Université d'Oran 2

Faculté des Langues Etrangères

THESE

Pour l'obtention du diplôme de Doctorat en Sciences
En Littérature Anglaise et Critique

Perceiving the Real: A Critical Reading of the Mirror of the Other in

Selected Contemporary America Novels

Présentée et soutenue publiquement par :
Mlle. BESSEDIK Fatima Zahra

Devant le jury composé de :

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GHENIM Naima	MCA	Université d'Oran 2	Rapporteur
THOMIERES Daniel	Prof.	Université de Reims-France	Co-rapporteur
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Academic Year: 2016-2017

UNIVERSITY ORAN 2 MOHAMED BEN AHMED

Faculty of Foreign Languages

Department of English

A Thesis submitted in the Fulfilment for the Acquisition of a Doctoral Degree in English Literature and Criticism.

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DECLARATION

I declare that this work has not already been accepted in substance for any degree, and is not concurrently being submitted in candidature for any other degree. I assert also that the whole work (research, planning, method, and presentations) have been undertaken entirely by the author.

BESSEDIK Fatima Zahra

To my parents, with love

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Abstract

This study is a multidisciplinary work that draws on fields of literature, cultural studies, philosophy, and politics in order to explore the representation of cultural otherness in three selected contemporary American novels: *Plowing the Dark* (2000) by Richard Powers, *Terrorist* (2006) by John Updike, and *Point Omega* (2010) by Don DeLillo. Using the theory of Orientalism by Edward Said and postmodern thoughts by Jacques Lacan, Slavoj Zizek, and Jean Baudrillard as sub-theories, this dissertation builds a perception on the Western Orientalist and neo-Orientalist representation(s) of the Arab Islamic world.

The order of these novels, regardless of their chronology, articulates three Orientalist representations that speak of each author's personal perception of East and West in the context of three different political events: Iran Hostage Crisis (1979), 9/11 terrorist attacks, and the War on Iraq (2003). By situating the three selected novels within the Orientalist discourse, and by exploring their reflections on postmodern American society, the study examines the various strategies of Orientalist (mis)representation as conditioned by American postmodernity.

Importantly, the study argues that nothing has changed in the way the West perceives the Islamic Other. It demonstrates that Western postmodern phenomena, as well as the political events that center the novels' attention, offer authors a new power of representation, a new stylistics of writing the Other.

Keywords: Richard Powers; John Updike; Don DeLillo; Edward Said; Otherness; (neo)Orientalism; postmodernity.

ملخص:

هذه الرسالة هي دراسة متعددة التخصصات تعتمد على مجالات الأدب، الثقافة، الفلسفة، وكذا السياسة. تقوم هذه الرسالة بدراسة التمثيل الثقافي للآخر في ثلاث روايات أمريكية معاصرة : حرث الظلام من قبل ريشارد باورز، الإرهابي من قبل جون أبدايك، ونقطة أوميقا من قبل دون دليلو.

وتعتمد هذه الرسالة على نظرية الإستشراق لإدوارد سعيد بالإضافة إلى نظريات فرعية تكمن في بعض الأفكار عن ما بعد الحداثة لفلاسفة كجاك لاكان، سلافوي جيجك وجون بودرارد. كما تبني هذه الرسالة وجهة نظر عن كيفية تمثيل المستشرقين ومابعد المستشرقين للعالم الإسلامي العربي.

يُبرز ترتيب هذه الروايات، بغض النظر عن تواريخ نشرها، ثلاثة تمثيلات إستشراقية تتحدث عن وجهة نظر كل من المؤلفين عن الشرق والغرب، وذلك في سياق ثلاثة أحداث سياسية مهمة: أزمة الرهائن في إيران عام 1979، الهجومات الإرهابية ب 11 سبتمبر (2001)، والحرب على العراق ب 2003. تبين الرسالة استراتجيات مختلفة عن سوء تمثيل الآخر كما هي مرهونة بمختلف ظواهر الحداثة الأمريكية.

من خلال دراسة الروايات الثلاثة، تشير الدراسة إلى عدم تغير وجهة نظر الغرب للمشرق العربي والإسلام. تبرز الرسالة أن ظواهر ما بعد المعاصرة الغربية لها تأثير واضح في تقديم أسلوب كتابي جديد للآخر.

الكلمات المفتاحية: ما بعد الإستشراق، ما بعد المعاصرة، الآخر، ريشارد باورز، جون أبدايك، دون دليلو، إدوارد سعيد.

Abstract (in French)

Ce travail est une étude multidisciplinaire qui touche les domaines de la littérature, de la philosophie, de la culture, voire parfois de la politique et ce afin d'analyser la perception de l'Autre dans la culture américaine. Pour ce faire, nous avons sélectionné trois romans américains contemporains: *Plowing the Dark* de Richard Powers (2000), *Terrorist* de John Updike (2006), et *Point Omega* de Don DeLillo (2010). En utilisant la théorie de l'orientalisme tells qu'elle est présentée chez Edward Saïd tout en explorant certaines pensées postmodernes (par exemple, Jacques Lacan, Slavoj Zizek et Jean Baudrillard), cette thèse développe notre point de vue sur la représentation orientaliste et néo-orientaliste du monde islamique arabe.

L'ordre d'étude de ces romans, indépendamment de leur chronologie de publication, traite trois représentations orientalistes discutant chacun sa perception de l'Orient et de l'Occident et ce dans le contexte de trois événements politiques différents: les otages américains en Iran (1979), les attentats du 11 septembre 2001, et la Guerre d'Irak ou l'invasion de l'Irak (2003). En analysant les trois romans, il ressort des différentes stratégies de la (mal) représentation du monde arabo-musulman, conditionnée par la culture américaine postmoderne. L'étude suggère que rien n'a changé dans la façon dont l'Occident perçoit l'Autre. Elle démontre que les phénomènes de la postmodernité offrent un nouveau pouvoir de représentation, une nouvelle stylistique d'écriture de l'Autre.

Mots Clé: Orientalisme; neo-Orientalisme ; L'Autre; Richard Powers ; John Updike; Don DeLillo; Edward Saïd.

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General Introduction

1. Overview:

     I begin this thesis with a personal statement that resonates with the topic of this study. I, as an Oriental Other[1], should inevitably write myself into this text. I recognize that we live in a pluri-cultural world where a kind of Hegelian identity of opposites exists. We live in a moment in history in which each passing day people in the streets or on T.V. seem to repeat Samuel Huntington's famous rhetoric of "the clash of civilizations" (*The Clash of Civilizations* 24). Looking back at the course of history shows a field of struggle, a long sequence of thought that divides the world into West and East, Self and Other, them" and "us"—the Orientals. I share the view with those who prophesize that the future of our so-called "globalized world" will be corrupted, and despite its technological advancement and the nations' promises of democracy, will be reduced to attitudes of cultural resentment. Contemporary political events like September 11, War on Iraq, the Paris attacks on Friday 13th, the Charlie Hebdo's attacks, and the crisis of democracy in the Arab world have complicated to a large extent the discourse on "we," the Oriental Muslims. As it has become a so intricate issue, I was advised not to conduct a study on Orientalism in the contemporary era

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[1] The term "Other" and the concept of "Otherness" are central in the context of cultural studies and literary criticism to highlight discourses on identity constructions and representation of minority groups, including women, lower social classes, ethnic groups, blacks, colonized countries, to state but a few. Throughout the thesis, I will be using "Other" (in capital) in the Saidean way of reference to the ideological constructions of the Islamic Oriental world. The binary opposite of "Self" *versus* "Other" will be used in the following pages based on insight gleaned from Orientalist inquiry.

because it yields serious political issues like terrorism and Islamic fundamentalism. I was convinced that any other study would be a dismantling of a more serious terror, that which concerns millions of Muslims to be victims of (mis)representation. Although this may be a tentative contention in contemporary Orientalist research, I do neither negate the difficulty of approaching the representations of the Arab Islamic world in the light of the present political events, nor claim a pure understanding of the reality of this representation. About a year ago, when I was reflecting on the expression "why do they hate us?" in Updike's novel, I concurrently heard about a 9/11 event in Europe—the terrorist massacres in Paris. This dialectic between violence and a religion called Islam, which has been accentuated in news, replayed cameras, and popular and intellectual debates, has presented a huge paradox to my analysis, and led me to stop writing for a long period to reflect profoundly on the issue. This might not have given fruitful theoretical arguments, and therefore, the present dissertation will offer only a "perception" of the reality of this radical antagonism between what major political and cultural discourse claim to be "Islam and the West." The title "Perceiving the Real" resonates in this direction of attempting to understand this total demonized irrational force of the Islamic Other as represented in the novels. Many fictional writings have centered their attention on Muslims and the Arab world in the contemporary contexts of terrorist events.[2] Yet, a wide number of studies are conducted to consider these writings in the light of Orientalist discourse; however, my study tends to widen this field of research to address contemporary American culture amid these political events with more detailed theoretical and philosophical reflections.

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[2] See for example *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* (2007) by Mohsin Hamid, *The Good Muslim* (2011) by Tahmima Anam, *Falling Man* (2007) by Don DeLillo, *The Book of Ten Nights and a Night* (2004) by John Barth, *A Disorder Peculiar to the Country* (2006) by Ken Kalfus, *Alif the Unseen* (2012) by G. Willow Wilson.

This dissertation refers in its very title, "Perceiving the Real: A Critical Reading of the Mirror of the Other in Selected Contemporary American Novels," to the existence of (mis)representation while mirroring the Other in contemporary American literature. This issue is one of the large critical debates held on identity and the Self-Other relations. In his book *Orientalism* (1978), the Palestinian-American scholar Edward Said classifies the Orient as a metaphor of the Other in Western consciousness (xi-xii). He famously argued that the West uses the East as an inverted mirror, or as its "contrasting image," perceiving it everything the West is not (2). In *Orientalism*, Said shows how this perceived binary logic separating the East and West has traditionally manifested itself in literature through presenting the Arab Islamic world as unknown, exotic, and dangerous. Yet, it has became a common view that, for centuries, the Islamic Orient is irrational, morally inferior, barbaric and a source of terror which deserves a "mission civilizatrice" (a 'civilizing mission'), to borrow from Said (169). Such stereotypal recurring images of the Other in Western discourse, especially in the contemporary period, are what render Western imagination of the Orient a substantialized reality in global consciousness.

In his *What I Believe* (2009), Tariq Ramadan, a leading Islamic thinker in the West, maintains that our identity is constructed through a distinction between what we think of the Other and what we think of the Self (12). Refuting Samuel Huntington's thesis of "the clash of civilizations," he claims that there is rather a "clash of perceptions," a conflict of images projected on the Self and on the Other (12). This dissertation is inspired from this idea of "clash of perceptions" occurring between the American Self and the Oriental Islamic Other. In an attempt to investigate the reality of this clash, this study locates its investigation in the American Self that continues to shape the image of the Oriental. Particularly, it will examine *Plowing the Dark* (2000) by Richard Powers, *Terrorist* (2006) by John Updike, and *Point Omega* (2010) by Don DeLillo as narratives that project Edward Said's insight that the

Islamic Orient continues to be represented and sought to be dominated. The order of these novels, regardless to their chronology of publication, articulates three Orientalist representations that speak of each author's personal perception of East and West in the context of three different political events: The Hostage Crisis in Iran (1979) in Powers's *Plowing the Dark,* 9/11 events in Updike's *Terrorist*, and the War on Iraq in DeLillo's *Point Omega*. As the contemporary era is dominated by images and perceptions, the reality of Orientalist (mis)representations amid such political events becomes a serious subject of study in the above novels.

In his essay "In the Ruins of the Future" (2001), DeLillo maintains the extreme cultural clash between the East and the West happening nowadays, stating that "the sense of disarticulation we hear in the term 'Us and Them' has never been striking, at either ends" (34). This study attempts to answer how Orientalism is reproduced and reshaped in the contemporary American culture. I have used the term "contemporary" to the period of the twenty-first century, particularly to the first decade. The texts included in this study, whose publications range from 2000 and 2010, all present prominent features that characterize the contemporary zeitgeist, including the conditions that appear to structure the image of the Islamic world (namely the Hostage Crisis, 9/11 events, and the subsequent war on Iraq), and the conditions of postmodernity which continue to structure Orientalist logic nowadays. Therefore, the "postmodernism" that the present study tempts to consider in the selected novels is mainly thematic. For the sake of definition, postmodernism refers to the cultural movement that developed in the mid twentieth century and that brought a perceptible style in different domains like art, linguistics, fiction, literary criticism, and philosophy. To speak of postmodernism as an intellectual situation is profoundly complex and ambiguous, for the postmodern mind is typically characterized by openness, indeterminacy, and by the "lacks of any firm ground for a world view" (Tarnas 398). For this reason, the term "postmodern"

varies considerably according to context because it is shaped by a variety of intellectual and cultural currents, including existentialism, Marxism, psychoanalysis, feminism, deconstruction, to state but a few of the most prominent (Tarnas 395). Philosophically speaking, these so-called postmodern epistemologies are perhaps rooted in the very epistemologies of Hume, Kant, Hegel, and Nietzsche. For the understanding of these philosophers, all human knowledge is uncertain.[3] Linguistic meaning itself is viewed as unstable and that inevitably contains hidden contradictions. Hence, the nature of truth and reality, in science as in religion, philosophy, and art, is radically ambiguous according to postmodern thought. This is what leads one to propose that it is this postmodern epistemology of uncertainty that brought secularism as an essential category of the contemporary Western culture.

Rather than delving deeper into the bewildering variety of meanings attached to postmodernism, I must specify that I use the term "postmodern" throughout the thesis to refer to the social lifestyle approached in the postmodern age and that is still approached nowadays. In contemporary American culture, the features of globalization, capitalist consumer culture, high-technology, cyberspace culture, media, and secularism, deserve the appellation of "postmodern" because no other substantial cultural trend has generally recognized it in another frame. It is worthy to specify again that I do not use "postmodern" as a linguistic or a stylistic feature of the selected novel, more than a cultural logic of contemporary Western culture. With this intention, the words "contemporary," "postmodern," and "modern" are used interchangeably throughout the thesis to refer to the current social and cultural state of the West. In this frame of thought, the thesis seeks to examine the way(s) contemporary

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[3] This line of thought can be found in (Hume, *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding* 89); (Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason* 112); (Nietzsche, *The Will to Power* 141); (Hegel, *The Phenomenology of Spirit* 497).

American culture has helped shape the authors' consciousness about the Self-Other relations. Therefore, by the title "Perceiving the Real," the present study also intends to stress the strategies of Orientalist representations as conditioned by American modernity. The study will claim that nothing has changed in the way the West perceives and represents the Islamic Other. Particularly, it argues that such postmodern phenomena, as well as the political events that center the novels' attention, offer authors a new power of representation, a new stylistics of writing the Other. This marks an intervention in ongoing debates on contemporary American civilization, being a point of universal reference for a new global space, the so-called New World Order, the rhetoric which according to Said, has been "promulgated by the American government since the end of the Cold War" (*Culture and Imperialism* xvii).

Powers, Updike, and DeLillo are among the most relevant authors of contemporary American literature of the last decades. Powers, though the least well-known, is anointed by critics as "one of America's greatest living novelists" for his exploration of the larger subjects of race, history, and environment; and his ability to reflect on the most complex areas of knowledge, including genetics, physics, and computers (Brockes). Powers has written many novels, among them *Prisoner's Dilemma* (1988), *Operation Wandering Soul* (1993), *The Gold Bug Variations* (1991), *Galatea 2.2* (1995), *Gain* (1998), and *The Echo Maker* (2000) which has won him the National Book Award for Fiction in 2006. However, his blending of science and computer technology with the politics of the Middle East is what makes his novel *Plowing the Dark* unavoidable in this study.

Updike, though known as "a minor novelist" than DeLillo, has made his characters in *Terrorist* move beyond his interest in daily life events in order to confront the contemporary world view marked by the striking division between West and East after 9/11 attacks (qtd. in Eder). His novels *Rabbit Is Rich* (1981) (which won him the National Book Award, the National Book Critics Circle Award, and the Pulitzer Prize for Fiction), *The Witches of*

Eastwick (1984), *Rabbit at Rest* (1990), *The Beauty of the Lilies* (1996), *Rabbit Remembered* (2000), and *The Widows of Eastwick* (2008), and others are centered in everyday ordinary life. However, his *Terrorist* is the most well-known novel that projects Orientalist perspective.

DeLillo's persistent preoccupation with notions of mass media, the digital age, terror, and Islamic fundamentalist terrorism, has won him the appellation of "the pre-eminent analyst of the age of the spectacles" (Evans 104). These thematic interests are found in many of his novels, like *White Noise* (1985), *Libra* (1988), *Underworld (1998)*, *Mao II* (1992) (which won him PEN/Faulkner Award, the PEN/Saul Bellow Award for Achievement in American Fiction in 2010, and the Library of Congress Prize for American Fiction), *Falling Man* (2006), and *Zero K* (2016). These novels are widely approached by literary critics (except for *Zero K* whose publication was simultaneous to the present study). *Falling Man*, which reports the activities of a Muslim character Hammad who is implicated in the fall of the towers, is already studied from an Orientalist perspective. Therefore, *Point Omega* has been particularly selected because of the lack of studies tackling the Oriental issue in it.

Since the selected texts by these authors reach a large readership in the West, this study analyzes images and metaphors on the Orient and Islam in these novels in order to demonstrate their ideological constructions of otherness. The first critical concept I draw upon in this thesis is Orientalism. My theoretical guide will reside mainly in Edward Said's classical ideas that he presents in books like *Orientalism* (1978), *Covering Islam* (1981), and *Culture and Imperialism* (1993). Said's theory of the Orientalist discourse will be applied to various elements of postmodern American culture as presented in the novels in order to analyze the results of the authors' creative practices. Since this study deals with two post-9/11 novels, my theoretical perspective will extend to neo-Orientalism, or what some scholars call "post-Orientalism" (Dabashi xiv). Contemplating the prefix "neo" in relation to "Orientalism" shows the presence of a transition between Orientalist and neo-Orientalist discourse.

Nevertheless, it involves continuity. As a theoretical construct, the neo-orientalist discourse is marked with the investment in and the engagement with the politics of the Middle East. It reflects how 9/11 events and terrorism have shaped the ideology of difference that Said talks about (Douai and Lauricella 19). While claiming to be attentive to historical changes in the Middle East, neo-Orientalists tend to mis-interpret important aspects of recent events in the region while denying the neo-imperialist relation of the United States to the Middle East (Behdad and Williams).

Said states that Orientalism is a Western-made idea, and eventually claims that the Orient is "orientalized" through hegemonic stereotypes by the West in a variety of domains (5). He emphasizes the ideological tendency of the West to construct images of the Orient by maintaining Western superiority and simultaneously making it as the norm from which the Orient has departed (42). What makes this study more interesting is that such Said's ideas seem to lose evidence in the light of the texts I will explore. Paradoxically, Powers's *Plowing the Dark*, Updike's *Terrorist*, and DeLillo's *Point Omega* seem to reflect the West as the immoral standard that can learn from Islamic culture. In previous Western literature, while authors did not show a desire to understand the identity of the Oriental Other, they mirrored only images that maintain Western superiority vis-à-vis Arab inferiority. In *Plowing the Dark*, Powers, though to a less extent than Updike and DeLillo, seems to use the unfamiliar Other in the critique of his home-culture. In the case of the novel *Terrorist*, Updike shows a tendency to understand the Arab identity, including its thought, religion, and tradition, while trying to argue the postmodern American Self as evil. Also DeLillo, in his *Point Omega*, in which he centers his attention on terrorism and the Iraq War, ultimately sustains the need to abandon the "Us *vs*. Them" dichotomy. Drawing on the theories of Edward Said, I look at how the concept of Orientalism, when applied to the chosen texts, allows for readings of both stasis and disruption, culminating in a deconstructing of the binaries that Said has thoroughly

explored in his books. In so doing, my vision of the authors' neo-Orientalist discourse will consider postmodern American identity not only as static or essentialized, but also as a decentered subject.

The engaged war on Afghanistan in 2001 and then on Iraq in 2003 expressed an anger on the Middle Eastern Other in response to terrorist attacks[4]; however, some novels during the past decades declare sympathy with the Orient. In the selected novels, the Orient is mirrored as part of the American Self, a new type of shaping otherness which Buchowski describes as a transition "From the exotic other to stigmatized brother" (463). What would be then the politics of such Western friendship with the Orient in this so-called "time of terror" (Dabashi ix)? "Politics of friendship" is a phrase first appearing in a seminar by Jacques Derrida and

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[4] In "What We're Fighting For: A Letter from America," an official letter signed by sixty scholars after 9/11 events, among them Huntington and Fukuyama, it is claimed:

> The primary moral justification for war is to protect the innocent from certain harm. Augustine, whose early fifth-century book, *The City of God* is a seminal contribution to just war thinking, argues (echoing Socrates) that it is better for the Christian as an individual to suffer harm rather than to commit it. But is the morally responsible person also required, or even permitted, to make for *other* innocent persons a commitment to non self-defense? For Augustine, and for the broader just war tradition, the answer is no. If one has compelling evidence that innocent people who are in no position to protect themselves will be grievously harmed unless coercive force is used to stop an aggressor, then the moral principle of *love of neighbour* calls us to the use of force. (emphasis added)

From the above quotation, it can be argued that the US' justification to legitimize war on the Eastern Orient was to stop the friendship with it.

elaborated in his book entitled with the same phrase. By reflecting on the idea of friendship through the history of Western thought, from Aristotle, Kant, to Nietzsche and Banchelot, Derrida argues that "friendship is political" (115). So, one might think of neo-Orientalism in the same direction. In his view, Said says that untruthfulness is the main characteristic of Orientalist works (71). My contention is therefore to explore neo-Orientalist elements more as new ideologies and systems of representations that mirror otherness. The answer to the above question will also open a space to discuss the state of postmodern American identity, which with the contemporary cultural conditions of late-capitalism[5], secularism, globalism, high-technology, and T.V. reality takes new tropes of representing the Other. Therefore, apart from dealing with Orientalism and neo-Orientalism as a major theory, I will be engaged with sub-theories of postmodern critical concepts. Rather than applying a single theory to the three novels, I have found many significant postmodern reflections that speak to various contexts in fruitful ways, including the cultural and neo-Marxist perspectives of Slavoj Zizek, the psychoanalytic theories of Jacques Lacan, the ideas on contemporary cosmopolitan society of

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[5] Capitalism, as an economic and a cultural logic, is a significant feature that contributes in the theoretical discourses of postmodernism. The term "late capitalism" (or neo-capitalism, or post-capitalism) refers to the late twentieth-century capitalism, particularly developing in the 1950s and 1960s, and that is typically characterized by high economic growth, high consumer goods, and the high technological advancement, including media, films, internet, and cyberspace technology (Jameson, *Postmodernism* xx). One of the critics has accurately described it as "'the golden age' of twentieth century capitalism" (Marglin 1). "Late capitalism" is generally used by neo-Marxists like Frederic Jameson and Slavoj Zizek to mark the continued relevance of Marxist theory in the modern period. For a more elaboration on this idea, see Chapter II and III.

