanding and serious problems that can be linked to them. Instead of trying to solve the problems, he aggravates them even further. Unfortunately, many Americans and Westerners have accepted these sporadic acts of violence as representative of a fanatic and terrorist culture that is keen on destroying American values and American interests—a clear example of stereotyping and image-building. On the other hand, many others have begun to cast doubts on the authenticity of such presentation and to voice concern about the root causes of such violent incidents.

Unlike *Crescent*, *Terrorist* does not present American society as a harmonious multicultural society. Instead, it depicts a society made up of opposing colors and of conflicting racial groups. As Banerjee observes, "*Terrorist* is a novel obsessed with, and not only conscious about, skin color" (16). In *Terrorist*, cultural alienation does not lead to feelings of nostalgia or a quest for original national roots, hybridity and multiculturalism or to seeking some kind of communal life with other minority or majority groups as in *Crescent* but to homegrown opposition, hatred and terrorism. Nevertheless, at the end of the day, Ahmad winds up being the most interesting and, paradoxically enough, perhaps the most sympathetic character through whose viewpoint we see Updike's criticism of American materialism and who finally gives up his premeditated destructive plot.

Conclusion:

Crescent and *Terrorist* draw two contrasting pictures of Arab-Americans, of Arabs and Muslims and of the relationship between America and the Middle East. Compared with *Terrorist*, *Crescent* depicts a completely different picture of America as well as of the Middle East, its cultural heritage, religions and people. In her novel, Diana Abu-Jaber, has focused on the questions of identity, hybridity, exilic existence, assimilation, acculturation and coexistence. Her *Crescent* can be read as a novel that contributes to the ongoing dialogue among the world's diverse cultural communities. In this novel, Abut-Jaber portrays and explores the lives of individuals who belong to a wide range of diverse ethnic and cultural groups and tries to present the events to a Western audience from a positively multicultural viewpoint. Although the characters come from diverse backgrounds, they live in one harmonious community. Their strenuous search for identity and cultural heritage is carried out while trying to preserve a

harmonious existence with the mainstream culture. In this way Abu-Jaber can be associated with some renowned writers such as Naom Chomsky, Edward Said and Homi Bhabha and a group of other Arab-American writers such as Naomi Shihab Nye and Lisa Suhair Majaj and several others who have done their best to cross borders and to promote multiculturalism and intercultural understanding and integration.

Conversely, Updike is calling in his novel for separation and confrontation. Whereas Abu-Jaber endeavors to break down the boundaries and bring together characters from different cultural backgrounds, Updike tries to establish barriers in front of intercultural communication. Instead of joining the voices that are trying to promote ethnic or racial integration and universal co-operation and understanding, Updike builds his work upon cultural, ethnic and religious ruptures. In adopting this attitude, Updike can easily be aligned with such writers and thinkers as Samuel Huntington, Bernard Lewis and V. S. Naipaul, all of whom have been warning against the dangers of the Muslim and the Arab worlds after they had diagnosed Islam as the major opponent of the civilized, democratic West. In their works, Islam is depicted as a culture or a religion of fundamentalism, backwardness and terrorism. Unlike Updike who presents his Arab characters as being primitive, fanatic, backward and inferior, Abu-Jaber introduces Arab characters of a sophisticated type that is never represented in the Western media or literature. Though the two writers deal with similar motifs, themes and issues, their discourses and objectives are quite different. While Abu-Jaber's discourse is embedded in connections, Updike's discourse is couched in rupture. Nevertheless, the final conclusion that can be drawn from all this dialectic is that neither America nor the Middle East can be fully understood apart from each other.

الأهداف والخطاب في رواية ديانا أبو جابر "الهلال" ورواية جون أبدايك "الإرهابي"

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ملخص

أصبحت الجالية العربية في الولايات المتحدة والعرب والمسلمون عموماً في أنحاء العالم موضوعاً للعديد من الأعمال الأدبية في الغرب وخاصة في أعقاب حرب الخليج وحوادث الحادي عشر من سبتمبر/أيلول 2001. تشكل رواية الكاتبة الأمريكية من أصل عربي ديانا أبو جابر "الهلال" (2003) ورواية الكاتب الأمريكي جون أبدايك "الإرهابي" (2006) مثالين جيدين على تلك الأعمال. ومع أن كلا الكاتبتين يتناولان تقريبا نفس الموضوع وهو وضع الأمريكيين من أصل عربي والأقليات العرقية الأخرى في الولايات المتحدة إلا أنهما يقدمان صورتين مختلفتين لحياة وطموحات واهتمامات هذه الأقليات. ففي الوقت الذي يقدم فيه جون أبدايك صورة سلبية عن الشخوص التي تمثل الأمريكيين العرب والأقليات الأخرى تعرض ديانا أبو جابر صورة إيجابية لتلك الشخوص وكذلك للشخوص المنحدرة من أقليات عرقية أخرى. يبين الباحث أن ديانا أبو جابر تستخدم موضوعات الهوية وامتزاج السلالات والتعددية الثقافية لتحقيق درجة أكبر من التكامل بين الأجناس والتعايش السلمي فيما بينها في حين أن جون أبدايك يستخدم هذه الموضوعات لتعميق هوة الخلاف بين الأقليات العرقية الأمريكية والثقافة الأمريكية السائدة. وبينما يتسم خطاب ديانا أبو جابر في معالجة الموضوع بأنه ثقافي في جوهره ومنفتحاً في توجهه نحو الآخر فإن خطاب جون أبدايك يتميز بكونه سياسياً في أساسه ومنحازاً ضد العرب والإسلام والمسلمين. ويخلص الباحث إلى أن الكاتبتين يستخدمان خطابين مختلفين ولهما أهدافاً متباينة وأن الأمريكيين بحاجة إلى فهم أفضل وحقيقي للعرب والإسلام والمسلمين.

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