Jean Baudrillard, and the existential philosophy of Friedrich Nietzsche, to state but the most prominent.

Lacan, a French psychoanalyst philosopher, has significantly explored Sigmund Freud's idea of the "unconscious" both in theory and in connection to other disciplines. His conceptions of the human psychic orders of the Symbolic, the Imaginary, and the Real; together with his reflections on human fantasies, desires, and the infantile stages of psychic development; have a significant impact on the theories of post-structuralism, literary criticism, film theory, and even political theory through the works of Louis Pierre Althusser, Jannis Stavrokakis, and Slavoj Zizek. His conception of the psychic triangle will provide a significant insight on the essence of terror as projected in DeLillo's *Point Omega*. His ideas about human fantasy will similarly enrich analysis about the postmodern subject and his fantasy to encounter the unknown Other.

Zizek is a Slovenian psychoanalyst philosopher and a cultural critic inspired by many philosophical perspectives, mainly the psychoanalysis of Jacques Lacan, the German idealism of Kant and Hegel, and Marxism. Zizek has prolonged his reflections on a wide variety of domains, including political theory, film theory, psychoanalysis, cultural studies, and theology. His skepticism and challenging assumptions regarding the state of Western culture nowadays makes him be recognized as a "radical leftist" and "the most dangerous philosopher in the West" (Hamad*;* Kisch). Throughout his works *The Sublime Object of Ideology* (1989), he thoroughly claims that modern capitalist culture, which he calls "post-ideological," is implicitly totalitarian (xxxi). Demystifying Marx's idea of ideology, Zizek presents a more accurate, yet a more realistic account on the meaning of ideology in the modern world. He contests the consensus that the West lives in a post-political world which presents a "false consciousness" that prevents people from seeing how they are dominated (15). His idea about ideology and materialism lead him extend his perspective on further subjects, like the state of

the postmodern subject, freedom, the Lacanian Real, terror, cyberspace technology, and a variety of other subjects. Therefore, Zizek's eclectic reflections through his books *The Sublime Object*, *The Plague of Fantasies* (1997), *Welcome to the Desert of the Real* (2002), and others, will definitely find place in the analysis of the three novels which dramatize the terrors pervading modern culture. Zizek's account on the capitalist materialist ideology is worthy to use in order to explore the ideological formations of Orientalism embedded in Western capitalist culture.

Baudrillards's theories on contemporary society also fit to be used in the following analyses. His ideas on the impact of media, information, and cyberspace technologies in the creation of a different cultural order will offer fruitful insight on the novel's presentation of postmodern society. Baudrillards's theory of simulacra is worthy to consider while trying to comprehend Western perception of the Islamic Orient in the postmodern world. In *Simulacra and Simulation* (1981), Baudrillard claims that today's "global society" is characterized by an effacement of profound reality, which he particularly calls "hyperreality" (5). This concept will be reflected on as part of the dialectics of (mis)representing the cultural Other, in the now world mediated by media and T.V. reality.

Friedrich Nietzsche's existential ideas also will provide a significant theoretical perspective on modern Western culture. With his reflections on the existentialist situation of the postmodern West and his eventual critique of the Christian doctrine, it is possible to build insight on the contradictions that infuse Western stereotyping of Islam in of the modern world. Also, with the Nietzschean concept of the "Will to Power," which he famously explained in terms of the existential desire "to find the way to higher level of being," there is much imperialist discourse to be found in the novels (*Will to Power* 30).

Therefore, I use a method of cross-reflective analysis using such range of postmodern sub-theories in order to gain a greater understanding of the reality of Orientalist

representations in the postmodern world. Hence, the method of the analyses is to bring Orientalism and postmodern theories into dialogue with one another in order to build a perspective on the Orientalist and neo-Orientalist representations of the Arab Islamic world. In terms of documentation style, I use the Modern Language Association of America (seventh edition).

2. Orientalism according to Edward Said

Central to the topic of this thesis is the hotly debated term "Orientalism" which derives from Edward Said's landmark book *Orientalism*. Said, Gayatri C. Spivak, and Homi K. Bhabha together make up what Robert Young calls the "Holy Trinity" of postcolonial critics (163). However, both of Spivak and Bhabha acknowledge Said's work as their immediate inspiration. Bhabha, in his chapter "Postcolonial Criticism" (1992), asserts that "Orientalism inaugurated the postcolonial field (465), while Spivak noted that it is "a source book in our discipline" (56). Without reducing the significance of Spivak's and Bhabha's contributions to post-colonialism, I particularly apply Said's Orientalism as a central theoretical framework because his structuring of its concept considers more varied terms—politics, economy, literature, culture, religion—and deals with varied geographical areas, historical, and literary periods. I find Said's perspective both remarkable and suggestive.

Orientalism and the ideas related to it do not date back to 9/11 events, nor are founded as a reaction against the Huntington thesis of the "clash of civilizations" established in the 1990s. Orientalism, even before its development into an institutionalized discipline in 1987 by Edward Said, has long existed and continued to pertain in Western thought. Informed by the idea of the West as defined by the notion of "us" Europeans/ Americans against "others"—non-Europeans, Orientalism is an ancient idea; it is claimed to be intensified and clarified with the progress of history (Said, *Orientalism* 7). Said's book studies how the West

constructs stereotypal images of the Orient. Far from simply correcting this image and reflect what countries of the Near East are actually like, Said views Orientalism as a discourse "by which European culture was able to manage—and even produce—the Orient" (3). For him, prejudice derives from stereotypal images that reduce the Orient to fictionalized essences that is typically ascribed to Islam and the East, like the images of "Mohamet; […] monsters, devils, heroes; terrors, pleasures, desires," and so on (*Orientalism* 63). In this sense, Orientalists produce the idea of the East as the opposite of the West: The West as enlightened, the East as barbaric; the West as civilized, the East as primitive; the West as rational, the East as beset by passion.

One of Said's arguments concerning the Orientalist tradition is that the West regards the East as "static;" he maintains that the only thing that might change resides in the reason for this commitment to Orientalism (293). He argues that the East is capable of change, but Orientalists simply ignore this fact because it does not fit their static definition of the Orient (240). He admits that even if the Orient is idealized by the West, it implies derogation while still affirming the dichotomy of the strong West *versus* the weak Other: "True, the relationship of strong to weak could be disguised or mitigated, as when Balfour acknowledged the 'greatness' of Oriental civilization. But the essential relationship, on political, cultural, and even religious grounds, was seen—in the West, which is what concerns us here—to be one between a strong and a weak partner" (40). Therefore, Said focuses on the success of Orientalists in othering the Orient by maintaining the Western ideology of supremacy. This focus on Orientalism as a political vision of the Orient is worthy to consider while trying to investigate the politics of Western friendship with the Orient as pronounced in the novels.

The structuring of the concept of Orientalism is performed by Said through a study of statements which become an archeology of knowledge about the Orient (*à la Foucault*)[6]. It is worthy to state Michel Foucault's theory of the statement at this point: "Although the statement cannot be hidden, it is not invisible either; it is not presented to the perception as the manifest bearer of its limits and characteristics. It requires a certain change of viewpoint and attitude to be recognized and examined in itself…it characterized not what is given in them, but the very fact that they are given, and the way in which they are given" (124). Foucault has led Said to the very unsafe ground of invisibility, and therefore, led him define statements about the Orient as "the determining imprint of individual writers" that constitute "a discursive formation like Orientalism" (Said 23).

Said also generalizes that "anyone" who writes about the Orient is considered Orientalist. He says, "Anyone who teaches, writes about, or researches the Orient—and this applies whether the person is an anthropologist, sociologist, historian, or philologist—either in its specific or in its general aspects, is an Orientalist, and what he or she does is Orientalism" (2).

The old clash of images and of perceptions between Occidental and Oriental civilizations has long permeated Western literature and its chapters, from Medieval, Elizabethan, to Victorian, and Modern literature. Repeatedly mirroring the Oriental Other as an antithesis of the Occidental Self, Western literature became a loudspeaker of the phenomenon of Orientalism, projecting the dichotomized West/East logic, white/ black, domination/ subordination, powerful/ weak, We/ Other…etc.

These dichotomies celebrated by Orientalism show a profound respect for Nietzschean theory which links knowledge and language to power. Said claims that Orientalism is a

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[6] Said's critical analyses are admittedly indebted to Foucault's theory of discourse. See (Said, *Orientalism* 23).

system of truth in the Nietzschean sense of the term (*Orientalism* 204). He says, "My contention is that without examining Orientalism as a discourse one cannot possible understand the enormous 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"(3). "Power" therefore becomes the mediating force of Orientalism. Said emphasizes that Orientalism is "more particularly valuable as a sign of European—Atlantic power than it is a veridic discourse about the Orient" (6). Hence, addressing Orientalism in this era characterized by a spirit of political and religious conflicts is understood, following Said, in terms of power.

Under these terms, Said relates the history of Orientalism to the history of subjugation and conquest of the regions of the East. Yet, he believes that modern Orientalism is just an aspect of imperialism itself (123). In *Culture and Imperialism*, he emphasizes that imperialism is embedded in Western cultures, which he conceives as "a theatre where various political and ideological causes engage one another" (xv). For this reason, Said's academic discipline of Orientalism has been invested almost entirely with European imperialist impulses expressed in anti-Islamic attitudes.

Said shows how the "othering" of the Orient was used to justify the West's imperialist conquest of North Africa, the Middle East, and Asia. For him, a defining moment of Orientalism was Napoleon's invasion of Egypt in 1798 (22). He argues that this fact is important to recognize because it created the common view that the Orient was both different and inferior to the West. When Napoleon conquered Egypt, Said asserts, he not only brought fighting armies, but an army of scientists who were employed to document how Arabs functioned for European understanding, indicating that they were inferior to the West (42). This Orientalist lens will be argued to be still evident today in Western discourse on the Middle East after 9/11 events, as will be highlighted in Chapter III.

Since the image of Islam constitutes a major aspect in understanding contemporary East-West relations, this discussion involves approaching the particular dichotomy of the Judeo-Christian Occident *versus* the Arab Islamic Orient. For Said, the main epistemological distinction between East and West is based on religion. As he quotes from Edgar Quinet's *Le Génie des Religions*, "L'Asie a les Prophètes…L'Europe a les docteurs" ('Asia has the Prophets…Europe has the doctors') (79). That is to say, the defining factor for the Orient is its religion. To be sure, one might consider the fact that early scholars of Orientalism were philologists (Lewis 101). Said strongly believes that the theory of Orientalism does not only involve the Asiatic East in general, but is most importantly comprehended in association with the Islamic Orient (74). For instance, in revising the history of the European presence in India, Said makes clear that the Indian Orient never represents a threat for the West as Islam does (75). He argues that the Islamic Orient represents an old enemy for the West: "Given its special relationship to both Christianity and Judaism, Islam remained forever the Orientalist's idea (or type) of original cultural effrontery, aggravated naturally by the fear that Islamic civilization originally (as well as contemporaneously) continued to stand somehow opposed to the Christian West" (260). For this reason, the West associates Islam with "terror, devastation, the demonic, hordes of hatred barbarians" (59).

Given the omnipresence of the historical and religious threat of Islam in Europe since the Middle Ages, the West felt justified to use power (whether cultural, intellectual, or military) against the East. Norman Daniel, in his study on the relationship between Islam and the West, affirms this fact, stating that: "The real interest of Christians was in their consciousness that the Providential dispensation accorded extremely ill with their own strong wish that worldly success should set a seal on religious truth. It was natural that they should bitterly resent that their failure should be attributed to their sins by anyone but the rightful occupant of Christian pulpit" (133).

In *Covering Islam* (1981), Said claims that the contemporary use of the word "Islam" is polemical, stating that it "is part fiction, part ideological label, part minimal designation of a religion called Islam" (x). He maintains that it is twentieth century Western media that demonized the image of Islam and contributed to make it an alien Other. Such a stereotype is reinforced by many cultural and political discourses on the Orient and the East. Daniel Pipes, an influential neo-Orientalist, emphasizes as early as the 1990s that "Muslim countries have the most terrorists and the fewest democracies in the world;" he associates such a representation to Muslim-ness (qtd. in Richardson 12). Huntington[7], who popularized the notion of "the clash of civilizations," implies in his 1991 article "Religion and the Third Wave" (1991) that Islam is fundamentally non-democratic. He says that the Christian Lebanon was the only Arab country which was democratic (41). "Once Muslims became a majority," he asserts, "Lebaneese democracy collapsed" (41). Bernard Lewis, a cultural historian in Oriental studies and an advisor of the Bush administration to Middle East policies, has also contributed in Othering Islam and Arabs. His ideas mirror Daniel Pipes and Samuel Huntington in an informative way by attributing terrorism to Islamic hatred to the West: "the resentments that dominated The Islamic world today and that are increasingly expressed in acts of terrorism" (*The Crisis of Islam* 16). In his *What Went Wrong?* (2003), Lewis stresses the deterioration of Islamic values and the rise of Western enlightenment. Lewis's claim of Western superiority is rooted in the status of women: "according to Islam law and tradition, there were three groups of people who did not benefit from the general Muslim principle of legal and religious quality—unbelievers, slaves, and women" (67). Such ideas are viewed by Said to "elaborate confection of ideological half-truths (intended) to mislead non-specialist readers" (346).

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[7] Huntington has been an important figure in the US foreign policy since the Vietnam War, and has been a member of the National Security Council.

3. From Orientalism to Neo-Orientalism

Said's statements deal with the time span from the eighteenth to the twentieth century. The early twentieth century has been employed as his final point for the discussion on Orientalism. Amid the now age characterized by cultural terror and by a rapid globalization, in which the proliferation of mass media provides access to the reality it creates, the idea of the clash of perceptions between the American Self and the Islamic Other pronounced in the selected novels must be reassessed through a neo-orientalist frame.

While Orientalism treats the element of Islam in the eye of the West, neo-Orientalism continues to treat it, but with respect to post-9/11 politics. The neo-Orientalist discourse associates the whole world of Islam with terrorism and violence. Even when dealing with topics that may have little to do with terrorism, the neo-Orientalist discourse finds it easy to rationalize them from a terrorist perspective (Douai and Lauricella19). Neo-Orientalists generally draw upon the politics of fear, one that implicitly maintain that Islam was anti-American, despite the presence of seven million American Muslim citizens who have the right to vote during presidential campaigns (Spellberg 26). This definition of neo-Orientalism does not exclude Bernard Lewis, Daniel Pipes, and Huntington from being also labeled as neo-Orientalists, since they generally hold that the Islamic world is a terrorist agent. While such "essentialists" highlight the rise of terrorism in neo-Orientalist frame, they lend support to the claim that "the war on terrorism" must be a component of the US treatment of international conflicts (Douai and Lauricella 19-20)

It has been declared that September 11 "marked the apotheosis of the postmodern era—the era of images and perceptions" (Amis). 2001, it is claimed, has propagated a century

of a symbol power [8] exercised on the Arab Islamic Orient (Altwaiji 313). The "universalization" of such politicized reality, hence, leads to the "imposition" of distorted images about the Islamic Orient on global consciousness (41). A major task that may be assigned to neo-Orientalists would be then to contextualize Islam and the Orient in the framework of modernity and post-9/11 events. As Orientalist representations of the East prior to the twentieth century have paved the way to imperialism, in a similar way, orientalist representations of the Arab World after 9/11 have paved the way to a new imperial era. The Western desire to dominate the Arab world has been literally expressed through U.S. war on Iraq and Afghanistan. DeLillo's *Point Omega*, one novel involving War on Iraq in its plot, is going to confirm this neo-Orientalist ideology.

Though Said's *Orientalism* has been subject to a variety of attacks and unfriendly interpretations[9], the book still imposes itself on this thesis while studying modern Western construction(s) of Islamic Otherness. My analyses of neo-Orientalism in the selected novels consider Said's Orientalism in relation to the phenomena of post-9/11 events and

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[8] "Symbolic power" is a concept elaborated by the French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu and often referred to as an "invisible power" (166). It designates a power that constructs hegemonic reality to be a consensus which contributes fundamentally to the production of social order (166).

[9] Many studies are dedicated as a counterargument against Said's book of Orientalism. Some studies involve a method of what Graham Huggan has called "'de-Orientalization' of Orientalism" (125). This method consists in attempt to encompass all parts of Central Asia, North Africa, Turkey and the Middle East (see Lowe 5; Miller). Other studies argue that the book has been "re-Orientalized" by its readers, and might even be considered to be Orientalist itself (Huggan 123). Such a response to *Orientalism* consists in constructing the West as the victim of Said's criticism of the West's essentializing discourse (see Clifford 262).

Postmodernism. Hence, the theoretical framework of the study will solicit Said's ideas on Orientalism as of point of departure, then, it incorporates it with 9/11 events and postmodern conditions.

4. Literature Review

A review of current research on contemporary representations of the Orient shows that this subject is well studied. In this frame, there are many studies that directly or indirectly addressed the issue of neo-Orientalism in a variety of ways.

Mubarak Altwaji' and Dag Tuastad's attempt to conceptualize neo-Orientalist representations is noteworthy. Tuastad understands neo-Orientalism as a new hegemonic strategy that defines the Arab world as violent and terrorist (594). He regards at such Orientalist representation as a sort of "symbolic violence" which he labels a "new barbarism" imagery that aims to legitimize Western economic and political colonialism in the East (595). Also, for Altwaiji, post-9/11 representations of the Arab world as terrorists represent a "neo-imperialism thesis," noting that 9/11 terrorist attacks have changed the maps of East-West relations (313-14). Although these studies specifically focus on the way neo-Orientalism operate in the contemporary era, their vision is restricted to world's politics. Altwaiji claims that neo-Orientalism is tied to the post-9/11 American cultural changes (314). However, he does not explore this shift on the cultural frame, as the present study seeks to explore it.

Ian Almond's analyses on the representation of Islam by postmodernists have been particularly valuable in the discussion of the novels. In *The New Orientalists* (2007), Almond's major concern is the Western gesture of using the Islamic Other in order to criticize the modern European Self. Almond demonstrates that Postmodernist thinkers tend to refer to the Arab Islamic Other in order to evaluate and re-present western culture (1).

By analyzing the consequences of this gesture on postmodernists like Nietzsche, Foucault and Derrida, Almond maintains that admiring Islam and the Orient implies a new

and subtle form of Orientalism (202). This represents the most consistent piece of knowledge in what Almond terms a "postmodern representation of Islam." However, What Almond's study eventually underlines is the fact that this "paradoxical" admiration of Islam and the Middle East remains firmly grounded in Said's account on Orientalism. For instance, a close reading of Almond's reflection on Nietzsche's peace with Islam proves that his fascination with Islam is rooted in his perception of Islam as "less 'modern'" (9) and "masculine" (11). Nietzsche appreciates the Oriental subjugation of women, a "deep man…can think about women only like an Oriental" (Nietzsche *Beyond Good and Evil* 126). He praises "Mohamedanism" for being a religion of men, which for him, "deeply disagrees with the sentimentality and mendaciousness of Christianity—which it feels to be a woman's religion" (Nietzsche *The Will to Power* 93).

Similarly, following Foucault, the idea of Oriental honesty is put in opposition with Western superficiality. According to Foucault, Orientals clearly possess honesty towards their societies and their relationships with one another, which distinguishes them from superficial, repressed Westerners (25). This apparently truthful representation by Foucault can be naively read as an admiration of the Other. Nonetheless, it eventually conveys the Arabs' enthusiasm fulfill terrorist attacks. Foucault's admiration of Islamic societies, which he conceptualized after witnessing a student movement in Tunisia, stems from the fact that the Islamic Youth bear a spirit of revolution, "compensated by the 'violence,' 'radical intensity,' and impressive momentum' of their actions" (31).

Almond deduces that the representation of Islam takes multiple aspects. He suggests that these various western perceptions of Islam argue that Islam has different uses at different periods (195). He concludes:

> If an antidote to modernity is required, a version of Islam suitably medieval
> will be summoned; if the argument is in favour of a decentered pluralism, then

the 'marginal' traditions of Islam—Sufism, mysticism, pseudo-heresies—will be foregrounded appropriately. The 'otherness' control of Islam, like the volume control of any stereo or radio, can be turned up or down according to the context. 195

Discussing the representation of Islam as an antithesis of the West in the context of globalization unavoidably requires to consult Benjamin Barber's *Jihad vs. McWorld* (1995). Barber's book maintains that the world is torn between two opposing forces: "Jihad," representing extreme orthodox mentality, and "McWorld," representing modernity, globalization and consumer capitalist culture. Barber casts the McWorld images of Disneyland, Coca-Cola, and the Kentucky Fried Chicken against the Jihad images of Babel and Ayatollah. Focusing on this antagonism, Barber suggests that the world is moving from a conscious control to an inevitable chaos (73). He claims that the potential clash of the polarities between religion and secularism, fundamentalism and liberalism, is a consequence of capitalism itself: mass communication, international capital markets, and globalism in general. Barber sees the greatest danger as coming from neither Jihad nor McWorld, but more from the relation between the two. Jihad and McWorld, he argues, are mutually reinforcing and interacting constantly: "Yet McWorld and Jihad do not really force a choice between such polarized scenarios. Together, they are likely to produce some stifling amalgam of the two suspended in chaos" (73). Though some critics condemns Barber's thesis for resonating "in "the old 'Orientalist' tautology (East is East and West is West)," the study remains realistic enough to be considered in Chapter II (El-Affendi 18).

Like Barber, Jean Baudrillard also finds the subject of terror deeply rooted in modernity. Contrary to the common perception that radical Islamic terrorism is motivated by faith, Baudrillard's *The Spirit of Terrorism and Other Essays* (2003) looks at terrorism in the context of the ramping globalization. He maintains that the present sharp conflict between the

West and Islam is an outcome of a resistance against "universality" (95). For him, the World Trade Center event represents "the clash of triumphant globalization at war with itself" (15).

Postmodern culture is, therefore, argued to be contradicting itself: "the antagonism is everywhere, and in every one of us. So it is terror against terror" (15). It is not surprising that Baudrillard considers the West to be anticipating a terrorist violence. He is clear in arguing the unconscious desire the West felt on witnessing the destruction of the Twin Towers: "…they did it, but we wished for it" (5). Reflecting on these words in relation to Baudrillard's conception of "le Hyperéel" ("hyperrality") in his influential book *Simulacra and Simulation* (1981) shows that postmodern Western identity, because it is obsessed with images and representations, unconsciously desires aggressive violence (*Simulacra and Simulation* 5). This very idea is well sustained by Slavoj Zizek in his *Welcome to the Desert of the Real* (2002). Zizek declares that a key feature of twentieth century Western culture is its "passion for the Real" (9). He asserts that violent chocking is the price to be paid in order for the West to recover its unconsciousness (9-10).

According to this line of thought, the Huntington's theory of the "clash of civilizations" might be demystified and conceived as the "clash of civilization" with itself. This notion falls in agreement with Zizek's view on 9/11 terrorism. Using psychoanalytic approaches on 9/11 events, he believes that contemporary terrorism emanates from "clashes within each civilization" (*Welcome to the Desert* 41). Baudrillard's view that Islam's reaction against Western expansive power is a metaphor of a resistance against globalization finds expression in the character's attempt for suicidal bombing discussed in chapter two. Similarly, Zizek's works are important in the context of the West's different perspectives regarding violence in the West, the War on Iraq, and the Islam-Modernity debate, as it will be discussed in the analyses of *Terrorist* and *Point Omega*.

Differently from the previous studies maintaining hostility between Islam and the modern West, Bryan S. Turner, in his *Orientalism Postmodernism and Globalism* (1994), sustains that modernization and globalization should change Western attitudes to Orientalism. His remarkable combination of these two elements provides fruitful analyses on the selected novels. Turner considers multicultural diversity as part of the intriguing development of postmodernism in the contemporary culture (199). He states, "When sociologists think about postmodernism, they typically think about the film industry, advertising and fashion. However, cultural diversity, Islamization and multicultural politics could also be seen as part of the postmodernization of politics" (199). Therefore, Turner criticizes Orientalist discourses for celebrating the development of capitalism and liberal democracy in the West while casting their absence in the East. Stressing the importance of cultural globalism within the modern world view, he rejects Western denial of Islamic fundamentalism:

> Islamic fundamentalism is seen as a reaction against cultural and social differentiation and fragmentation. More specifically fundamentalism is an attempt at de-differentiation. However, it is important to avoid a sociological orientation which considers Islam in isolation from other world religions, because the major religions are necessarily involved in global processes. 77

Turner considers both Christian and Islamic fundamentalism from the same side of the dichotomy. He claims that rejecting fundamentalism is also rejecting consumer postmodern culture. He argues that it is global communication system which makes possible a globalization of Islam "which in fact is the Islamization of cultures through the norms and practices of Islamic fundamentalism" (86). For him, Islam has always had a universal status; however, it was unable to unable to impose its conformity and universalization prior to contemporary communication systems (86). With these thoughts on the state of Islam in the modern West, Turner provides a profound critique of many of the leading figures in classical

Orientalism. Suggesting an alternative to Orientalism, Turner calls to stress the features that unite rather than differentiate between world cultures:

> we should also note that the orientalist discourse was based upon the problem of difference (we *versus* them, East *versus* West, rationality *versus* irrationality). Perhaps an alternative to orientalism is a discourse of sameness which would emphasize the continuities between various cultures rather than their antagonisms. For example, in the case of Islam it is clear that we may regard Islamic cultures as part of a wider cultural complex which would embrace both Judaism and Christianity. We need therefore a new form of secular ecumenicalism. (102)

A review of current research on neo-Orientalism also shows Tariq Ramadan as an important source contributing to the discussion on the conflict between Islam and the West in the contemporary period. Ramadan reflects on the position of Islam in the context of Western secular societies of the West. While most studies on Orientalism and neo-Orientalism discuss the West in a polar position with the Muslim Other situated in the East, Ramadan redraws the territories of this dichotomy by focusing on Western Muslims. Differently from previous studies claiming that Islam represents a threat to the modern secular West, Ramadan argues the opposite. For him, the major problem of the conflict between the West and Islam lies in the West itself (*What I believe* 24). He claims that Western societies experience a deep crisis that stem from its lack of a true understanding of its identity as multicultural and multireligious (25). He says that most influential studies defining Western tradition maintain the history of the Western world as being solely linked to Judeo-Christian roots, while forgetting about many influential Muslim figures in Western thought, like Kindî in the 9th century, al-Farâbî in the 10th century, Ibn Sîna (Avicenne) in the 11th century, al-Ghazâlî in the 11th and 12th centuries, and Ibn Rushd (Averroès) in 12th century.

Ramadan's discourse on neo-Orientalism also involves the topic of secularism as a characteristic feature of Orientalist misrepresentations of the Islamic world. For him, secularization, along with its French equivalent, *La Laïcité*, is a concept that has caused a major misunderstanding between East and West (*Islam and the Arab Awakening* 75). Contrary to previous scholars who understood secularism as contradictory to all religions, Ramadan's definition states that it provides a "neutral" space for any multicultural society (81). In arguing over the possible coexistence of Western Muslims in the secular West, Ramadan asserts that the process of the separation between Church (or religion) and the state has actually "enabled Western societies to achieve religious tolerance and democratic pluralism" (75). Ramadan's conception of secularism will be used in Chapter II in order to understand the essence of the clash between the character Ahmad and his modern secular society.

As has been demonstrated above, the topic of neo-Orientalism has been tackled by many studies in different perspectives. Many researchers sought to connect the modern conditions engulfing Orientalist discourse in a variety of ways. Therefore, the above stated sources will be used in order to build a critical insight on the novels' representation of otherness. My choice of the three novels follows a concern with different discourses on otherness, starting from a science fiction novel engaged with the Hostage Crisis after the Iranian Revolution in *Plowing the Dark*, to a societal novel engaged with the clash between the postmodern West and Islam in *Terrorist*, ending-up in a metaphysical novel engaged with American policy with Iraq and the Middle East in *Point Omega*. Besides analyzing the novels' thematic concerns from an Orientalist perspective, a common study will characterize the three analytical chapters: first, an investigation on the authors' interests in the cultural Other through their previous literature; second, a study on the novel's Orientalist division between the idea of Occident and Orient.

In discussing *Plowing the Dark*, chapter two "Mirroring the Middle Eastern Other in the Age of Cyberspace" examines Powers's construction of Orientalist stereotypes on Islam and the Middle East in the pre-9/11 period. The chapter will highlight Iranian Islamic State and postmodern cyberspace technology as major elements that contribute in Powers's writing of otherness. Discussing the concept of fundamentalism, the study will maintain that this stereotype generally ascribed to the Middle East is actually embedded in both sides of the dichotomy: in religion (in the Islamic Orient) as in postmodern Western culture (in its cyberspace technology).

Chapter three "Islam as a (br)oher," however, focuses more on the neo-Orientalist strategies of writing Islam as a brother of modern Western culture. In analyzing a novel that dramatizes the psychology of an Arab Muslim American implicated in a terrorist bombing, the discussion seeks to highlight the way(s) in which the West sees itself in the mirror of the Islamic Other. In so doing, the study will explore the cultural phenomena that manipulate the dialectics between the West and Islam, including capitalism. The chapter will argue that the major clash occurring between Islam and the West is a clash of ideologies, between Capitalist liberal democracy and Islamic fundamentalism.

Chapter four "DeLillo's War on Terror" turns the critical gaze to the political atmosphere of War on Iraq. While the first two chapters refer to the Orientalist representation of the Islamic Orient as a source of terror, the third chapter explores the radical notion of terror both East and West, as presented in DeLillo's narrative. Since the novel's epistemology resides in the existential and phenomenological framework of the French paleontologist Pierre Teilhard De Chardin, the chapter further looks at the tension between East and West as enveloped into a larger evolutionary frame of existence. In this sense, the study will be focused on the space of the desert as a neo-Orientalist metaphor, and will eventually propose that DeLillo's text is one of the major contributions to the "war on terror" discourse.

Chapter five concludes the dissertation with an evaluation of the contemporary American novel, keeping in view its progression from a narrow and restricted engagement with the cultural Other to a broader one. Such an assessment is necessary in order to visualize the authors' trajectory in terms of writing otherness. The conclusion will also envisage the future of Western Orientalist thought and its implications.

A review of related literature will be provided next to ensure the authenticity of this study. While the previous studies remain theoretical, it is still required to discuss the representation of the Oriental Other in the novels I intend to examine.

5. Scholarship on (neo) Orientalist Representations in *Plowing the Dark*, *Terrorist*, and *Point Omega*

Literary criticism on Powers's *Plowing the Dark*, Updike's *Terrorist*, and DeLillo's *Point Omega* show that much interest is given to the 9/11 novel as a case study of Orientalist thought. Reviewing criticism on the three novels demonstrates that Updike's *Terrorist* is the most approached novel from an Orientalist frame. These criticisms are worthy to consult, as they tackle different cultural, political, and religious issues in the novel.

Yet, it is important to mention is that no study has been particularly conducted to study the three novels I intend to examine in this thesis. My combination of Powers, Updike, and DeLillo follows the different perspectives built on the representation of American culture in the postmodern period. The significance of bringing them together in this thesis is to reassess the development of Orientalism as a cultural component that takes part of the authors' definition of "Americanness." Some studies have been conducted on similar works by postmodern authors. Amin Zaki, in his *Terrorism as an Anti-thesis* (2014), is interested in studying three different terrorisms (Religious, communist, and environmental) that he finds best articulated in Updike's *Terrorist*, DeLillo's *Mao II*, and Gary Hansen's *Wet Desert*, respectively. Presenting an anatomy of terrorism based on the Platonic forms of Good and

Bad, Zaki accounts for the nature of struggle in the three kinds of terrorisms. His chapter on Updike's Terrorist examines the civilizational clash between Islam and the West in the period after the Cold War. Using also Huntington's theories in the Clash of Civilization, the chapter analyzes Islamic terrorism in relation to the nature of Islam as a religious anti-thesis to the materialism of current Western civilization. Zaki's reflection on the religious conflicts between West and East are worth considering in the ensuing analysis. However, his perspective connected to Huntington is contradictory to the arguments of the present thesis because it is anchored in Said's theories in *Orientalism*.

Natalie Rae Leppard, in her thesis *Finding the Pen in a Pile of Grenades* (2007), focuses on the works of DeLillo (*Players*, *The Names*, *Mao II*), Paul Auster's *Leviathan*, and Powers's *Plowing the Dark*. Though her study is relevant with regard at the realities of 9/11 events, it remains restricted to the notion of terrorism and therefore less consistent in its devotion to the topic of Orientalism.

Also Jonathan Ross Mckay brings together DeLillo and Powers in his dissertation *Death Threat Letter* (2011). He studies the use of terrorism in DeLillo's *Mao II* and *Falling Man*, Philip Roth's *Opernation Shylock*, Powers's *Plowing the Dark*, and Paul Auster's *Levithan* as allegories that threaten the position of the literary author in the contemporary culture. In these novels, Mckay looks at the challenge of terrorism to the role of the authors and their use of allegory to construct the contemporary American novel. Though this study presents a good background on DeLillo and Powers, it remains less reliable when it comes to the topic of (neo)Orientalism.

Mark C. Taylor, in his *Rewiring the Real* (2013), analyzes Gaddis's *The Recognitions*, Powers's *Plowing the Dark*, Danielewski's *House of Leaves*, and DeLillo's *Underworld*. In his discussion, Taylor argues that these works represent the postmodern turn, especially the shift to the age of the simulacrum in which "sign and reality, copy and original are one" (62).

Besides his analysis of postmodernism in these texts, Taylor provides a sophisticated commentary on the religious dimensions of the novels. The chapter on *Plowing the Dark* argues that Powers questions whether science and technology (especially virtual reality) have replaced art as the most important locus of the spiritual longing for transcendence; just as in modernism, art replaced religion as the key site of spirituality (115). In his chapter on DeLillo's *Underworld*, Taylor focuses upon the conclusion of the novel in which the character Sister Edgar achieves eternal life, in cyberspace rather than in heaven. Taylor's analysis of this fictional scene is based on a theological perspective, interpreting "the relationship between traditional religious belief and practices and contemporary social, economic, and technological developments" (47). This study is worthy to consult in the course of the analysis of the representation of contemporary Western culture in Powers's and DeLillo's novels. Though it has sufficiently discussed the issue of technology in the postmodern era, it is limited in its tackling of the cultural Other.

Some studies are particularly devoted to examine Powers's *Plowing the Dark*. Johanna Heil's *The Purloined Chamber* (2010) considers the chamber of the Cavern to function in a way similar to "The Purloined Letter" by Edgar Allan Poe, although the two texts thematically do not have much in common. Using Lacan's "Seminar on 'The Purloined Letter'" (1966), Heil reflects on the symbolic signification of the two chambers, and ultimately claims that their true content is similar to the Lacanian Real (7). Although Heil's study is significant in its dealing with symbolization of Powers's fictional Cavern, it does not broaden the discussion towards the aspects of otherness.

In Bruno Latour's "Powers of the Fascimile" (2008), a particular interest is given to Powers's stylistic exploration of science and philosophy in *Plowing the dark*. Latour approaches the novel in order to testify its scientific theories that he claims to be pursued in science studies projects (94). In so doing, the study examines *Plowing the Dark* as a realist

novel. Latour eventually recognizes that "the sciences are the humanities, …that computer is rhetoric and tragedy" (21-22). What is quite interesting to this study is Latour's eventual consideration of the intersection between the mathematicians' scientific approaches in the Cavern and the novel's reference to the Qur'an. He claims that Powers's revisiting of the theme of the Creation story in the beginning of the novel and his use of the Qur'an in its end "is not for naught" (94). He ultimately claims that the question of reproduction in digital reality is the same question about the emergence of fundamentalism in Islam (94). This idea is unfortunately not sufficiently discussed by Latour, since he put it as a conclusive thought to his study on Powers's realism.

In the case of Updike's *Terrorist*, a review of current research shows that many studies deal with the novel as Orientalist. For instance, Maryam Salehnia, in her "Political Zionism and Fiction" (2012), reads the novel from a political standpoint, stating that it should be associated with the Arab-Israeli conflict (486). She claims that Updike dramatizes a Jewish character, Jack Levy, to represent both American and Zionist colonial values (488). By studying the moral position of Jack who interrupts Ahmad's suicidal bombing, Salehnia demonstrates and explains the Orientalist ideology of displaying Jewish superiority over the Arabs. Relying on Said's *Orientalism*, the study claims that if Ahmad is mentioned in an Orientalist text like Updike's, he is regarded only as:

> The disruptor of Israel's and the West's existence, or in another view of the same thing, as a surmountable obstacle to Israel's creation in 1948. In so far as this Arab has any history, it is part of the history given him (or taken from him: the difference is slight) by the Orientalist tradition, and later the Zionist tradition. (qtd. in Slehnia 484)

One is led to think that perhaps Updike's choice of Ahmad's nationality as half Egyptian is implicitly significant in relation to this study. It can be further argued that Jack's

articulated supremacy over Ahmad, whose ancestors are "pharaohs," might stand for the Jewish historical and biblical triumph against the totalitarian Pharaoh in the *Exodus*. While Salehnia's article reflects on Orientalist depictions of Ahmad with respect to his religion and identity, it remains too political for the present study. It is important to focus on the representation of the Arab-Jew relation as it takes part of Orientalist discourse. However, my study takes a larger space of discussion to include the antagonism between modernity vs. Islam and secularism vs. religious values.

The representation of Islam as anti-modern is a common topic to be discussed in Updike's *Terrorist*. Anna Hartnell's "Violence and the Faithful in post-9/11 America" (2011), for example, considers the relationship between religion and violence in the novel. By analyzing Ahmad's ethnic as well as religious position in modern American society, she ultimately argues that Updike structures the image of the Other inside America to reject the assumption of American cultural unity (478). In her "Writing Islam in Post-9/11 America" (2012), Hartnell further elaborates on religious terror by examining Updike's representation of Islamic fundamentalism through Ahmad's turn to violent "*jihad*" and his eventual attempt of suicide bombing. For Hartnell, studying terrorism from a religious perspective is crucial to understand the essence of the conflict between Islam and modern Western culture. She points out how Ahmad's radicalization takes place in isolation, cited as a decisive factor by most commentators and by jihadist militants themselves. She studies Ahmad's crisis of faith in the novel in relation to the biblical story in which Abraham believes he has been summoned by the Devine to sacrifice his son, Isaac. Drawing on Kierkegaard's *Fear and Trembling* (1843), she concludes that Abraham's anticipated act of religious violence is different from Ahmad's attempt of suicide. Where Abraham's act depends on a "suspension of the ethical" of his own culture, Ahmad's act depends on embracing the ethics of another shared culture (138).

A remark worthy to add in relation to Hartnell's studies is that her discussion includes only one side of the dichotomy (the fundamentalist terrorist Other), while ignoring the representation of postmodern American identity. In this sense, her study does not look into the dynamics of post-9/11 representation, being based on a clash of perspectives, as I am going to sustain it. She tries to identify the separation of sacred and secular spheres in modern popular culture. The logic of such contrast is undeniable, but what is really worth discussing in Updike's *Terrorist* is probably secularism itself, as it structures a meaning of modernity and opposes itself to religious fundamentalism.

Another critic that tackles the idea of neo-Orientalist depictions of Islam in *Terrorist* is Birgit Dawes. In "Close Neighbors to the Unimaginable" (2010), Dawes ponders on Ahmad's tendency to fight the unbelieving U.S. secular culture. He sees Ahmad's temptation for suicide bombing as a conscious desire to impose Islamic fundamentalism on American multicultural space. Dawes radicalizes the meaning of the novel into the idea of "hatred" between Islam and "the People of the Book." One of the novel's epigraphs taken from the Bible suggests that Updike is indeed intent on explaining the "hatred" of the Other: "And now, O Lord, please take my life from me, for it is better for me to die than to live. And the Lord said, 'Is it right for you to be angry?'" (507). This passage from Jonah 4:3-4 considers religious difference according to Christian theology. The anxiety of hatred raised in the study, hence, shows that Updike understands the rhetoric of the "clash of civilizations" from a purely Christian perspective. Differently from Dawes, I intend to analyze the tension between Islam and modern western culture from neither Christian nor Islamic perspective. In an attempt to put forward secular analyses, I will draw on none of the religions in the discussion. I will argue that the source of hatred projected in *Terrorist* is cultural and racial—not religious.

In "Orientalist Feminism" (2012), Marandi and Tari deal with the representation of women in *Terrorist*. Though Updike does not dramatize an Oriental woman in the story,

Marandi and Tari study Ahmad's Christian mother, Teresa Mulloy, who wears a scarf at her son's wish, as reflecting the submissive Oriental woman. In this respect, Marandi and Tari discuss Updike's references to Qur'anic texts which he intends to explain in relation to Muslim's subjugation of women. They claim that the novel works within the Orientalist frame that misrepresents Muslim women and uses the Qur'an as an Orientalist strategy:

> In *Terrorist*, Updike often selects verses and chapters of the Quran based on his denigrating purposes and without contextualization, ignores the fact that to correctly interpret the Quran requires the knowledge of when and under what circumstances different verses were revealed to the Prophet Mohammad. This approach is evident when Updike intended to reinforce the underlying theme that the Quran and the religion of Islam are the roots of women's oppression. (15-6)

While the focus of this study is specifically on gender issues in relation to religion, Bradley Freeman's study focuses on Orientalism from a cultural perspective. In "Threatening the Good Order" (2011), Freeman discusses the consequences of bringing the East and West together in one culture. He claims that though the characters of Updike live in a multicultural country—America, they are perceived in terms of their raciality and territoriality. The article states that even with the wake of globalization, the novel shows the territorial concerns that surround American conceptions of the East (18). It claims that through representing the Eastern Other, Updike tends to maintain that American culture should remain Western in order to keep its order (18).

As has been illustrated above, there are many studies dealing with Updike's Orientalism, from religious, cultural, and political perspectives. Such studies are significant to enlighten the discussion on the essence of the clash of Occident and Orient in Chapter three. However, all the previous studies maintain Ahmad as a non-Western subject, though he is

stated by Updike to be an American citizen. Differently from these studies, I will analyze Ahmad as a Westerner whose religion also takes part of the American identity. I try to locate the meaning of "the clash of civilizations" within one side of the dichotomy—the American Self. Another observation regarding the previous review of literature related to Updike's *Terrorist* is that none of the studies delves into the question of modernity that Updike seeks to condemn in the novel. What I am going to do differently from the previous works is to scrutinize the source of this antagonism by discussing secularism as a major characteristic of modernity.

With respect to DeLillo, many studies have dealt with the thematic concern of *Point Omega*. David Banash reads the novel as a narrative framed by Gordon's *24 Hour Psycho*. He understands the events happening in the desert as an extension of the images produced in the gallery. He claims that the novel is made of one mode of perception: "like the unnamed man is in a position of watching and waiting in the cinema, the characters are also put to wait in their everyday life in the desert" (14). However important this study is for understanding the novel, it remains less helpful because it does not treat the novel's (neo) Orientalist ideolologies.

In another study, DeLillo's novel is taken as a fictional artwork that merits interest within the frames of both critical thought and physical production. David Price, in his "The Space of the Page in the Writing of Don DeLillo" (2012), reads the novel through art theory in order to analyze its visual artwork. Particularly, he treats the space of the page as a complementary discourse to writing that allows to be set in critical discourse. Indeed, this study provides a relevant aspect to enhance the novel's reading.

Liliana M. Naydan, presents a quite important study from a quite different perspective. Her article "Media Violence, Catholic Mystery" (2015) considers *Point Omega* as an implicit response to 9/11 in which violence assumes a feature of Catholic mystery. She suggests that

the unseen violence that emerges in DeLillo's narrative is evocative of a kind of "mystery of faith" that governed DeLillo's thinking since his Catholic upbringing (100). She claims that the characters' presence in the desert manifests as a waiting for the foretold Second Coming (100). For her, the characters exist in order to create a space for religious contemplation that, for the Catholics, occurs through the mediating force of the Roman Catholic mass (100). Despite the fact that this study is significant in understanding the novel, it fails to notice the political account of the novel that the present study seeks to consider.

However, Daniel O'Gorman, in his "Connective Dissonance: Refiguring Difference in Fiction of the Iraq War" (2015), discusses the reflections and echoes between post-9/11 American foreign policy and violence in the world in the novel. He argues that *Point Omega* works to redress what William Butler Yeats describes as a dehumanizing "derealization of loss"—or "insensivity to human suffering and death"—in the context of the war on terror (77). Drawing on the work of the geographer Derek Gregory, he suggests that the novel attempts to shift its readers' "imaginative geographies" (77). For Gregory, who in turn draws on Edward Said, an "imaginative geography is the frame of perception through which we articulate not simply the differences between this place and that, inscribing different images of here and there, but (that) also shapes the ways in which, from our particular perspectives, we conceive the connections and separations between them" (qtd. in O'Gorman 71). Building on this idea, O'Gorman concludes that *Point Omega* represents the potential for a desirable post-9/11 "connective dissonance;" that is, "a creation of new emphatic ties between Americans and Iraq is *not despite* their differences but *because of them*" (77 emphasis added).

In *The Cultural Politics of the New American Studies* (2012), John Carlos Rowe analyzes the notion of "the War on Terrorism" in DeLillo's literature before and after 9/11. Rowe Attempts to comprehend international problems by contextualizing them in American domestic culture. He discusses U.S. cultural and political imperialism by reflecting on more

domestic terms like religious intolerance, racism, sexism, and class conflict. By reflecting on DeLillo's novels, he argues that DeLillo's characters are specters of their own terror articulated in their "aimless, stateless, socially determined beings" (194). He maintains DeLillo's *Falling Man* as "a classic instance of the famous Pogo aphorism: 'We have met the enemy, and he is us'" (194). One of the important claims of this study, also, is that al-Qaeda terrorists fictionalized in *Falling Man* is a consequence of American cultural imperialism, maintaining that through globalization, global terrorism is internalized and domesticated (194).

Another inquiry that might enrich the study on DeLillo's neo-Orientalist perspective in is Justin Newman's *Fiction beyond Secularism* (2014). In his chapter "Time and Terror," Newman explores how DeLillo's novels frame 9/11 as a temporal event and envisages the problem of attacks in terms of a clash between multiple conceptions of time. As many critics like Said, Butler, and Christiva, Newman regards at the dichotomies of the war on terror depending on the dualistic notions of the cultural conflict between Western modernity and the archaic fundamentalist Islam. In this sense, he emphasizes that DeLillo's characters echo stillness in life, experiencing events outside time. Drawing on DeLillo's "In the Ruins of the Future," he maintains that the West, a future-oriented culture characterized by "the dramatic climb of the Dow and the speed of the internet" is summoned to live permanently in the future (106). With 9/11 events, however, the modern West "have fallen back in time and space" (qtd. in Newman 106). Newman views that in DeLillo's novels, 9/11 facilitates temporal compression, inflected by repetitions of trauma (106). This study is worthy to consult while dealing with *Point Omega*, which also reproduces the problem of time in the context of the war on Iraq. Newman and Rowe have well elaborated on the notion terror in relation Orientalism, but their study does not deal with *Point Omega* as a case study.

Possibly because of the abstract conceptual framework of *Point Omega*, one may find very few critical explorations to account for Orientalist representations depicted in the novel. Sven Birkerts and J. B. Rollins review DeLillo's *Point Omega*. However, the bulk of these reviews regard the novel as a meditation to themes of temporality, modernity, and illusionism. Though the novel does not openly deal with the Orient as Powers and Updike did, my analyses will explore DeLillo's epistemology of the war on terror as a philosophical in a more philosophical dimension that bears significance when applied to Iraq and the Middle East.

Chapter I

Mirroring the Middle Eastern Other in the Digital Age: A Reading of *Plowing the Dark* by Richard Powers

"America bosses the world around in English. We need English, just to tell America to go to hell"

Richard Powers, *Plowing the Dark* 75

"This war is not over. This war will never end"

Richard Powers, *Plowing the Dar k* [10]

I.   1. Introduction

The first epigraph above told from the voice of a Lebanese Muslim character and the second told from the voice of a non-Muslim American, demonstrate the ongoing antagonism occurring between the American Self and the Oriental Islamic Other in Powers's seventh novel *Plowing the Dark* (2000). In the first statement, the Middle East and the Islamic world in general are cast as undemocratic, intolerant, and hateful to the West. The second statement, yet, reinforce the idea of the eternal conflict present between the West and the East. Highlighting the presence of a running cold war between these two categories, Powers therefore confirms his conviction of Huntington's rhetoric of "the clash of civilizations" (*The Clash of Civilizations* 28). The purpose of putting together these epigraphs is to signal the extent to which Powers seeks to revive the conflict between the U.S. and the Middle East before 9/11 events. What Powers's novel demonstrates is that since the fall of the Berlin Wall,

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[10] Powers, Richard. *Plowing the Dark* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2000) 74. Subsequent references to *Plowing the Dark* will be cited in text.

i.e. since the nineteen nineties, the Western eye has turned its gaze eastward, towards a new enemy, Islam. Yet, it has to be remembered that according to the history of Orientalism, Islam finds itself as an old enemy of the Occident that has existed in Western thought since the Middle Ages and the early Renaissance, or even before that (Said, *Covering Islam* 4). What Powers's novel demonstrates is that the position of Islam as a cultural and religious rival has never changed with the course of history. Being published in 2000, then, *Plowing the Dark* presents a good example of a pre-9/11 novel that revisits and recycles Orientalist cultural stereotypes of Islam and the Arab world.

This chapter aims to use the thematic concerns of *Plowing the Dark* as definitive examples of an Orientalist novel written in the pre-9/11 era. Powers's novel is published a year before 9/11 terrorist attacks, but its story is focused in 1986, shortly before the fall of communism. It casts the Islamic Revolution of Iran and its aftermath Hostage Crisis, and continues through the beginning of the First Gulf War in 1990. These dates are significant because they frame the transition between the Cold War and the contemporary clash between the global West and Islam after 9/11, which Jean Baudrillard calls "The Fourth World War" (*The Spirit of Terrorism* 12). The primary focus of Powers in such a historical setting that takes readers fourteen years before is significant, for it demonstrates that the Middle East and Islam represent a haunting phenomenon in Western consciousness. In more details than Don DeLillo's *Mao II*, Powers recounts to his readers the experience of a hostage captured by an Islamic Fundamentalist group, with an account that perhaps Western media did not cast. As the novel highlights the motif of travel to the Orient through Martin's move from his home country—America, to Lebanon, the chapter will first consider Powers's vision, expression, and structure of the Oriental Other in the novel. Throughout narrating the hostage Taimur Martin, a half-American, half-Iranian teacher of English in Lebanon, Powers echoes a set of cultural stereotypes that produce and reproduce Orientalist representations ascribed to Islam

and to the Middle East. Upon examination of Powers's canon of the Middle East, the study finds a curious cross-section of themes displayed in the correlation of Shia Islam with Iranian politics. Powers's allusion to Iran in conjunction with religious terrorism does not startle, since Powers's vision of the Orient is that to an unfamiliar irrational territory. Therefore, Powers's approach to Iran as an Islamic state will be unavoidably examined as a second step in this chapter. Despite the ongoing events of the story in Lebanon, the study will consider Iran and Muslim Shiites as also part of Powers's construction of otherness. In examining the representation of Islam throughout the chapter, this study will reflect on the image of fundamentalism as a contemporary stereotype ascribed to Islam since the Iranian Revolution. It will highlight that the Western perception of Islam shifts from a religious stereotype to a more complex political strategy of Orientalist representation. In this sense, the study will not develop on fundamentalism as a religious sect in its own right, but will consider it as a political approach characterizing Middle Eastern relations with the U.S.

As Powers creates an imaginary world of Virtual Reality in the Cavern in parallel with the plot of Martin's kidnapping, he gives expression to the Western mind that transcends the poetics of its imagination about the future of the world order. Just as importantly, the Orientalist oppositions between Occident *versus* Orient, West *versus* Islamic East, and between the Dionysian artistic, imaginary fantasies in the setting of the Cavern *versus* the Apollonian radical reasoning in Lebanon, shape the ontology of the novel. Hence, it is in the word "imagination" that the present chapter seeks to anchor its Orientalist analyses. In his *The Passion of the Western Mind* (1991), in which he tries to conceptualize Western thought from its beginning, Richard Tarnas claims that "Western imagination is itself part of the world's intrinsic truths" (434). Taking this idea, it is worthy to consider these "intrinsic truths" embedded in Powers's imaginary world of virtual reality that involves Islam as part of it (434). Since Orientalism is admittedly a Western imagination of the Orient, as claimed by

Said, its elements are what have to be explored in Powers' narrative of virtual reality (Said, *Orientalism* 177). All features that virtual reality considers, including dreams, art, and myth, are means to read the postmodern American Self as a mirror of the Islamic Oriental Other.

Powers's aesthetic strategy blended with the use of the "too perfect" (Powers 34), utopian world of virtual reality in parallel with the dystopian psychology of a kidnapped, blindfolded American in a basement in Beirut, is interesting to prove how the "late-postmodern" West views both his own culture and that of the Other (Green 1). Said argues that the electronic postmodern world reinforces the stereotypes by which the Orient is perceived and represented (*Orientalism* 91). In this respect, this study tries to make sense of cyberspace as an ideology that reproduces the Oriental Other as an anti-thesis of the West. As I discuss Powers's Orientalism in relation to postmodern high-technology, I eventually demonstrate cyberspace as a hegemonic ideology that seeks to create a subjective World Order.

Cyberspace is a term increasingly recurrent today and perhaps one of the most contested words in contemporary global technology. It is a "cultural space" that refers to the space of the internet and Virtual Reality (Kendrick 143). Slavoj Zizek perhaps makes it clearer when he describes it as a universe where societal life-world are dissolved, contact with 'real' bodily others disappear" ("What can Psychoanalysis Tell us about Cyberspace" 802). Powers dramatizes his characters in this fictional world, in a landscape of "simulacra" created by artificial intelligence. Studying this network of cyberspace technology is significant in order to recognize Powers's image-building of American identity and his repertoire of Orientalist otherness in the postmodern era.

Powers's novels are generally complicated. As they try to highlight the complex systems that maintain the conditions of globalization and global threat, they continuously return to the relation between the human and the technological in an "overt-thinking" way, to

borrow A. S. Byatt's adjective while she comments on one of Powers's novels (*Kaleidoscope*). Powers is deeply concerned with memory, the posthuman[11], science, and the mutual understanding of humans and computers. Perhaps, the most distinctive themes of Powers's novels reside in the thematic range of the history of visual arts, the nature human of imagination and consciousness, the possibilities of virtual reality, Cold War, and epochal change. All these concerns meet in *Plowing the Dark* and produce a new form of political sight on the binary of the American Self and the Oriental Other. Powers dramatizes concrete history, that of the hostage crisis, and intersects it in a fascinating way with the possibility of a digital world. My reading of Powers's dual plot structure is "contrapuntal" in the Saidian sense of understanding what is involved when an author projects both discourses on imperialism and that of resistance to it [12] (66). Jan Kucharzewski, in his article "From

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[11] The "posthuman" and "post-humanism" are recurrent terms in postmodern thought to envision the future of the human experience, consciousness, and even physical body in the conditions of science and computer technology. Many postmodernists build a critique on the evolution of technology as part of the essential destiny of the human species. Perhaps, Lyotard's notion of the "inhuman" provides a relevant expression to connote the intersection between sciences, technology and culture (*The Inhuman* 2). Powers's *Plowing the Dark* also engages with a theory of the posthuman, since it describes the cultural effects of the expansion of science and technology in a society overwhelmed by information network.

[12] "Contrapuntal" is a term coined by Edward Said which he borrowed from Western classical music in order to interpret colonial texts. In *Culture and Imperialism,* Said defines his method of analysis of colonial texts as "contrapuntal," meaning that he interprets a text while he considers the perspectives of both the colonizer and the colonized. A contrapuntal reading means taking in both accounts of an issue, addressing both the perspective of imperialism and the resistance to it. (66). It is reading with the awareness of the history of a text and other

Language to Life" (2008), holds that Powers's *Plowing the Dark* is dominated by the philosophy of the conceit (183). He sustains that though the author builds two parallel stories that are spatially and temporally separated, one of an artist and one a hostage, their juxtaposition allude to a persistent metaphor (183). One of the tasks of this chapter is to investigate the "unsaid" in the Powers' juxtaposition of the two "seemingly" unrelated stories. The study will read the Orientalist implications of narrating the post-industrial West, as visualized in the Cavern, in relation to Martin's imprisonment in a prison cell in Lebanon. In this way, the study will be interested in exploring the way the postmodern West constructs otherness in this age determined by multimedia and cyberspace cultural phenomena.

Powers's complicated narrative can be reduced to the intersection of the story of Islamic terrorism with that of postmodern technology fictionalized in the Cavern. I will explore both Islamic terrorism, practiced by the capturers of Martin, and cyberspace technology as cultural phenomena that shape decentered modes of human subjectivity and behavior. Importantly, the study will prove that both religious fundamentalism and cyberspace technology are disorienting spaces that defy the capacity of the human subject to orient himself to a form of political agency. This discussion will hold that both of these are ideological categories that lend themselves to the principle of fundamentalist terrorism. Differently from other debates and discussions held on Western contemporary culture that maintain the general view that the modern technological West is liberal, and therefore, opposes any fundamentalist value, this study will claim that fundamentalist rationalism is

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histories against which "the dominating discourse acts" (51). In a similar frame, I use "contrapuntal reading" above in order to explain that the following analysis will consider the different perspectives of East and West, of Orientalism and counter-Orientalism, in order to reflect on the implications that run between Martin's and Adie's plots.

repressed in Western liberal modernity and operates even as a deep current of its ideologies. As I seek to conceptualize this new form of fundamentalism present in Western contemporary digital culture, I will use "cyberspace fundamentalism" as a term to refer to the ideology that manipulates the invisible spaces of databases and computer networks. I will eventually demonstrate that like Islamic fundamentalism produces terror, cyberspace fundamentalism also generates terror.

It should be remembered that *Plowing the Dark,* being published in 2000, takes part of the literature of the end of the twentieth century and the beginning of the twenty first century. In this sense, it provides an example of a literature written at the end of the millennium. This fact gives opportunity to make few comments on the novel's subject in relation to the years defining what Frank Kermode expresses as "the sense of an ending" (181). Kermode notes that the past millennium has witnessed the eminence of events that could without exaggeration be described as "apocalyptic," taking into account the Cuban missile crisis, the assassination of Present Kennedy, the Cold War, the war in Vietnam, and the nuclear war (181). This view may be enlightening in reference to *Plowing the Dark*, especially as it reflects the historical events of the 1990's with its darker casts about the destruction of humanity. While other novelists have displayed different varieties and scenarios of terror in order to give the age its sense of an ending—for example, the fascist government of Hitler in Philip Roth's *The Plot against America* (2014), the supernatural ghost terror in Don DeLillo's *The Body Artist* (2001), and the horrors of cannibalism in Cormac McCarthy's *The Road* (2006)—Powers finds in the Middle East a typical fascination for presenting his future apocalyptic vision of the world. What is interesting about Powers is his resort to Islamic fundamentalism in order to mark the end of the millennium. Therefore, the word "millennium" will intervene from time to time in the present discussion while trying to address Powers's insight on the future of East-West relationship.

However, before even beginning to talk about Powers's account on the Orient, one should first investigate the place of the Middle East and Islam in Powers's previous writings.

I.   2. Powers's Interest in Islam and the Middle East

It is indeed difficult to locate Orientalism as a basic feature of Richard Powers' works. A review of his novels shows that Islam and the East have practically no place in his writings. Similarly, all reviewers of Powers' novels show no reference to Islam or to the Orient in his fiction, except in *Plowing the Dark*, whose part of the plot consists in dramatizing Islamic terrorist groups in Beirut. A review of Powers's biography also demonstrates his distance from the territory of the Oriental Other. The only instance that perhaps merits to be noted here is his five years spent in the Far East, in Thailand, in the age of six when his father accepted to work with the International School of Bangkok. That encounter with the culture of the East was during the heights of American military presence in Southeast Asia. Be that as it may, Powers's personal career proves no direct contact with the Islamic culture on the geographic level.

This non-curiosity to write about the Oriental Other, especially with the cultural and political dilemmas shaping our contemporary worldview, is perhaps being eclipsed by Powers' interest in science. It is worthy to remember that Powers's literary production shows a deep and usual interest in science studies. He is regarded as "the most rewarding source of philosophical inspiration for his stylistic exploration" of science (Latour 2). His stories are always plotted around explicit scientific, say neuro-scientific, biomedical, genetic, or digital body of knowledge. These detailed discussions of modern scientific issues which Powers infuse in his fiction demonstrate the extent to which he perceives science an inseparable component of the complexities of modern culture.

Despite his novels' scientific and political engagement (like in *Three Farmers on Their Way to a Dance* (1985) which recounts the story of three young men during WWI) and *Prisoner's Dilemma* (1988), set amid the realities of Cold War and nuclear warfare during WWII, and despite their historical accounting of American culture since the end of the twentieth century, Powers finds Occidental Christian tradition a major focus of his literary attention. Whatever the reasons for Powers choosing not to talk directly about Islam, especially with the actual conflicts hovering over the world's political landscape, one thing remains clear: Powers's silence suggests, explicitly or not, that Islamic culture is something too radically "Other" for a postmodernist American writer to talk about. Islam and the Orient, for Powers, is the unspeakable Other, an "Other" simply out of place in any critique of American culture.

Though Islam does not show as a major topic in Powers's fiction, it is actually not forgotten. It is surprising that Powers's attention to Islam shows in his audio narration of Joel Richardson's engaged book in Islamic eschatology *The Islamic Antichrist* (2009). The latter consists in accounting for the Islamic tradition and its version of events occurring during the biblical "Second Coming" of Christ. Following the same insights of those Orientalist thinkers like Samuel Huntington and Bernard Lewis, the book clearly shows an obsession with Islam as a figure of anti-Americanism and anti-Eurocentrism. The book ultimately directs the readers' attention to chapters entitled "The Dark Nature of Muhammad's Revelations," "Islam's Ancient Hatred for the Jews," and most surprisingly to "Islam and the Goal of World Domination." This would clearly suggest Powers's interest in Islam as an antithesis of the West.

Nonetheless, there are Orientalist images echoed in Powers's literary texts that still deserve particular attention. It seems that Powers's scientific literature does not present a sort of diversion or escape from American lifestyle, nor does it repress what Almond describes as

"the nightmare Other of that society" (*The New Orientalist* 1). Powers's interest in science does not lead him to totally overlook Islam as a religious, cultural, and political image that plays the role of a terrorist agent. Through a close reading of Powers' novels, except of *Plowing the Dark* which is the central attention of this chapter, what follows is an attempt to examine Powers's references to Islam, not simply its sources, but also its motivations, and implications. What one seeks to investigate is whether there is anything peculiar about Powers which distinguishes his view of Islamic culture, or whether Powers, for all the novelty of his scientific perspective, is just another preoccupied American writer with the Oriental Other.

In one of Powers' novels *Operation Wandering Soul* (1993), whose title is inspired from a Vietnam War psychological warfare operation, and which recounts the story of a pediatric ward in a big L.A. hospital in the near future, we encounter the following passage:

> Colonialism, imperialism, and the various industrial age crusades to establish a world order typically sport messianic hallmarks. Marx's historical apotheosis of communism, although secular, bore an obvious millenarian cast. Hitler's Thousand-year Reich was a revival of Joachim of Fiore's medieval apocalyptic vision. The radical political fervor characterizing the present international community—from the Red Guards to the *Islamic Revolution*—is perhaps understood not in economic but in eschatological terms…. (209 emphasis added)

In the above passage, Powers draws a drastically polarized geography that distinguishes the West from the rest of the world. However, the interest that Islam seems to exert upon Powers is an observable phenomenon in the above passage. His declaration that industrialism and imperialism are hallmarks of the future destiny of the world order proves that Powers foreshadows War on Terror as early as 1993, before 9/11 events wrote a new page on the ongoing clash between the West and Islam. Powers's interest in the Other in the above

passage also consists in an obsession with the image of Islam as a source of terror after the Islamic Revolution primarily held in Iran. By placing Islam among Western fears, like Communism, the Chinese communist fighting group Red Guard, and Hitler, Powers pictures the space of the Other as "endowed both with greater size and with a greater potential for power (usually destructive) than the West" (Said, *Covering Islam* 4). It is worthy to remember, taking the novel's publication in 1993, that the major phobia that dominated Western consciousness during the nineties was Iran, especially after the Iranian Revolution. Said explains that in 1978, Iran caused Americans to feel an increasing anxiety (5). He says that America has never felt "so paralyzed, so seemingly powerless" during the Iranian Revolution, and it never could "put Iran out of mind, since on so many levels the country impinged on their lives with a defiant obtrusiveness" (5). This phobia from the Islamic Other is accounted for by Powers's discourse. It is clear from the previous passage that Powers regards Islam not only as a source of political or economic destruction of the world order; rather, as an apocalyptic sign, a sign of the end of the world. This idea involves that Powers's thoughts are "infected" by the thinking of intellectuals such as Bernard Lewis and Samuel Huntington. It is not surprising that Powers views a cataclysmic future of civilizations, for the general intellectual atmosphere in the nineties was focused on Islam as a major threat: Bernard Lewis' *Islam and the West* in 1993 and later Huntington's *The Clash of Civilization* in 1996. Like these Western Orientalists who viewed Islam as a sign of apocalypse, Powers tries to make a sense of prediction, or yet a prophecy, by drawing a pessimistic future of Western civilization being subject to Islamic dominance. It is not surprising also that the essence of eschatology *The Islamic Antichrist* published as late as 2009, which Powers narrates with his own voice, is cast in the above passage. This proves that Powers's phobia from Islam is persistent in his thoughts.

Most of Powers's novels render the Orient, whether Islam, Iran, Egypt, or Algeria, as a dark realm. In *Operation Wandering Soul* (1993), Powers pictures Algeria and Egypt as full of evil: "travelers returning from the Middle East tell a light-skinned Muslim slaves in Algeria and Alexandria who speak a strange pidgin of Arabic and Romance" (332). Characterizing Algeria and Alexandria with slavery and with a "strange" language would indicate that Powers actually follows the same feet of traditional Orientalists before him who intended to picture the Orient as a strange and an exotic place (332). In this way, Powers maps a geographic perception in his historical and aesthetic texts, elaborating consistently on the basic difference between the Oriental and the Occidental worlds.

What the previous discussion sought to claim is that images of Islam and the Orient are not repressed in Powers's mind. Though his fictional account does not directly treat Islam, it filters quietly into most of his fiction. In an interview with Stephen J. Burn, Powers declares his influence by Luis Borges, being his "source of estranging renewal, especially (his) first three books, in *Galatea*, and in *Plowing the Dark*" (171). This declaration by Powers cannot escape our attention, since most of Borges's short stories and essays show a linguistic, literary, and philosophical inspiration from the Orient. *Plowing the Dark*, admittedly influenced by Borges whose texts are pushed towards Islamic thinkers like Averroes and Omar Khayyam, would definitely mirror, in a way or in another, certain Orientalist representations.

Plowing the Dark represents a different phase in Powers's career. His exploration of the Other leads him to re-present international events taking place outside American borders and that have direct connection with the American foreign policies of the nineteen nineties. Despite its publication in 2000, *Plowing the Dark* ostensibly has recourse to Orientalist discourse in its investigation of events such as Iran's Islamic Revolution and its aftermath Hostage Crisis.

Theoretically speaking, the relationship of Powers as a Western representater and the Middle East as a represented image is discussed in this chapter in the light of Said's account on Orientalism. In *Orientalism*, Said underlines the success of Orientalists in creating the Orient and Islam by sustaining the ideology of Western superiority (7). Said's ideas on Orientalims will be used to demonstrate the way in which Powers's discourse about the Middle East is defined by images and clichés that represent a privileged American Self in opposition to the inferior Middle Eastern Other. Said bluntly summarized in *Covering Islam* that "the underlying theme of *Orientalism* is the affiliation of knowledge with power" (xix). The analysis of this chapter considers cyberspace technology as this knowledge that expresses power. As the study illustrates how the novel contributes in the dichotomization of "East/West," it will subsequently make use of sub-theories that play an essential part in the ontology of the novel.

I.   3. Synopsis

Plowing the Dark presents a provocative exploration of the untrustworthy Middle East through an account of Virtual Reality technology. The narrative weaves together two stories that unfold the binary opposite of East and West. The first of these stories documents the psychological collapse of an Iranian American prisoner, Taimur Martin, kidnapped by a group of Shiites called "Sacred Conflict" in Beirut (260). Before being kept as a hostage, Martin teaches English in Beirut. Narrated in the second person, the narrative about Martin refers to him as "you," which perhaps stands for the voice of his consciousness that keeps him from losing his mind (87).

The second narrative questions the relations between art and science and finally politics. Adie Klarpol is a former student of art with technophobia who is recruited by her former schoolmate Steve Spiegel in a mission to help design the "Cavern," a virtual reality

environment situated on the shores of Puget Sound, Seattle (237). Adie and Steve, among other eclectic team programmers, seek to make an imaginary landscape looks real after being created by a system of codes and numbers in the "Realization Lab" (8). The construction of virtual reality culminates in reproducing the famous paintings of Rousseau's *The Dream* (1910), Van Gogh's *Bedroom in Arles* (1888), and the Cathedral Hagia Sophia which dates back to the Byzantine Empire. As Adie and Steve explore and contribute in the Cavern's amazements, the real world falls apart around them: the Berlin Wall collapses, the Soviet Union disintegrates, and Tiananmen Square is nightsticked en masse. Soon Adie suspects that the Cavern, far from being the portal of a new renaissance, will serve uglier masters in the defense industry.

Addie's employment coincides with Martin's kidnapping by Islamic fundamentalists in Beirut. This teacher then finds himself attached to a radiator in a small empty white room where he must survive by the power of his imagination alone, "where the body is chained," martin thinks, "the brain travels" (321).

The dual narrative of *Plowing the Dark* is entirely distinct. It is not only set apart geographically but also presented in a strikingly different narrative mode. Nevertheless, correspondence does exist as the narrative boundaries become interactive and exchangeable when the description of the rooms alternate uncertainly between the narratives. This results in a striking narrative intersection.

While Stevie and Adie try to create their digital gallery, Martin begs to read a book and considers himself lucky to get a Qur'an rather than another beating. These two rooms briefly overlap at the book's end when the digital magic of the virtual Hagia Sophia changes the life not only of Adie, its chief designer, but of Martin also. The East and West meet together in Hagia Sophia where Byzantine mosaics are transformed by the web browser Mosaic.

I.   4. Encountering the Oriental Other

Half of the story of *Plowing the Dark* is devoted to narrate Martin Taimur's encounter with the Oriental Other in Beirut. Martin's confrontation with the territory of the East leaves a significant imprint on Powers's understanding and representation of Oriental identity. Martin's voyage to the East, his teaching experience, and eventual kidnapping by the Muslims, offer a reservoir of metaphors, reflections, and images about the novel's perception of otherness.

Before even starting any discussion about the character's encounter with the territory of the Other, it is significant to begin with one elementary question: Who encounters who in the novel? The story deals with Martin as a bicultural identity much like the protagonist Ahmad Ashmawy Mulloy in John Updike's *Terrorist*. Martin's half Iranian, half American identity may be problematic and productive at the same time, for it provokes a problem of perceptions. As the character's name epitomizes a blend of the cultural identities of West and East, Self and Other, it sometimes provokes confusion whether to "Orientalize" or westernize him, to refer to him as Martin, which symbolizes a particular kind of "American-ness," or Taimur, which symbolizes a kind of "Iranian-ness" throughout the discussion (Said, *Orientalism* 5). What is surprising is that even in studies and reviews about the novel, the character is referred to as "Martin" in certain resources and sometimes as "Taimur" in others. For example, while Natalie Rae Leppard uses the name "Martin" throughout her study concerned with post-9/11 terrorism, Johanna Heil uses "Taimur" throughout her Lacanian reading of the novel. The question, however, that remains is: what is the reason behind this apparent discrepancy in the protagonist's name? The answer to this question proves, after reviewing both studies, that this difference is based on the authors' interest or disinterest in the question of Orientalism. Heil's non-focus on the idea of Orientalism leads him to unconsciously refer to the protagonist as "Taimur" while disregarding any thoughts about

Western-Eastern perception: "in Beirut, it is Taimur's mind that serves him as a symbolic screen onto which he can paint actual memories" (2). On the other hand, Leppard's study is more focused on Martin as a Western eye through which the author rationalizes and theorizes "the steps in logic" Americans define terrorism (87). For this reason, Leppard uses the Western name in her analyses. This study, on its turn, is using "Martin" not because its subject deals with Orientalism more than the fact that Powers himself intends to turn Martin's Iranian identity upside down. In the novel, only one perception is maintained: Martin is not considered an Other, but a Western identity that speaks for the West. The perception of the Other remains fixated on the culture of the East and on the Muslim fundamentalists who took Martin as a hostage. The novel proves that Martin's attitudes are similar to that of a Western tourist. His gaze proves to emanate from a subject who speaks from a privileged position: "your very existence astonishes *them*. 'How can an American have your first name?'" (76 emphasis added). Said's claim of the Western Orientalist tradition of "setting itself off against the Orient" as a sort of underground self is underlined in the novel (3). In a gesture of othering, Martin's reference to the plural pronoun "them" proves his conscious awareness of his Western position. Being Iranian, Martin wishes to be released by the Shiites and tries to convince them he is a Western foreigner who also belongs to the category of the Other. However, he is not allowed to be free because he is once more perceived American by the other side of the dichotomy—the Islamic group. Be that as it may, Martin comes from the West and engages to teach English at school in Lebanon, a fact that perhaps represents an ideal of the modern global West.

After defining the identity perception of Martin, it is now relevant to analyze him as a Western traveler to the Orient. Before his experience in the East, Martin illustrates the Western Orientalist desire to encounter the Other. He feels the urge to escape the American culture and throws "darts at the world map" in order to escape from his home culture (32). His

"pursuit of happiness" eventually leads him to go "down the path that must still lie somewhere to the South" (20). This decision to travel to the Southern hemisphere exemplifies his existential situation of anxiety and malaise from his home-culture, viewed in his addiction to alcohol, the breakdown of his dreams, and the failure of his love relation. Then, his decision to travel to the Orient can be read as a longing to search for a sense of "being," or homeliness, or what Heidegger calls "dwelling" out of place of his culture (Heidegger, "Building Dwelling Thinking" 146). In his existential discourse on "being" (or "*Dasein*"), Heidegger refers to "space" as an essential feature that determines existence, claiming that "being" is "being-in-the-world" (*Being and Time* 80). From this spatialization of "being," Heidegger maintains that being is dwelling, which is to reside "alongside," or "to be familiar with" a place (80). For Heidegger, thus, homelessness is not only founded on the absence of physical dwelling, but also on the loss of "being" itself. As he states it, homelessness is the result of "the oblivion of being" (*Letter to Humanism* 218). Such a phenomenologist understanding of "dwelling" provides a key idea in understanding Martin's homeless spirit in his own home-culture, America. Martin's will to escape "the replay (of) the old routine, the self-triggering cycle of accusations, the verbal razor cuts daubed in love's alcohol" explains his experience of an inner state of homelessness (Powers 32). In order for Martin to encounter the essence of home, perhaps, is for him, a return to his other identity, the Oriental. His personal decision to come back to his Oriental Muslim identity is in order to defeat his internal struggle with being and subvert his homelessness[13].

It is still evident to underline that Martin's ambition to go to the Southern side of the globe is not only grounded on his personal fantasy, but on a rebellious motivation. His rage to

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[13] For a more analytical view on Heidegger's philosophy of homelessness and homecoming in literature, see Bessedik, *A Heideggerian Reading of Jack's Homelessness in Marilynne Robinson's Home*.

American culture, or "Américophobie," to borrow from French thinkers, is admittedly substituted by his plan to encounter an Oriental place for eight months in a period when war has just ended in Lebanon (Toureille and Vallet 135). This pattern of encountering the Other as an alternative to home-culture is repetitive in postmodern Orientalist discourse. Perhaps, there is a way to draw a parallel between Martin's final decision to confront otherness with one postmodern Orientalist like Friederich Nietzsche who openly declared his critique to the West and subsequent peace with Islam. In his *The Antichrist* (1888), Nietzsche claims that:

> …the German aristocracy is virtually missing in the history of higher culture: one can guess the reason…Christianity, alcohol—two *great* means of corruption … .For in itself there should be no choice in the matter when faced with Islam and Christianity, as little as there should be when faced with an Arab and a Jew… 'War to the knife with Rome! Peace and friendship with Islam!': this is what that great free spirit…. (*The Antichrist* 64; sec 60)

Nietzsche's peace with Islam is striking in this passage. Regardless to his disapproval of Christian ideals, which does not interest us in Martin's context, his declaration to embrace Oriental civilization is obviously ensued by his critique of Western modernity. It is his rejection to alcohol and other means of corruptions propagated by Western modernity that leads Nietzsche express solidarity and sympathy with Islam. It is on the same rationalism that Martin's optimistic view of Eastern Oriental culture is founded in the novel. His embrace of the culture of his mother is based on his dissatisfaction with the ideals of American culture in which "Women … tell their husbands, live on camera, that they have lesbian lovers" (140). The spirit of this modern lifestyle is perhaps embodied in Powers's depiction of Western civilization at its decay. Powers explains that "out in the template world, flowers still spill from the bud. Fruit runs from ripe to rot. Faces still recognize each other in surprise over a fire sale. Marriages go on reconciling and cracking up. Addicts swear never again. Children

succumb in their beds after a long fever" (4). Powers visualizes the decay of modern culture through the lack of communication between individuals, the decline of marriages, and people's addiction to the material world. Powers pictures modern Western culture as falling prey to nothing but to its decomposition just like the flowers that fall wastefully from their buds and the fruits that precociously become rotten. In this desolate and mournful tone at least, Powers reminds of T.S. Eliot's description of modern civilization in his *The Waste Land*. If Eliot has put forward a superficial society at a state of degeneration as an account subsequent to the two world wars, Powers presents this account subsequent to the contemporary digital age. In the previously stated passage, there exists a sense of a disturbing routine that punctuates modern life. It seems that the essence of life and humanity is no longer significant for a postmodern individual like it was for Western renaissance men and for Romantics. A Certain boredom from the outside world is underlined in the novel through Martin' and Adie's case which eventually results in the idea of creating a New World Order.

While Adie and Steve resort to Virtual Reality environment as a world that retakes the future, Martin's decision is rather Nietzschean. He perceives his future in the East which, for him, represents a place of a civilization with a spirit. The perception of human life in the Orient is different from that desperate perception applied to the West. As Martin wanders the streets and the cultural ambiance of Beirut, he says, "On all sides of your closed car, life returns to trade. You pass the financial district and the open-air suqs, once more breathing with people. The anti-Ottoman statues in Martyrs' Square seem almost crater-free, from a distance. You hook around the Corniche along the Riviera, avoiding the checkpoints" (72). In this description, Martin's fascination with encountering an Oriental place is startling. The use of the term "hook" in "You hook around the Corniche along the Riviera" reflects Martin's enthusiasm to explore the Orient. Powers's use of the expression "breathing with people," though he is in a closed car, proves the extent to which life in the East is inspiring for Martin

(72). This echoes the idea that while in Western lifestyle people accidently meet in fire sales, people in the Orient do maintain a spirit of a community.

In reporting Martin's travel to the Near Orient, Powers proves to belong to the Orientalist tradition, in all its positive and negative senses that Said has applied to the word. As the novel recounts the beginning of Martin's experience in Beirut, it is understood that Powers's East is to a large extent the East of a host of Western dreams and travelers as it manifests in the early European travel writings of Chateaubriand, T. E. Lawrence, Richard Burton, Ernest Renan, Heiner Muller, not to mention others. As has been previously demonstrated, Martin is fascinated with a fantastic Orient. The representation of the streets of Beirut in the previously stated passage, and Martin's recognition of his life "like a sultan" in it can be considered to summarize Powers's traditional approach to the Orient (74). Powers proves with precision the Western fantasy to revise the old pattern of the Romantics who depicted Oriental "positive history and positive geography" (Said 55). The fascination that Beirut seems to exert upon Powers also shows in his eventual use of Oriental imagery, like "Ramadan" (76), "veil" (73); and his continuous reference to Arabic dialect like "inshallah" (73), "mujahideen" (76), and "sayid" (436). Powers creates Beirut, to use Said's words, as "an idea that has a history and a tradition of thought, imagery and vocabulary that have given it reality and presence in and for the West" (*Orientalism* 5). In this narrow sense at least, Powers does not appear to differ greatly from the vast amount of nineteenth-century Orientalist writers before him. He seems to be recycling what Almond would call "the thousand-year-old reproach of fanaticism" directed to the Islamic Orient (*The New Orientalists* 22).

At some point, when Martin describes Beirut, he calls it "the Paris of the East" (73). In this description, it is necessary to stress Martin's strategy of westernizing an Oriental country like Lebanon. By conceiving an unfamiliar place beyond "ours," i.e. "Lebanon," in

association with a familiar place which is "ours," i.e. "Paris," Martin breaks the ontological and geographical barriers between East and West (73). It is possible to argue that the description of Beirut as "the Paris of the East" is based on the paradigm of religion. One should not be naïve and disregard Martin's awareness of the multicultural population of Lebanon, among them Christians (73). In this sense, Martin's expression seems to argue that Christianity is the only category that tolerates the Middle East to be perceived as having a Western attitude.

Many Orientalists lessen their stereotypic representations of primitivism and terror when it comes to Lebanon. In order to stress asymmetry between Islam and Christianity, Orientalists regard at Lebanon as a more rational place than its neighboring countries like Iran and Iraq. Huntington's claim that Lebanon is the only Arab country to sustain democracy for a significant period is sustained on the fact that Christianity is its dominant faith: "Once Muslims became a majority," he says, "Lebanese democracy collapsed" ("Democracy's Third Wave" 28). One is tempted to claim that Powers shares with Orientalists like Huntington the same insight on Lebanon when he soon dramatizes the kidnapping of Martin by a Muslim fundamentalist group. Martin's initial enthusiasm to encounter the so-called "Paris of the East" and his eventual fall in the trap of what the novel visualizes as Islamic confinement and irrationalism can be read as a "radicalization" of Lebanese cultural identity (43). Among other religious groups, only Islam seems to fit to "orientalize" Lebanon (Said, *Orientalism* 5). This would thus compel us to think that Powers's Orientalist approach toward Muslims is politicized, based on the radical discourse that every Islamic state is tyrannical and tyranny is a distinctive feature of an Islamic state.

The expression "the Paris of the East" has also postcolonial implications. It is perfectly possible to argue that associating Paris, not other Occidental city, with Lebanon transcends France as a postcolonial power in Europe. In delighting to call it "the once-chic orchid of the

eastern Med" through the voice of Martin, Powers tries to universalize Beirut as a postcolonial city that owes a common tradition with France (73). In this sense, Martin's Parisian insight about Beirut proves to be a tool for advancing the political claim that the modern East is a product of Western civilization.

Before Martin encounters Beirut, he was aware that the Lebanese Civil War has ended, that "the foreign armies have left, (and) their president has finally taken the reins" (34). The aftermath of the war is visualized in the streets of Beirut, as Martin observes: "Here and there, steel girders tear loose from the sides of blasted buildings, dragging along sprays of concrete veil. Balconies crumble off high-rises like so many dried wasp nests. Freshly scrubbed laundry from those that remain, blinding white flags flapping in the Levant sun" (73). The devastated urban space documented in this passage represents Lebanese civilization "fallen into pieces." The "blasted buildings" and the crumbled balconied echo a situation and an epoch of frustration in Lebanese history (73). Doesn't this implicate a narrative that paves the way for a new colonial era? Considering the historical fact that the French colonial occupation of Lebanon preceded the aftermath of the Civil War, it becomes possible to argue that novel tends to transcend colonial attitudes toward Lebanon.

Another element worth considering is related to Martin's encounter with the politics maintaining the relation between the United States and the Middle East. Without trying to justify the terrible kidnapping of an innocent American or showing an understanding of it, such an event would confront the reader with the true horror of Islamic rationalism. Martin has no grasp of the true picture of his kidnapping. All of a sudden, he finds himself thrown into a terrifying situation. The novel depicts Martin as an ordinary American man affected by the sudden intrusion of the Other that hurts, which once appeared for him invisible. All the reader can see through Martin's plot is the disastrous effects of Islamic fundamentalism. A mental experiment that can be made at this level is to imagine the same events of Martin's

kidnapping however by one of his old enemies in one of the American cities. Or, worse, how about imagining the same narrative taking place in a big German city in the winter of 1944 after a devastating bombing? Both suggested imaginary settings, I claim, cannot hold in Powers's novel. The point is that these places—America or Germany—would immediately reduce the novel's interest to a subtle domestic terrain in the West. What this means is that the narrative projects a particular concern with the U.S. and the Middle East political relations; it conveys an ideological message residing in the implicit idea that Martin should have trusted his government. What the novel tries to demonstrate is the result of Martin's unfaithfulness and non-commitment to his American identity.

It has to be inserted that Powers's representation of Oriental Islam is purely political in the novel. Among the "Sixteen officially recognized religions," Shia Islam is represented as a sect of Islamic fundamentalism that owes hostility toward America (255). Be that as it may, Powers assumes that encountering an Islamic state necessitates a good background on politics. Martin is aware that Lebanese culture is made up of religious diversity including, "Sunni, Shiite, Druze, (and) Christian" groups (506). He is aware that there is a tension among "Shiite versus Sunni, Maronite versus Orthodox, Druze, Palestinian, Phalangist" (79). However, his naivety and ignorance to the politics defining the relation between the United States and these groups, among them, the Shiites, the pro-Hezbollah group who represent an important ally with Iran, make him pay the price expensively for his voyage to the Orient. The Shiites confirm this when they justify kidnapping Martin as a political action: "Don't worry. Don't worry. This is just political" (84). The reason for capturing Martin is the political belief "you are an American spy. You are CIA" (88). Martin himself finally fears to be killed "for (his) political ignorance" (86). His kidnapping by the Shiites, whom Powers identify as a Muslim fundamentalist group called the "Sacred Conflict," indicates the novel's politicization of

Islam. This feature is underlined by Said when he claims the word "Islam" as used in today's world for more political designation (*Covering Islam* x).

Martin can be ultimately regarded as a victim of perceptions between America and the so-called terrorist group. Martin supposes that "whatever chain of crazed command these hoodlums follow," he will be released because he is not, in fact, a dangerous person (118). He takes for granted that he is actually associated with a man who looks like his "internal clip-art stereotype of an Arab terrorist" (127). Martin, however, fails to understand that the United States has an image problem that includes him as naïve and unaware. One of the terrorists explains succinctly that "America is not your fault…But you are America's fault" (504). The result of this random kidnapping of an innocent victim contributes in the novel's Orientalist representation of terrorism as the form of violence that remains typical to countries "over there." The political strategic calculation behind Powers's dramatization of an American hostage is to transcend a sense of harmony with Martin and hatred to the East.

One other idea has to be underlined in relation to Powers's representation of East-West conflict. In spite of the novel's tendency to stress politics as the underlying feature characterizing the antagonism present between the West and the Middle East, attention is drawn to religion as also part of representation. The very expression "Sacred Conflict," which proves to be the name of the terrorist group, is a metaphor that transcends a religious kind of conflict with the West. "Sacred Conflict" (260), or sacred war, can be safely connected to the Arabic word "Jihad," an idea that implies the stereotype of Medievalism—the dark side of Enlightenment. This confirms a theoretical reverberation that alludes to the idea that kidnapping an American citizen is a direct commandment by the divine. The word "jihad" is a model of much Orientalist discourse. Even before the destruction of the towers, this term was recurrent in Western public and political discourses on the East to indicate the Islamic hatred to the West.

One has to stop here and reflect on the word "jihad" because it has been, and is still, the source of much polemic and controversy in Oriental and neo-Oriental discourses. Scholars such as Bernard Lewis, Huntington, and lately Benjamin Barber, who fall in the repertoire of Western Orientalist writers, draw on the literary meaning of "jihad" as a "striving…*fi sabil Allah*, in the path of God" (Lewis 9). However, their understanding of it deteriorates from its literal meaning. It is actually strictly limited to the notion of war against non-Muslims. Tariq Ramadan, whose understanding of "jihad" follows the reformist approach—that is, his comprehension of it goes beyond the literalists' interpretations, is keen to specify that the word "jihad" consists in the individual's struggle toward justice "to be made at various levels and in various areas" (*Western Muslims and the Future of Islam* 113). Ramadan illustrates that "jihad" can work on the intimate level; on one's self to master egoism and violence; on the social level, in a struggle for justice and fight against inequality and racism; and on the political level, in defense of civil responsibilities, rights, freedom of expression, and so on (113). From this comprehensive meaning of "jihad," it is possible to see how Orientalists do deviate to achieve far more ideological goals. While Lewis presents the meaning of crusades as an early form of Western imperialism, he defines "jihad" as the "Muslim duty—collective in attack, individual in defense—to fight in the war against unbelievers" (9). His understanding of jihad is strictly directed to the fundamentalist interpretations that maintained the world's division between "Dar el Islam," the realm of peace, and "Dar el Harb," the realm of war. [14] Huntington's reference to "jihad" in presenting his theory of "the clash of

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[14] In it inconsistent to disregard the idea of Occidentalism while discussing Orientalism. According to Abu Hanifa, a Muslim scholar and the founder of the Sunni Hanafi school, the world is divided into two parts: Dar al-Islam (literally meaning "house of war") and "Dar al-Garb" ("the house of the West"). According to this concept, Dar al-Islam (or "Dar al-Salam," meaning "house of peace") represents the group of countries in which the main religious

civilizations" is also based on the same reasoning. One perceives that this understanding of "jihad" is radical. Barber himself affirms his political understanding of "jihad" in his *Jihad vs. McWorld*, claiming that "Islam is not an issue" (14). He comprehends "jihad" as "the forces of disintegral tribalism, a reactionary fundamentalism" (14). In other terms, he views it as the antithesis of modernity itself, including economic and cultural globalization, which he dubs "McWorld" (14).

Now, it is possible to highlight the stereotype of "jihad" in Powers's novel and the Orientalist representations it provokes. The recurrence of the word "jihad" in the narrative, as one might expect, is Powers's emphasizing of the evil power of the Middle East against the United States. After Martin is released after eighteen months, one of his friends informs him of his past hostage situation: "jihad, he tells you, Hezbollah" (616). In this Western explanation for Lebanese politics, Powers is lucidly aware of the political use of "jihad" as understood by Orientalists before him. In regretting his travel to the East, Martin visualizes the image of his silhouette in relation to the Islamic meaning of "jihad":

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practice is Islam, while other secondary religions are tolerated. However, "Dar al-Harb" represents the group of countries in which Islam is not their major religious practice. The antagonism between these two "houses" is well clear in the word "harb" ("war"). For Abu Hanifa, the countries of Dar al-Islam should be ruled by an Islamic state and Dar al-Harb is inevitably converted into Islam or be killed (qtd. in Black et al. 42). This Occidentalist reading of the world as such in reference to the Qur'anic Text is considered extreme fundamentalist, and more specifically, a "salafi literalist" reading, as Tariq Ramadan would call it (Western Muslims and the Future of Islam 25). This concept has been eventually criticized by Ramadan, claiming that it neither belongs to Qur'an nor to Sunna (63). He says that Islam is meant for the universe ("lil-alamin"), not for authorities (63).

You hoped to play tourist here once, long ago, in a world past reconstructing. Now you do, checking off the night-etched silhouette against the one filed away in your mental Baedecker. Sic eerie Corinthian capitals, six stray verticals—all that's left of the belief they stood for. Jihad could not have built a more surreal set of your safekeeping. This glimpse of awful otherworldliness strips you up. You stumble, and someone cracks you across the crown of your skull. Then looking is over for this lifetime. (611)

The result of Martin's exploration of the East, as demonstrated in the above excerpt, is an encounter with "jihad." Martin depicts "jihad" as an outcome of "Sic eerie Corinthian capitals, six stray verticals" (611). Corinthian capitals are believed to be columns in the Classical, Greek, and Roman architecture with ornate elegantly decorated (*The American Heritage Dictionary* 1724). Using this image, Martin associates "jihad" with six of Corinthian capitals that certainly represent the six pillars of the Islamic faith. One cannot but hold that Powers has undoubtedly done research on the meaning of "jihad" in Islamic texts. Martin's metaphor of the six verticals can be found in the Qur'an as well as in prophetic texts. This proves Powers to be an Orientalist researcher who contextualizes representation in relation to religious text.

Powers uses "jihad" as a technique for readers to avoid any thinking of a potential universalism in Lebanon. This idea is reinforced by the students of Martin who speaks a language of violence against America in the classroom. One of Martin's students, a "bearded Nawaf" says: "America bosses the world around in English. We need English, just to tell America to go to hell" (75). In demeaning the power of the West, another student represents Martin as the "Rocky" and as the "Terminator" who "doesn't last five minutes against (his) cousin with mujahideen" (76). This representation casts what Almond would recognize as "a militaristic perception of Islam" on Powers's part (*History of Islam* 155). Such inclination to

highlight the persistent hatred directed to the West proves that the students form their identity in opposition to America. It is interesting to summarize Martin's encounter with Lebanon, considering his experience with the students, as a journey from the North to the South, from rationalism to irrationalism, from intelligence to courage, from academic reasoning to violent action, so to speak. Powers essentially repeats the Orientalists' representation of the East as a symbol of backwardness, tribalism, and anti-Americanism. In this sense at least, the energy of these students resemble the Tunisian students whom Foucault has encountered, particularly in the student demonstrations he had witnessed there. As Foucault observed, the lack of a theoretical approach by Tunisian students is compensated with violence and radical intensity (qtd. in Almond, *The New Orientalists* 31).

In this respect, it can be claimed that the novel, being a pre-9/11 narrative, is a construction of the stereotype of "Jihad" as a frame of insight through which the West perceives the Muslim world as a satanic phenomenon. The aim of the previous ideas regarding the image or the cliché of "jihad" is not to annihilate its existence in some extreme fundamentalist thinking but to demonstrate the extent to which Powers, aware of the information he delivers, ultimately demonizes Lebanon and the Muslim world at large. Be that as it may, Powers's cultural projection of the East through Martin's voyage is claimed to be informed by the political antagonism between Iran and the United States. As Martin admits: "your mythic home-away-from-homeland turned, by an unholy alliance of mullahs and American television networks, into a demented parody, a nation of breast-beating crazies run by militant clerics with foot-long bears who captured innocent Americans and held them hostage" (409). This description makes Iran the object of Powers's representation. By so doing, Powers narrows the horizon of his Orientalist discourse from a representation of the East to a representation of Iran and Islamic reasoning, a feature that merits to be studied separately in the ensuing pages.

I.   5. Representing Iran as an Islamic State

In dramatizing an American hostage captured by a Shiite group, *Plowing the Dark* casts Iran as a new threat for the West in the post-Iranian Revolution. Martin's plot and its setting in a locked room serve to historicize the private realm of Iranian politics and its ideology. What is also interesting in addition to Martin's plot is the presence of the image of Iranian Revolution in the Cavern. Adie states that the video inside the Cavern moves to another crowd, floating "in an ocean of mad, mourning black. Now no Mongolian trainees offered up group death. Now just mass self-mutilation, grief over the lost Imam, returned from his state of exile to redeem the world" (243). Powers's incorporation of the geopolitical reality in the Middle East within the atmosphere of Cavern illustrates what Zizek calls the "fantasmatic screen separating it (the United States) from the Outside World" (*Welcome* 49). The screen here can be read as a good metaphor of the separating line that constructs the Orientalist division between the postmodern technological West and "the madness of the crowd" in Iran (Powers 244).

If images of Iran are presented through screen in the Cavern, they are directly experienced by Martin in the setting of Beirut. Even though Martin is not concretely present in Iran, his encounter with his Shiites capturers makes him grasp Iranian politics. Martin puts this clearly when he says, "because you could not come to it, Iran has come to you. It happily exports Islamic revolution into vacuum of this fractured country" (410). Picturing Martin's capturers as a Shiite group held by "Hezbollah," who represents a partner of Iranian politics, brings series of conceptual issues regarding the history, culture, religion, and politics of Iran (Powers, *Plowing the Dark* 616). These categories intervene in the relationship between Martin's lived experience in a prison cell and the way in which the narrative describes it. Nevertheless, one is eager to investigate, at the beginning, the reason Iran attracts Powers's

attention in *Plowing the Dark* while his major concern is generally centered in Western digital culture.

It has to be stated that with the Iranian Revolution, Iran became the target of Western Orientalist representation. Since then, mass media has expressed otherness by focusing on Iranian lifestyle as a mystery and an elusive culture to the West. After those events, the question of the representation of Iran has come to the fore to mark what Said has called "the return of Islam" (*Covering Islam* x). Said makes it quite clear when he says:

> …in 1978 Iran occupied center range, causing Americans to feel increasing anxiety and passion. Few nations so distant and different from the United States have so intensely engaged Americans. Never have Americans seemed so paralyzed, so seemingly powerless to stop one dramatic event after another from happening. And never in all this could they put Iran out of mind, since on so many levels the country impinged in their lives with a defiant obtrusiveness. (5)

This frame of how Iran is perceived by the West is reinforced by the hostile relations of Iran and the U.S following the Revolution and its subsequent aftermath in media. Major news headlines and stories following 1979 have drawn attention to the Hostage Crisis and to the Iran-Iraq war (1980-1988). The 1990s are admittedly saturated with reports related to the Hostage Crisis and the Persian Gulf War. Amid this general atmosphere, the West has approached Iran as a state whose Islamic framework is its main enterprise of evil, fascism, and radicalism.

Therefore, the matter of misrepresenting Iran is mainly religious. For Lewis, because the modern Western man is unable to assign a central role of religion in his matters, he is unable to recognize that other people in another place could have done it, like Iranians (*The West and Islam* 134). For this reason, the situation of Iran is peculiar in the eye of the West:

"Until the Revolution of Iran," Lewis contends, "there was a steadfast refusal on the part of Western media to recognize that religion was still a force in the Muslim world" (135). The novel seems to argue the same judgment proposed by Lewis. In polarizing East and West in two distinct plots, Powers locates mysticism at the heart of Iranian politics while he locates hedonism/atheism in postmodern cyberspace. As illustrated from the voice of Stevie, "Stone circles. Barrows. Temples. cathedrals. Mosques, pagodas" are no longer spaces of power in the Western digital civilization (272). What this statement argues is that neither Christianity nor any other religion fits in contemporary Western culture. Following this, the novel portrays the Western culture at the end of the millennium as spiritless and subject to "the oblivion of (its) Being," to borrow Heidegger's expression (*Existence and Being* 183). It envisages the future of the Western subject as dissolved in the material world brought by postmodern high-technology.

At some point, Powers takes a critical distance from his home-culture when Adie ultimately reproduces the Cathedral of Hagia Sophia[15] in the Cavern, "still the fourth-largest church in the world" and a mosque for five centuries (585). It is important to remember that Hagia Sophia is reminiscent of Byzantine Empire that maintained the Christian faith in ruling the world. This image may reflect the necessity of the postmodern West to act like traditional Christian cultures which centered their politics in religion. The motif of Hagia Sophia, being a place for prayer for both Christians and Muslims, casts the idea of a cultural harmony among Muslims and Christians.[5] Therefore, Hagia Sophia also reflects Islam as a peaceful faith that acknowledges tolerance and harmony with the Christian faith. Powers's admiration of Islam through this image follows the tradition of previous Western travelers to the Orient, who, like Lord Byron and William Butler Yeats, could speak of Islam as a wise religion.

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[15] See Appendix 1.

In Powers's account, Iran becomes an occasion for the examination of his home-culture. The presence of Islam as an elementary constituent of Iranian politics reflects a major difference between the politics of the West and that of the Middle East. In this sense, in order to recognize its state, the West contrasts itself with Iran. In an attempt to approach the intrinsic mystery of Iran as an Islamic State, Powers opts to deal directly with the Qur'an, like Updike does in *Terrorist* in his attempt to comprehend terrorism. In this way, Powers manifests not as a distant observer of a distant alien culture, but as one part of that culture commonly perceived distant. The reference to the Qur'an becomes his means to transgress the boundaries between a Western reader and the reality of an Islamic State.

What is startling about Powers is his perception of the Qur'an as a miraculous phenomenon. In the course of his imprisonment, Martin recognizes the impressive effect of reading the Qur'an. He says,

> The verses themselves evade you. Their linked riddles will not crack. But the torrent of words, their sense-free cadences suffice to hold you, even in the absence of story. Their pageant of sounds drowns out your own incessant dunning. The throwaway phrase 'and the water-bearer let down his bucket' expands in your eyes for hours, sounding in your ear for all the world like a soul-saving miracle, the most magnificent idea, the roundest image you have ever stumbled. (555)

In the above excerpt, Martin's fascination with the Qur'an is striking. In being consciously aware of a peculiar mystery in the Qur'an, Powers manifests as an enthusiastic, sympathetic reporter of a Text he feels engaged in. Martin "feels" that the Text he reads is a miracle that transcends the phenomenological world. He claims, "These measured-out passages keep you tethered in the flux of time. If you start at the *fatihah* and sum the verses you have read, then divide the total by ten, the quotidian yields, by the miraculous dictate of

numbers, the total number of days that have passed since you received the word" (556). These lines illustrate Powers's reading of the Qur'an from a postmodern perspective. Differently from the traditionalists who seek not to understand but to draw blind "fatwah(s)" from the Qur'an, Martin sees that a Divine Text can be approached from a mathematical perspective (442). One is compelled thus to claim Powers's insistence on the possibility of postmodern culture to orient its thinking toward both the technological and the religious, the empirical and the transcendental. What Martin's reading of the Qur'an demonstrates is that the rejection of the divine in postmodernity is centered in postmodernity itself. Martin is convinced that his reading of the Qur'an is different from those fundamentalist Muslims engaged with Iran: "But the secret side effect, the contraband payoff must never have occurred to your captures" (556). This claim renders Islam innocent of any misrepresentation while talking about Iran.

However, Powers proves to belong to an Orientalist tradition when representing Iran. His perception of Iran as an Islamic state is, to a large extent, a mixture of the exotic and the impenetrable. Even though the Iranian Other is fabricated to explain the Self, it remains an epitome of terror for the postmodern Self. One of Powers's approaches to Iran remains predominantly religious. Although it has political underpinnings, Iran is understood by Powers essentially as a tyrannical religious entity. The terror that emanates from the Iranian Other lies in Islam, being an active power that sustains a sense of a community and build revolutionary spirits even among far national scales, like Lebanon, Libya, Palestine, and Syria. The threat that comes from Iran, for Powers, lies in the "madness of Islam," as Almond calls it in his reflection on Foucault's attitude to Iran (*The New Orientalists* 22). Martin ultimately realizes the irrationalism of Islam when he reads about the consequent "criminal" punishment for a thief in Islamic law: "*The man thief and the woman thief. Cut off the hands of both of them, as punishment, for they have done very wrong. An example from Allah, for Allah is mighty and wise*" (559). This ayah reverberates the horror of an intolerant, tyrannical

religion. It illustrates Islamic law as a strict divine opponent not merely to Western non-believers, but to those Muslims fully committed to it. Cutting the next ayah which talks about forgiveness, and forgetting to comment on other punishments in other Semitic religions, Powers demonstrates how the use of an uncontextualized ayah is put to create an alien Islamic identity. This ultimately echoes the idea that the truth of an Islamic State, illustrated in the contemporary Iran or in the time Islamic empire reigned Hagia Sophia for five centuries, is actually oppressive.

Powers's parodic revision of the Qur'anic Text also exposes an irrational Islam. As Martin reads the Qur'an, he becomes consciously aware that the Text, as a reliable tool for the Shiites like his capturers, is absolutely ambiguous: "still, it swells, this staggering dialogue: God, His Prophet, and the cast of broken humanity, in a three-way game of telephone where only endless repetition forces the words to correspond with what they figure" (557-558). The ambiguity of the Qur'anic Text, as viewed from Martin's perspective, resides in its incomprehensiveness. The meaning begotten from the ayahs, according to Martin, resides in an arbitrary association between the words. In this sense at least, Powers casts how fundamentalist Muslim understand the Qur'an.

It bears mentioning that Powers speaks of one great religion called Islam while he describes that same religion as authoritarian and tyrannical. On the one hand, he proves to claim the miraculous status of a religion called Islam, while he pushes it over the other side, into irrationality and insignificance. While he acts as a reporter of a mighty religion, he turns to be a detached reader of an alien belief. In this respect, one is tempted to claim that Powers's insistence on the necessary involvement of faith in the postmodern West is not only a desire to write a moral account on religion that purifies politics, but also plays a central role in marginalizing Islam. Indeed, his proposed blend of religion with the postmodern empirical

thought through reflecting on the case of Iran continues to contribute into the caricature of an Islamic state.

Powers visualizes a tyrannical political state of Iran that recruits young men in the army, "no more than twenty-five," who "waving small arms, hanging out of car windows patrolling both sides of the Green Line" (127). Such an image definitely epitomizes the general approach of the novel towards Iran as a fundamentalist terrorist State. It can be said that the prototype image cast about the evil of Iranian politics lies in the fundamentalist rationalism of Martin's capturers that opposes Western liberal reasoning. When Martin is asked "what kind of name is Taimur Martin?" he is unquestionably believed to be an "American spy," "CIA" (88). Martin, as described by Jonathan Ross Mckey, is a "postmodern hybrid figure whose ironic mode of distancing himself from the situation falls flat on the radicalism of the terrorists" (Mckay 153). Therefore, the fundamentalists' rejection of the idea of half-American/half-Iranian identity lies in the Islamic radical resentment to the West that the novel seeks to mirror. The result of the fundamentalists' philosophy is to kill hostages, like registered after the Iranian Revolution in 1979:

> For every violence, we will give a violence. You kill, we kill. You play trick on us, we bomb your embassy. You bomb our village, we kill your marines. You think you are hurting us? You are doing good for us. You make us strong. You let Israel destroy Shantila? We kill you on that airplane. You bomb us at Tripoli? We kill three hostages just like you. (504)

The root of terrorism in the Middle East is projected to reside in Iranian fundamentalism itself as an agency that performs its acts in the large Arab world, through Libya, Palestine, and Tripoli. The image of violence stressed in the above passage by no means reinforces the stereotype of the Oriental, and the Iranian in particular. An important Orientalist motif employed in Powers's passage is the representation of the Oriental as illogical and generally

difficult to deal with. Oriental irrational violence exposed in the novel can be closely associated with what Said calls Oriental "picturesque streets" (*Orientalism* 38). Said's remark on Orientalist descriptions of the mind of the Oriental features the same motif when he says, "the mind of the Oriental, like his picturesque streets, is eminently wanting in symmetry. His reasoning is of the most slipshod description. Although the ancient Arabs acquired in a somewhat higher degree the science of dialectics, their descendants are singularly deficient in the logical faculty" (38). In this way, Powers contributes in presenting the Iranians and Middle Easterners in general as both ontologically and epistemologically different human beings. The use of the second person narration "you" puts the reader in Martin's position as a Westerner, and hence, as an enemy of Iran. When Martin is told "you kill…you bomb…you let Israel destroy," both Martin and the reader are informed of a declared war because of their implication with American politics in the Middle East (504). By drawing on this cliché, Powers structures the imperial gesture of Western imperialism towards the Arab world and the Iranian State as its political source of ideology.

The novel's political representation of Iran is also underscored through picturing Iran's fierce resentment to Israel. Martin is told by one of his capturers that "when (he) was a little boy, (he) love(s) the Palestinians" (502), and that the Israeli people are "bad people, evil people" (503). These statements demonstrate that the Arab-Israeli conflict is a fact in representing Iranian politics. The capturer's ultimate claim "Now a real army will tell the Israelis a lesson" confirms Powers's approach towards Iranians as the real Islamic community that will engage in the Palestinian question (503).

Powers's discourse on Iran remains Orientalist throughout the novel, especially as he persistently identifies Iran and the Middle East as inferior to the West. A strong Master/Slave dialectic is maintained by Powers in order to consistently emphasize his Orientalist approach to Iranians. Firstly, in the virtual reality Cavern, the West is conceptualized as the Master

whose object of authority is to hegimonize world reality, including Tehran. One of the plans of the Cavern is to recreate the 1990; for example, to "reverse-calculate the last oil crisis," "to do political events as well" (123). Though the Cavern is a medium through which the characters may walk around in crayon worlds and Van Gogh's paintings, it is home to technology used for battle in the first Gulf War. The Cavern, as a symbol of power, becomes a theater of the next televised devastation, showing everything because the "helicopters filmed it in detailed pan, from a thousand attentive angled" (687).

What makes this dialectic unique is the way it combines the awareness of the West as a master of the universe as a whole by the use of high-technology. O'Reilly's is convinced that manipulating politics is possible if "we (the programmers) can date the universe, if we can come up with the theory of evolution, if we can shoot electrons through semiconductor channels" (194). The discourse of the Master is ultimately grounded in "reinventing the terms of existence" (160). In this dimension, Western new technological inventions, including cyberspace, can be read as what Lacan calls the "Master-Signifier"[16] at its purest i.e. it epitomizes Power in itself, while the position of servant, or slave is absent.

Second, in the other plot, Martin's humiliation by the Shiites and his eventual imprisonment in a locked room makes him embody the figure of the Slave. This simultaneously highlights Iran at the position of the Master after the Islamic Revolution. Powers reminds the reader of the fact that "Persians were masters of the world back when the Greeks were in preschool" (410). In this frame, he presents Modern Iran as oppressive to Americans. What makes Iran repossess power against its enemy is keeping hostages, as Martin illustrates it, "They mean to break your will. They find this cute. Some kind of victory of the world's downtrodden, to make America wet its pants" (166). The fact of keeping

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[16] For the concept of the "Master-Signifier," see (Lacan, *The Other Side of Psychoanalysis*, 89).

Martin as an "uncashable token held to impress an enemy who doesn't grasp the first thing about the rules of exchange" is what makes Iran control its enemy (108).

However, if one looks at the novel from the lens of the Hegelian dialectic of Master/Servant, one cannot avoid a paradox: even though Martin is part of the order of Slavery, he is discursively sustained as the Master. It is underlined through Powers's parodic descriptions that Martin is the absolute Master within his prison cell. Regardless to his function as a teacher in the Middle East before being kidnapped, which produces the Orientalist idea of the West as a "Master-mind" of the Orient (Said 89), Martin is convinced of his superiority when he ignores his capturers: "you feel your power over him, power that comes from your total indifference" (152). In this way, Martin succeeds to move beyond his role as a slave by "giv(ing) no hint of the power the enemy holds over your (his) feelings" (185). While martin's capturers are presented as the masters of their victim—Martin, they quickly turn to be his slaves when they ask him to teach them English. In this frame, Powers reverses the hierarchy of the Iranian Master vs. American Slave. Martin's discourse of power is illustrated in his description of one of his captives as "the Cockroach Man of Beirut" (186). Martin's diminishing of men of Beirut to a position of a small insect is a strong Orientalist discourse. However, this Orientalist description is not rooted in Martin's underestimation of the Oriental, but it is because he is convinced that "they are slow learners" and that they have "the insect brain" (186). This representation applies to Said's explanation of the Orientalist maxim that "the European is a close reasoner," "a natural logician, albeit he may not have studied logic" while the Oriental's "disordered mind fail to understand what the clever European grasp immediately" (*Orientalism* 38).

Worthy of mentioning is the novel's eventual presentation of the Iranian pain for its failure in front of the West. This is embodied in Powers's description of the capturers when Martin finally gets free from his prison cell: "the sight of your freedom drives your guards

insane. Bodies fly shouting through your room, enraged. Shadow puppets, through your blindfold, rush around in clumps, testing the lock, searching your cloths, slashing at your mattress with knives….Voices lash at one another, spitting through the teeth like cornered rats." (326-327). Added to the fact that Martin's freedom is for the reason that one guard forgot to lock the room again, it fits to claim that Powers maintains his claim of the non-intelligent Oriental. Powers's caricature of the capturers again supports the Orientalist tradition that suggests that the East is evil and inferior to the West. It illustrates his attitudes towards the Oriental Other who is considered hostile and depraved from civilization.

Powers's subversion of the position of Iran as the Master of world power in Martin's plot reinforces what he has maintained in the Cavern—the West as the Master of the world through computer technology. More pointedly, if one reads both plots from one thematic perspective, it fits to state that the novel seeks to argue that keeping American hostages does not lessen America's power. Though keeping hostages gives the Iranian Other power in face of the West, it remains "virtual" in the eye of the West because such power is not embodied in knowledge and scientific advancement. Regardless to the category of knowledge that has defined the Master/Slave dialectic in the novel, there are other categories that maintain the novel's Orientalist binary thinking. These are what to be explored in the following pages.

I.   6. Setting Opposites: West *vs*. East

The essence of Powers's novel resides in the very gesture of setting opposites between two different worlds. Two different stories in two different rooms is Powers's way to draw a clear cutting-line between the ideas of West and East. In an interesting way, the narrative epitomizes the essence of Orientalism as it distinguishes between the culture of the Self, set in through the Cavern, and the culture of the Other, set in Beirut. Through this Orientalist logic, Powers puts forward a group of binary oppositions that still continue to shape much of

Western attitudes towards Arabs and Muslims in the contemporary era. Through framing his narrative in cyberspace technology and in post-Revolution Iran, Powers re-articulates the epistemological differences between the binaries of West *vs.* East, (post)modernity *vs.* archaism, freedom *vs.* non-freedom, intellectual power *vs.* physical power, democracy *vs.* anarchy, morality *vs.* immorality, and reason or mind *vs.* body. As the present discussion will read how these dichotomies are forged amid the dynamics of revolutionary potentials of new technologies and of the first moments of the post-Cold War world, it allows a renewed understanding of the relation between the American Self and the Middle Eastern Other. Importantly, also, while studying the "violent" hierarchies that Powers exposes in his dual narrative, the discussion tends to deconstruct some of these hierarchies. The objective of this gesture is not to destabilize Powers's Orientalist representation of the superior West and inferior East; it is to present a radical questioning of how the values of superiority are distributed in the novel. The result of overturning some of the oppositions will be to trace Powers's Orientalist ideology and make it more explicit.

The first binary opposition that shapes the structure of the novel is geographic. Powers's interest in targeting the Orient as a major topic for his novel is demonstrated in locating Martin's plot in an Eastern city, Beirut. As previously documented, Powers has never had a direct geographic contact with the Oriental Other. If one takes this fact into account, Powers's Lebanon would fit to be what Said calls "imaginative geography" (*Orientalism* 49). It goes without saying that constructing an image of Lebanon "based on (a) cultural, linguistic and ethnic unit" without actually experiencing it is constructing the Orient as a myth, or as Victor Gordon Kiernan has called it, a "collective day-dreaming of the Orient" (Said 50; 131). Representing the Middle East in reporting its political conflict with the United States in the 1990s is Powers's way to conceptualize the clash between the two cultures which perhaps

does not exist. This attitude exemplifies the way in which the West desires to (re)create its Other as an alien culture.

The imaginary line between the Orient and the Occident becomes more visible especially when Martin's story is juxtaposed with Adie's storyline in the ideal setting of the Cavern, in Seattle. Together with Stevie and other engineers, Adie works in a Realization Laboratory full of wires, 3-D, multiplanar, software, caches of chrome, screens, and plenty of other devices in order to create virtual reality. This cyberspace universe, in which characters experience a futuristic lifestyle, represents the Western postmodern age at its uttermost advancement. It represents modern Western society that Baudrillard has characterized as "Hyperreal" (*Simulacra and Simulation* 5). The Cavern, as a place of fiction of the real, fits to be paralleled with Baudrillard's Disneyland, what he thinks to be an example of modern "culture of simulation and of fascination" (110). In explaining the way simulation destroys the real and produces hyperreality, Baudrillard draws a parallel between the fictional place of Disneyland and modern society that has replaced all reality and pure meaning with signs and symbols. For Baudrillard, Disneyland is "a regeneration of the imaginary;" it is a place where "dreams, phantasms, the historical, fairylike; legendary imaginary of children and adults" are recycled (26). In this conceptual framework, the Cavern also manifests as a Disneyland, since it functions as a dream world, a laboratory of practical fiction. Like Disneyland, the Cavern is claimed by Powers to "reach the far end of the simulation" (228). In this sense, science or cyberspace serves as a pure simulation. As it is applied by the programmers on all living things and made invisible, it becomes as Baudrillard says, an omnipresent fourth dimension, that of the simulacrum" (16).

The novel's celebration of the complexity of Western postmodernity manifested in the digital landscape of the Cavern implicitly reflects the extent to which the East is intellectually backward and underdeveloped vis-à-vis the West. This idea finds a good illustration in

Powers's depiction of Martin's superior position in front of his students: "your very existence astonishes them…you are their model, their messenger from the outside world" (77). This statement is informed by the Orientalist view that puts Martin in a position of superiority, in both spatial and temporal dimensions. Being Western and coming from a culture in its profound relation with modernity, Martin's identity is viewed prophetic, as if it comes from an unknown future. This discourse in itself projects not only a conception of the West as modern but also the Orient as still stagnant in time.

While the Cavern represents a medium of liberation for its workers, the room in Beirut is identified with restraints and enchainment. Martin's encounter with the Orient and its multiculturalism has ended nowhere but in a prison cell of an Islamic fundamentalist group. This fact presents Islamic fundamentalism as a locus of confinement for modern Western identity. It represents it as a system which prohibits all the liberal values of the West. Fundamentalism is put here as contradictory to Western democracy and the freedom of human being. Martin's experience of "self-annihilation" and "live burial" in a Beirut basement eventually represents Islam as a "space" of confinement (123). Martin's deprivation of reading by his captives and of seeing daylight during eight months echoes the image of fundamentalist Islam as the underside of Western enlightenment.

Speaking on the cultural and religious levels, Islam is represented as non-tolerant, strongly rejecting any traditional, historical, or cultural ties related to Western liberal values. As said from the voice of Martin, in Beirut, a golden colored hair even under the required head scarf is a "westoxification at its finest" (402). The term "westoxification" is clearly composed of "West" and "toxic" in a way to portray the toxic ideological invasion of the West that superimposes its civilization upon the world. It is significant to remember that this term—"westoxification"—is underlined by Huntington to maintain Islamic intolerance toward Western modernist ideals (*The Clash of Civilizations* 101). Yet, the term originally

comes from the Persian term "Gharbzadegi" and is first termed by Ali Shariati, one of the Iranian revolutionaries, to describe the results of Iran's modernization (*The Oxford Dictionary of Islam* 337). It is significant now to argue that since the term is dubbed by an Iranian, its use by Powers definitely has the target to expose the restrictive ideals of Iranian fundamentalist Islam. Powers pictures Iranian Islam as a political category, an Islam that resists cultural imperialism, a thing that Said underlines to be a new form of colonization after the Cold War and the fall of the Soviet Union (*Culture and Imperialism* 282).

This Orientalist insight projected in the novel does not differ from the kind of representations a whole century of Western Orientalists were making about Arabs and Muslims in general—that Islam is illiterate, violent, and that it is socially unjust. Though Martin's mother, Shahnaz, is grown up in different Arab regions like Basra, Kuwait, and Doha, she never felt at home until she came to the United States. Shahnaz declares plainly that "*People in the Midwest are so friendly. So ready to take you in*" (403). This statement reflects the cultural restraints of Islamic societies and visualizes the "unenlightened" condition of Islam vis-à-vis women and social equality. This representation eventually puts Islam in its traditional place as the opposite of Western liberal values.

In contrast to the restrictive state of an Islamic society, Powers describes freedom at its highest manifestation in the Postmodern West. As illustrated through cyberspace, the West experiences "all the degrees of freedom" (291). A simple click on a button, for instance, is enough to view the whole world: "he stood at the base camp of pure possibility, his remote puppet free to roam the universe at will" (182). What unites the programmers together in Seattle is declared through their project in the "defeat of time and space. The final victory of imagination" (275). This desire to transgress the phenomenological world is what illustrates freedom in its pure sense in a modern Western seociety. Steve admits that "programming blew my thinking loose. Absolutely liberating. It freed me up in a way that I hadn't been

sinc…" (375-376). To translate this into Lacanian words, what Steve admits to be "absolutely liberating" lies in transgressing the Symbolic Order and confronting the Real which he experiences through Virtual Reality (376). To go a step backward, one has to quickly explain these Lacanian orders in order to illustrate Powers's conception of modern Western freedom. The Imaginary, the Symbolic, and the Real are Lacan's three elementary psychoanalytic orders that represent the matrix of human everyday experience. The Imaginary realm, related to the order of the ego, is the universe of fantasies and imaginary ideas constructed by the subject. This dimension of images can be exemplified by the subjects' belief in mythic figures, like dragons and gods. A good illustration of the imaginary realm can be found in Lacan's example of the idea of falling in love. Lacan claims that it is the Imaginary which is invoked when we fall in love; we strive to make two into one, to achieve wholeness through union with an imagined other (*The Four Fundamental Concepts* 205). However, the Symbolic order is what constructs the external world and its meaning. It is mainly about language, signifiers, and speech that represents and organizes our experience of the social world. While the Imaginary and the Symbolic are conceived by Lacan as inadequate in themselves, the Real is perceived as complementary to these two orders. In Lacan's theory, the Real stands outside the realm of culture and psychology, and remains foreclosed from any analytical experience which is mainly linguistic. Lacan perhaps makes it clearer when he states that the Real is "prior to the assumption of the symbolic, the real in its 'raw'," meaning that the Real is the pure ideas and thoughts that resist to be represented through language or symbols (280). To explain this further, one can find in ancient philosophy a similar notion to this Lacanian concept—that of Ideas or Forms theorized by Plato, since these constitute the realm of pure reality, the realm of the ideal and the eternal that is subject to imperfect representation. It is for this reason that Lacan considers the Real as the realm of "the impossible" that can be approached but never grasped (280). In postmodern theory, Baudrillards's notion of

"hyperrality" also provides a good thought in reference to the Lacanian Real. In the world of media, hyperrality is a model reality that is simulated through T.V. and media, something that is more real than reality and that is impossible to achieve (*Simulacra and Simulation* 68). It fits now to understand Powers's conception of freedom in the light of the Real. The latter, which Lacan perceives to be a site of impossibility and impasse, is dramatized to be attainable through cyberspace. In the Crayon room, for example, the programmers could turn abstract dreams into real; they could transcend the physical world and explore a pure abstract idea of an environment like "a hailstorm of aquamarines" in both spatial and temporal dimensions (21). As Powers describes "…the shards condensed, reassembling into a blue sailing. The three of them stood in their own bodies, under a blazed sky. Yet they floated above the scene they looked at, canted at an impossible angle. Adie's knees buckled. She pitched forward, compensating for this snub of gravity. When she righted herself, so did the Crayon World below" (21-22). This description proves that virtual reality is ideal in the eye of the programmers. Their perception of freedom is in the sense that they are capable of a "free and infinite creation" of reality through cyberspace technology (557). For the programmers, creating the code is what provides "absolute possibility" to confront the Real order, the order of perfection; it is the key to "the defeat of time and space" (275).

While the world of Islam is visualized as finite in the novel, the world of technology and mathematics is viewed as the only way that leads to the Infinite. This primarily implies that the West perceives itself as a divinity in itself. In the novel, Powers illustrates that the modern West is no longer relying on God in order to live in reality. This idea reminds of the compromise the early modern Western mind has engendered with its recognition of science: the conflict between reason and faith, science and religion. While it was possible for the West to move forward without recourse to the divine since the beginning of the scientific revolution and the early enlightenment, it is now possible for a modern Western and for the posthuman

to replace the image of the divine with the triumph of cyberspace technology. This idea can be well illustrated in reference to Don DeLillo, in his response to the destruction of the two towers:

> Technology is our fate, our truth. It is what we mean when we call ourselves the only superpower on the planet. The materials and methods we devise make it possible for us to claim our future. We don't have to depend on God or other astonishment. We are the astonishment. The miracle is what we ourselves produce, the systems and networks that change the way we live and think ("In the Ruins of the Future" 37).

In the novel, Powers illustrates the same perspective. His description of the Cavern demonstrates that with cyberspace, man is able to redefine divinity and humanity. Earth and mankind might be the metaphysical pivot of God's creation, but that status can no longer be supported by a purely technological mind which sees itself as the master of creation and the universe. This is visualized in the programmes' ambition not to escape from the world but in their desire to transcend the world.

> The computer changes the task. Other inventions alter the conditions of human existence. The computer alters the human. It's our complement, our partner, our vindication. The goal of all the previous stopgap inventions. It builds us an entirely new home...You know what we're working on, don't you? Time travel, Adie. The matter transporter. Embodied art; a life-sized poem that we can live inside. It's the grail we've been after since the first campfire recital. The defeat of time and space. The final victory of the imagination. (275)

In the Cavern, it is possible for the human to create air, gravity, light, time, "dimension, color, surface, motion" and all the immensity of existence (393). By using mathematics in this, it is possible to create creatures, fruits, trees, shadows, and "every picture in existence. Every last

image ever imagined or imaginable" (52). Programmers are able not only to imitate reality but to create reality in itself through mathematics. To be sure, O'Reilly believes that God created the universe out of statistics. When Vulgamott says that he "believe(s) that God created the world one high-resolution frame at a time. And on the seventh frame, he rested," O'Reilly responses that reality is computerized by nature (142). O'Reilly thinks that the "world is numbers racket, all the way down" and that "even miracle-preaching evangelists, God love them, make their point statistically" (143).

Read from an Orientalist perspective, Powers's divinization of Western thinking serves to advance the political claim that the West is able to dominate the world. There is no doubt that in Powers's mind, America is uniquely positioned to lead the world, a view that indirectly hints at the culture of the Other as a sort of a minor intellectual power. The implication of leading the world through cyberspace is the same idea of globalization that Said understands as a modern form of imperialism. For Said, globalization cannot maintain a neutral order of the world but expand and extend control of the cultural Other: "there could be no neutrality: one either was on the side of empire or against it, and, since they themselves had lived the empire (as native or as white), there was no getting away from it" (*Culture and Imperialism* 279). In the novel, hegemony is also maintained as a subjective phenomenon. The Cavern is portrayed to reproduce a super ideological power that dominates the Southern/ Eastern hemisphere. When Freese, one of the programmers in the Cavern, claims that "*We're engineering the end of human existence as we know it*," Rajasundaran, one of the marginal characters, reacts: "Not as I know it, White Man" (471). The latter statement is a clear argument that the novel's perception of the future of the world is a matter of dominating or being dominated by the Other. Articulating "White Man" in itself indicates the presence of a cultural conflict.

It is curious to notice that freedom is distributed in a strange and non-balanced way by Powers in order to structure his Orientalist binary opposition between Western freedom and Eastern fundamentalist non-freedom. Although virtual reality in the Cavern embodies some kind of hypostasized agency which does not really exist, Powers talks as if virtual reality holds a multitude of potentialities: "This room lingers on the perpetual pitch of here. Its low twighlight outlasts the day's politics. It hangs fixed, between discovery and invention. It floats in its pure potential, a strongbox in the inviolate vault" (4). As the impossible is more and more possible in the Cavern, the fundamentalist group in Martin's plot remains an embodiment of non-freedom. However, to speak at a more fundamental level, the novel's representation of an obscene religious fundamentalist group is not only presented through the notion of deprivation as exerted by religion. The fundamentalism of Sacred Conflict presented in the story designates almost the exact opposite of non-freedom: the Islamic fundamentalism pictured in the story is characterized by the endorsement of a sort of false, obscene freedom that permits them to kill, rape, steal, and torture. A true religious fundamentalist would never concern himself with such religious prohibitions, for these disastrous forms of freedom are not supported by religious law and restrictions. Martin himself makes Sayid admit that "the Prophet say(s) that you must never steal," despite the fact that he actually permits himself to steal (558). This paradox is what indicates that religious fundamentalism is actually politicized in the novel. Powers's Orientalist ideology, then, creates a sort of demonization of religious principles using the paradigm of fundamentalism as a main representative argument.

The opposite of the obscenity of the Islamists' freedom manifests in a similar way inside the Realization Lab in the Cavern. Despite the fact that the Cavern represents a new home for its workers, providing them a space for celebrating their free-thinking and imagination, it nevertheless presents a dangerous form of deprivation for them. Non-freedom is displayed in the characters' hard work in the laboratory. Labors enjoy working during

midnights, twighlights, and at all hours in their cubicles. After being recruited, Adie feels "like the mole-Woman" because she finds herself working for a whole year underground (271). Adie is put in "that Ramada Inn lab at the bottom of a mine shaft, with the flock of video cameras and microphones pointed at her around the clock" (270). Because programmers are sheltered far from the outside world, they ought to step "outside the sunlight now and then, if only to refresh (their) personal hit points" (194). This sort of imprisonment is akin to Martin's who is put in "a recessed well in the floor of a van" (124). However, what is interesting is not the fact that the characters are un-free, like Martin. What is quite interesting is the fact that these characters are content with their situation of non-freedom, contrary to Martin. It appears for the programmers that they experience a true liberation while they experience an actual imprisonment. Doesn't this idea echo the same paradigm of late-capitalist materialist ideology? Doesn't this cast the underside of total freedom promised by virtual reality as an instrument of Capitalism? This eventually visualizes the true state of postmodern identity mesmerized by late capitalist ideals.

One has to rely here on Slavoj Zizek in order to explain the hegemonic ideology exerted upon the programmers in the Cavern. Zizek, as influenced by Marx and Lacan, thinks that modern Western culture is controlled not physically but psychologically by Capitalist hegemonic ideology which manifests itself in various forms in societal practices. In his vision, individuals are living in a "post-ideological" era in which capitalist fantasy of commodity fetishism permeates contemporary daily life (*The Sublime Object of Ideology* 27). He believes that capitalist hegemonic ideology functions differently from the old feudal system in which the relation between the dominant and dominator was visible (31). In this era, for Zizek, individuals perceive themselves as free from ideological presuppositions while they are led strictly by utilitarian motivations (31). The point is that individuals are though conscious of the domination of the capitalist system, actually continue to enjoy it and inscribe themselves

into its values. In this sense, Zizek refutes Marx's formula of Capitalist fantasy "they do not know it, but they are doing it" (29), claiming that the ideological illusion lies in the "knowing:" "they know very well how things really are, but still they are doing it as if they did not know" (30).

Relying on this Zizekan insight, it fits to claim that the programmers in the Cavern experience a sort of non-freedom that is perhaps more dangerous than that exerted on Martin. In depicting how the Cavern functions, Powers re-presents contemporary Western society as also experiencing the same cliché of fundamentalist imprisonment. Social control and domination manifested in modern society, as in the Cavern, do not appear directly as a limitation of individual's freedom; rather, it appears at their very self experience. Zizek thinks that people nowadays do not take ideological presuppositions seriously. He believes that in social reality, while individuals are buying commodities, watching movies, and advertisements, are subject to invisible orders which sustain their apparent freedom (*The Sublime Object* 17). People, though they know that their idea of freedom is masking a particular form of exploitation; for example, they are forced to buy a certain product, to watch T.V., and obey social authority, they still continue to follow these orders. This hegemony is manifested in the same way in the Cavern. Exploitation can be viewed in the programmers who are addressed by authority not as subjects doing their duty and sacrificing themselves; but as objects who should continue to obey the need of the factory of virtual reality. Spider is one of the programmers in the Cavern who from time to time "forgets to breathe" when working at the screen (101). This image shows the extent to which the Cavern represents a utilitarian, and/ or a totalitarian enterprise. Instead of helping Spider breathe or showing some care about his state of "coma," Stevie's egoistic interest makes him worry only about his expertise: "keep breathing, Spider… We need your expertise" (102). Stevie's "objectification" of Spider is because he sees him only in so far as he possesses a commodity

that could satisfy the Cavern (Marx). What is paradoxical is when Adie takes Spiders' situation seriously and "the two men exchanged looks" and claimed that "It's OK" (101). What is most paradoxical about this is that Spider himself acts as if there is nothing wrong with him.

The Cavern, in this sense, presents an accurate depiction of how a postmodern Western capitalist society works. Spider's condition, as well as his other partners, is a condition of imprisonment like that of Martin. Following this, it has to be inserted that while Powers's narrative seems to create the Orientalist hierarchy of the free liberal West *vs.* totalitarian authoritarian East, it in reality proves religious fundamentalism and late-capitalism as having the same authoritarian ideals of despotism. In reflecting on this, it can be said that Powers, in his gesture of portraying each regime, pictures two possible conditions of the end of the millennium, or to go further, of the end of the world: a world dominated by Islamic fundamentalists in which people are subject to total absolute tyranny, and a world dominated by late-capitalist ideology which invades the individuals' psychology. Freedom as well as non-freedom are determined in Powers's story by the will to dominate over the Other. In describing the fundamentalists who imprison an American, Powers shows how they seek to attack Western freedom. On the other hand, in defining the elementary goal of the Cavern to predetermine the world, Powers illustrates the Western desire to attack the freedom of the Other and dominate the whole world.

It remains essential to underline that Powers's representation of the modern West and its reality is identified by "idealization." Following the previous analysis on the West's divine attitudes to lead the world, one is tempted to highlight that "idealization" is one of Powers's significant ideologies that manipulate the Orientalist binary logic of the good West vs. evil East. Again, it is essential to revisit the idea of freedom as an idealized concept so as to highlight the degree to which it reverberates Middle Eastern inferiority. Henri Rousseau's

painting *The Dream* can be a pure illustration of Powers's idea of freedom that he inscribes to the West. In their attempt to create a new world reality, programmers choose Rousseau's painting, among others, as one fascinating environment in which they hope to dwell. The artistic painting is not used to be imitated in order to create reality; rather, it actually becomes reality in itself inside the jungle room.[17] The underlying idea of this painting stresses the freedom of being able to live inside imagination, which may be seen as the ideal definition of freedom given by Powers. In the painting, Rousseau features a woman lying on a divan to the left of the painting, gazing at a jungle landscape with diverse fauna and flora. The essence of freedom celebrated in the painting can be viewed not simply in this free woman pictured inside nature. Instead, it is featured in the idea that landscape, with all trees and creatures in it, actually exists in the woman's mind. It is interesting to see how Adie, Spider, Rajan, and Ebseen discuss this idea in the jungle room:

> Steve Spiegel broke the spell. *Explain something to me, Adie? What exactly is the dame on the sofa doing in the middle of all this malaria action?*
>
> Ha. *Does that trouble your little bourgie norms?* Adie jabbed her college chum in the ribs, her first attack on his underbelly in a dozen years. The underbelly had grown softer in the interim. So had the jab.
>
> Sue jingled her tire-iron bracelets. *She's listening to the music, obviously. To the spooky ebony guy in the Day-Glo skirt.*
>
> *No, no*, Spider said. *She lives there. She's some kind of jungle spirit. Like the other.*
>
> *Like him.*
>
> *Yeah, right. On a Louis Philippe divan?*

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[17] See Appendix 2.

Uh, Rajan wavered. *You white people do happen to notice that she'sbuck naked?*

No one heard Karl Ebesen enter the room, until he snarled. Idiots. *The woman is not in the jungle. The jungle is in the woman's living room. It grows in through her window, while she dreams.* (114-115 emphasis added)

The ideal sense of freedom, then, resides in the invisible relation between the woman and the jungle, a fantasy that has become reality in the Cavern. The object of invoking this painting is to elucidate Powers's conception of freedom which has no place in the setting of the Orient. The Orientalist idea that can be conveyed through analyzing both Western and Eastern cultures, is that the West, through cognition and imagination, is regarded as a privileged enterprise. To be sure, despite the fact that Martin is imprisoned, he could get beyond the shackles of his cell through imagining artistic musical compositions, his girlfriend's birthday, and eventually the same images mapped by Adie in the Cavern. The idea of imagination or thinking echoes the nature of the Western liberal thinking as opposed to fundamentalist restrictive thinking. For the capturers of Martin, Martin is unable to escape from the prison cell; however, Martin is convinced of his freedom: "where the body is chained, the brain travels. In captivity, every inference is the freest flight. Nothing stops your associations and keeps them accountable" (321). In opposition to the intellectual West, the East is pictured a place of illiteracy: "in this world, books are not even a luxury. They are an obscene irrelevance" (501). While the West is pictured as liberal and more engaged with reading, the Oriental Other is viewed as illiterate and obsessed with despotic thinking.

Representing the West's strong relation with knowledge and technological advancement is an ironic tool of claiming cultural and political dominance. Powers's representation of the technological West confirms its legitimate hegemony. To say this in Said's terms, the West is "dominant because we (the West) have the power (industrial,

technological, military, moral), and they don't, because of which they are *not* dominant; they are inferior" (*Culture and Imperialism* 106). While power in the East is viewed through Jihad as a strong political agency, Western power lies in the infinite potentials of technology that is able to virtualize the Other. By the end of the story, Adie learns that the Cavern will be used by the U.S. military in order to create missiles to bomb the Iraqis. When Adie asks Stevie "what have we been doing here? Are they using the same electronics as us?" he answers that:

> the Air Force invented virtual reality half a century ago. Mission trainers, flight simulators. The army made the same computer, back when the game was still about beating the Nazis. They've been hip-deep into VR from the beginning. APRA built the Net. They invented the first microprocessor. You sow the Whirlwind, you reap SAGE…if you want to know the truth, we're stealing their code. (679-680)

The military use of VR is an epitome of technology as a dominant power of the West. The novel's depiction of the Cavern can be read as a vision of the end of history in which the United States is believed to be the future hegemonic culture, which suggests that the U.S. perceives itself in an era of maturity which, after the collapse of communist states, seeks out millenarian dreams of annihilating the Islamic Other.

From the above analyses, it can be highlighted that the narrative structure of *Plowing the Dark* reflects Powers's Orientalist binary thinking that defines a rigid discrepancy between the West as fanatic to high-technology and the East as fanatic to religion. Cut off from the rest of the novel, the Cavern can be regarded as an epitome of the contemporary West or the future of the West as a digital civilization. While the ontology of the Cavern manifests in a very advanced "unprecedented" technology, Beirut is defined in terms of irrational violence and regressive traditionalism. In this way, such a polarization "contributes in constructing the Orient as more Oriental and the West as more Western," as expressed by

Said (*Orientalism* 46). By projecting the Middle East as a place that celebrates acts of "mujahideen," Powers implicitly visualizes it as a medieval and an anti-modern territory. The definition of Western hope is conceptualized as creating art and virtual reality in the future of the West. However, in the Middle East, it takes the form of the Arabic word "Amal," i.e. "hope," which is articulated in the novel in Arabic as A*fwaj al Muqawamah al Lubnanya*. The Lebanese Resistance Battalions" in the Orient (436). The Arab individual in Beirut is viewed as a religious fundamentalist who is ready to "blow himself away with 2,000 pounds of TNT, taking 241 Marines along with him to the heaven of martyrs" (261). Such a representation of Islamic fundamentalism proves to be a pre-9/11 stereotype.

Up to this point, I have dealt with five major Orientalist oppositions defining the binary between West and East: modernity *vs*. archaism, freedom *vs*. un-freedom, intellectualism *vs*. illiteracy, and intellectual violence *vs*. obscene irrational violence. These oppositions celebrated in Powers's narrative do mirror Orientalist stereotypes that have practically been a tradition in the Western mode of representing Islam and the Arab world. In this way, Powers's binary logic presented in the novel takes the form of the Orientalist scheme that Benjamin Barber described in his *Jihad vs. McWorld*, which defines the other side of Western modernity in terms of Islamic traditionalist rationalism, ideas of "fierce politics of religious, tribal, and other zealots" (1). In a similar way, Powers seeks to argue throughout the novel that the East is a culture in control of its religion that has remained stagnant in history. This idea is well illustrated in Martin's declaration while in the prison: "time is more of an enemy than any other terrorist" (253-254). On the opposite side of the dichotomy, the West is represented as that controls itself and controls its Other. This idea of Western hegemony is what is going to be further elaborated in the following title.

I.   7. Western Hegemony in the Age of Cyberspace

In the novel, the world of virtual reality, for all types of transcendences that it provides, can be grasped as the ideal American Dream that America has never dreamt about before. It is nonetheless a good metaphor for the American Dream to dominate the future of the world. Though the Cavern appears neutral, i.e. it appears as non-ideological and objective, it nevertheless proves to follow a particular political orientation since it is used by the military. This pattern is characteristic of a despotic regime whose *raison d'être* necessarily exerts an implicit type of hegemony. Excessive fidelity to cyberspace results in a West that seeks to exert a permanent revolution in the world. In so far as the fundamentals are embodied in cyber-technology, the West thinks to generate itself as a superpower that lives in the world itself and for itself.

Like Islamic fundamentalists who prospect to defeat the West and lead the world, cyber-fundamentalists also envisions to dominate the world. Both represent a corrupted authoritarian state eager to impose its hegemonic power on its Other. In their conversations about the Cavern, engineers usually refer to the whole world as a subject of reference to indicate that their purpose considers "digitizing" world-reality at large: "the Cavern is an experiment in assembling several advanced technologies. We simply want to see what the world is going to look like a few years down the rail cut" (91). This longing to consider the question of how things appear indicates the imperialist enthusiasm of postmodern technology. It highlights that postmodernism is an ideological idea "par excellence" that seeks to lead the future of the world. Stevie openly admits Western hegemony to Adie when he says that the Cavern aims at an "insidious plan for world domination" (8). This illustrates that the standard motif of cyberspace phenomena is to create a New World Order in both existential and political extents.

In a process of elaborating on "ideology" as a phenomenon pervading our daily life, Zizek considers cyberspace as one of its "active agent(s)" (*The Plague of Fantasies* 118). Zizek claims that the new technologies of postmodernism are ideological spaces, for they involve the non-knowledge of its users about its "ultimate Truth" (167). For Zizek, as for postmodern writers on cyberspace, the scientific digital universe is believed to be a universe of a "naïve trust in the screen which makes the very quest for 'what lies behind it 'irrelevant'" (168). The American professor of social studies on science and technology Sherry Turkle has written an accurate formula when she said that the contemporary man is witnessing a move from the modernist "culture of calculation" toward the postmodernist "culture of simulation" (19). This transition is explained by Zizek in terms of "transparency" in order to illustrate the mechanism of ideology (167). While Modernist technology is "transparent" in the sense that its user is supposed to comprehend "how the machine works" and has direct access to its system, postmodernist "transparency" indicates the exact opposite (167). The user of postmodern technology has no direct access to what lies behind the screen. As Zizek explains it, he is led to "renounce the endeavor to grasp the functioning of the computer, resigning himself to the fact that in his interaction with cyberspace he is thrown into a non-transparent situation analogous to a mode of tinkering (bricolage) by trial and error" (168). For this reason, Zizek calls cyberspace an "opaque technology" (168), a place of "vanishing mediators" (166). Following Zizek's claim, I propose that the Cavern's hegemonic ideology lies in the very "invisibility" of the space between a code and virtual reality.

In considering the novel in relation to the previously explicated cyberspace ideology, one has to elucidate the Cavern and the frame through which it is made to perceive the world. In its fictional universe, which Powers calls "the room," or "chamber," cyberspace can be described as a computer network of information that projects the world in a virtual form. Once in this room, Adie encounters the landscape of virtual reality system inhabited by

computer programs and simulacra created by artificial intelligence (4). Non-transparency, as claimed by Zizek to be a symptom of cyberspace ideology, is manifested in the computer network of the Cavern that Adie and other programmers fail to understand. Adie is dissatisfied with the programmers' answer regarding her question "what makes the pictures?" (47). For her, the very process of translating algorithm into a picture is still abstract and vague that makes her re-ask her unsolved question: "what makes the pictures?" (47). Her failure to understand the computer programs is not because the system is complicated or it exceeds her cognitive capacity. Rather, it is because postmodern technology is "invisible,"[18] as claimed by Zizek (27).

The system of Virtual Reality is not only controlled by artificial entities but also by "intelligent" agents: Jonathan Freese, the Realization Laboratory director; Ronan O'Reilly, the econometrician who hopes to predict the outcome of world events; Karl Ebeson, the visual designer; and Stevie, Adie, and many others who work as computer programmers. This sort of administration that manipulates the dream-like world of the Cavern can be read as a perfect

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[18] In his *The Plague of Fantasies*, Zizek says:

> The postmodernist 'transparency' designates almost the exact opposite of this attitude of analytical global planning: the interface screen is supposed to conceal the workings of the machine, and to simulate our everyday experience as faithfully as possible (the Macintosh style of interface, in which written orders are replaced by simple mouse-clicking on iconic signs ...); however, the price of this illusion of a continuity with our everyday environs is that the user becomes 'accustomed to opaque technology'—the digital machinery 'behind the screen' retreats into total impenetrability, even invisibility. (167-168)

embodiment of a hegemonic regime that controls world future politics, economics, environment, and reality.

Behind the invisibility of the 3D computer-generated virtual reality, it appears to the naive programmers that the purpose of the Cavern is pure enjoyment. Perhaps, the gap that separates cyber-fundamentalist programmers from religious fundamentalists concerns this idea of "fantasy" framed in the physical world. One can draw an analogy here with Nietzsche's Zarathustra who left home and the outside world to descend in a cave where no star shines. The characters' existential situation in Powers's novel bears a semblance to Zarathustra for they also descend in "some subterranean confection of dripped stone, with blind cave newts" (5). Significantly, however, the characters in the Cavern apply to Nietzsche's idea of the "Last Man" whose main purpose of life is absolute comfort and enjoyment (*Thus Spoke Zarathustra* xx). The postmodern Western subject, as illustrated through the programmers, represents the antithesis of an ideal human, for its indifference to world reality and non-commitment to any specific existential purpose. For the programmers, hard work is invested in the creation of ideal spaces, a world of fantasies. Freese's declaration "none of us knows what to do with this stuff" is a pure example of the "purposeless" object of the Cavern and of the postmodern West (92). When Adie asks "(she) need(s) something specific to do," the programmers advise her "Make us the most beautiful Cavern room you can think of. Learn things. Enjoy yourself" (92). Such an answer points to the superficiality of the Western subject whose "nut of existence would be hollow," to borrow Nietzsche's words (43).

Adie delights to reproduce her favorite artistic paintings, like Henri Rousseau's *The Dream* (1910), and Van Gogh's *Bedroom in Arles* (1888). It seems that the Cavern creates a non-political, idealist space for the post-human; it appears to annihilate the Orientalist binary logic between East and West. In mimicking famous European paintings, the Cavern becomes

a landscape of a Western tradition inhabited by simulacra of a globe for "Mankind's next migration" (129). However, Adie is unaware that the room holds more serious potentialities: "this room lingers on the perpetual pitch of here. Its low local twilight outcasts the day's politics. It hangs fixed, between discovery and invention. It floats in pure potential, a strongbox in the inviolate vault" (4). The formulation of the chamber "floating in its pure potential" acknowledges a hegemonic discourse embedded in computer network; its major interest is to maintain power against the culture of the Other. The globe that the programmers created, which seemingly constructs what Bhabha calls "a third space" i.e. a space of cultural hybridity, actually enunciates division and draws borders between West and East (*The Location of Culture* 36). In his description of the zoom function in Cavern, Powers says:

> O'Reilly assigned the wand's thumbwheel to a zoom function. A little scrolling and the Earth swelled to a medicine ball or imploded into an atom. With the rub of a thumb, Afghanistan, as it had lately in the world imagination, ballooned from an invisible speck to a billboard that filled the field of view. . . . The crust of countries that the projectors served up looked even better from the underside than from the out. (205-206)

In fact, what lies behind the screen "destroys" this mirror of representation in which culture is as a homogeneous and unified in the Cavern. The description of the world of Virtual Reality expresses a radical thought that casts a sense of division in world geography. It is clear that the manipulation of cyberspace is fused with discursive structures which produce the polarities of East and West. The characters' use of images like Aladdin and the Arabian Nights in constructing the utopian world of the Cavern indicates that the East remains a "tableau vivant" in the Western mind. Ebesen makes a significant comment about Rousseau's painting *The Dream* when he says: "Idiots. The woman is not in the jungle. The jungle is in the woman's living room. It grows in through her window, while she dreams" (115). This

statement fits also to illustrate the vision the presence of the East in the mind of the West—in the Cavern. The image of the East is a process of Western imagination like that of the jungle in the painting.

It is interesting to notice that Powers's references to Arabian Nights and to the Qur'an follow the Borgesian way of approaching Islam. Almond claims that Borges's repeated reference to the Arabian Nights is his standard metaphor for infinity (65). Drawing an analogy with Borges is significant since Powers himself admits his influence by Borges.[19] Following this, isn't it accurate to read Powers's references to Islamic symbols and to the Orient in the Cavern as a metaphor of eternity, too? This idea claims that Powers perceives Islam as an eternal being, an infinite phenomenon, while the postmodern remains a physical, mortal phenomenon.

It is this palpable division that makes Powers's writing on cyberspace Orientalist: the discourse of difference of human identity is located in the division of nature. What this idea of zooming emphasizes is that the "seeing eye" must contemplate what is invisible: the heterogeneity of national space (677). In the space of the Cavern, it is shown, the East is always present. The Iranian Revolution is, as well, projected in the Cavern, as Adie stood watching "the madness of crowds" (244). This virtualization of Iran in cyberspace indicates that the Western mind is always anchored in its Other. This defining of the Western self-image is also epitomized in O'Reilly's conception of future economics in the Cavern. It is presumed to depend on a pattern of petroleum consumption which itself "depend(s) upon oil price, and oil price depends upon Western Arab relations" (212).

The Cavern, hence, displays a characteristic of a virtualized world of hegemony. Powers's epistemology of cyberspace represents a fictional world situated within a Western tradition and which controls the politics of the East. His representation of cyberspace proves

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[19] See (Burn 171).

to be a means to express the Western desire to explore the Orient. In this sense, one can conclude that Powers's cyberspace is never separated from the politics of representation precisely because it is a projection of racial and cultural conflicts. Fundamentalism is one category that illustrates a racial and a cultural conflict between East and West in the novel. Re-presenting fundamentalism in *Plowing the Dark* is perhaps what makes the novel significant to be read as a terrorist novel. In what proceeds, the image of fundamentalism is closely analyzed in the light of both cyberspace technology and the Hostage Crisis.

I.   8. Representing Fundamentalism in the Age of Cyberspace

The Islamic fundamentalist group perceives itself as a conflicting force to the West. Sayid, as he recounts his story to Martin, says that "You know souq al Gharb? I live in souq al Gharb. All Lebanese live in souq al Gharb. Americans bomb…from souq al Gharb. …from a boat, out in the water! Because they know we will kill them dead if they come to us on the land" (501-502). Sayid's emphasis on the East's concern in "Souq al Gharb," which might figuratively mean "the politics of the West," openly declare the anti-American attitudes and the never-ending antagonism between the U.S. and the Middle East. (501). Sayid continues to argue that the object of this antagonism is an endeavor to dominate each other's culture:

> No, no. The world wants us dead. Good; fine. The whole world is our Karbala. Too bad for the world. For every violence, we will give a violence. You kill, we kill. You play a trick on us, we bomb your embassy. You bomb our village, will kill your Marines. You think you are hurting us? You are doing good for us. You make us strong. You let Israel destroy Shatila? We kill you on that airplane. You bomb us at Tripoli? We kill three hostages just like you. (504)

It is clear from the above passage that Sayid, whose voice represents fundamentalist thinking, echoes a discourse of a never-ending violence maintaining East-West relations. It appears for

a fundamentalist that violence resides in physical rather than intellectual power. Said is convinced that jihad is a strong state of power that becomes even stronger through U.S. military violence against it.

Dealing with the image of fundamentalism, however, is dealing with a more recent and complicated stereotype, especially after postmodernism and globalization have presented a radical shift in world cultures. Two points complicate this issue. The first is the significant number of scholars and writers in the West who, in order to present such a sophisticated image about the Islamic world, celebrated the term "fundamentalism," and relatively "terrorism," while it was almost entirely absent in cultural and political discourses before 9/11. Pre-9/11 fiction writers like DeLillo in his *Players* (1977) and *Mao II* (1991), Updike in his *The Coup* (1978), and Tom Clancy in his *The Sum of all Fears* (1991), are among the precursors who familiarized the image of Islamic fundamentalism as an Orientalist stereotype. These writers, as well as historians like Bernard Lewis and Huntington who dedicated their energies to focus on the Islamic Orient in the nineties, present a warning about the danger of Islam right before the actual destruction of the two towers. The second point is not simply the existence of "fundamentalism" in public discourse, but the extent to which writers do deteriorate from its original meaning when it concerns Islam.

It is significant to remember that the Western perception of Muslims and Arabs as aliens, or rather enemies, remains a fixed insight ever since the first contacts with Arabs and Muslims (Said, *Orientalism* 26). However, by recycling terminologies ascribed to the Arab Muslim world, since the Middle Ages till the contemporary period, Islam appears to have multiple identities through the long run of epochs. For example, the Western perception of the Orient in the Middle Ages has particularly characterized Muslims as "erotic," "primitive," and "slave traders" among many other stereotypes. Without actually effacing these images from public consciousness, the West continues to fabricate more stereotypes. With the Western

colonial expansion in the nineteenth century, Muslims were caricatured as "savages," "brutal," and "illiterates" who needed to be civilized by the West. However, terms such as "fundamentalist," "terrorist," "totalitarian," and "jihadist" are what largely define a Muslim notably in the contemporary world. In his *The New Orientalists*, Almond has precisely noticed this phenomenon of varied stereotyping through history exclusively in the postmodern period, as he notes that:

> If an antidote to modernity is required, a version of Islam suitably medieval will be summoned; if the argument is in favor of a decentred pluralism, then the 'marginal' traditions of Islam—Sufism, mysticism, pseudo-heresies—will be foregrounded appropriately. The 'otherness' control of Islam, like the volume control of any stereo or radio, can be turned up or down according to the required context. (195)

The same strategy of "othering" Islam described by Almond applies in Western Orientalism throughout the ages. The history of the demonization of Islam in Western thought proves to be subject to constant development and change in order to reinforce Western virtue and purity (Almond, *The History of Islam* 2). The West, being at the center, is comfortable to choose semantic determinations and select whatever aspect of the periphery it wishes about the Islamic Orient, which explains the high degree of eclectic representations involved about Islam throughout the ages. One has to recognize that these different representations of Islam and of the Arab world as contrasted to the ideal self-image of the West are not simply to preserve the boundaries of Islam as a sublime threat to the West. Rather, there is a much more extreme position that lies behind the surface of Western views of the Orient which are political, as it is supposed to be emphasized in *Plowing the Dark*. As Shaheen admits in his report in how the U.S. represents the Arab world in Hollywood movies, politics and stereotype images are linked and do reinforce each other (101). Here, one is tempted to take

the Saidian position in order to claim that the absolute horizon of all Orientalist representations is primarily political. In the early Middle Ages, Said observes, Islam appeared to the Occident as a fraudulent religion because it has been perceived as concurrent to Christianity (*Orientalism* 59). While the threat of Islam has remained mute during the Middle Ages and the early Renaissance, the situation in Europe after the fall of the Ottoman Empire has developed to more like a military resistance to "control what seems to be a threat" of Islam (Said 61). The representation of the Muslims as barbarians, savages, and illiterate, was taken to support the rationale of "Manifest Destiny" or "white man's burden" to civilize/ Christianize the barbarians at the period of Western colonial expansions. After the Eastern world was no longer threatening for the West, the situation becomes alarming in the time of the Iranian Revolution, which Orientalists view as "the return of Islam" (Lewis, *Islam and the West* 133). It is easy to notice, hence, that though Islam has one face in the eye of the West, its representation is made to respond the different Western political intentions.

It is time now to analyze the Orientalist ideology of representing the Islamic world in the novel as a religious fanatic in opposition to the West as a liberal, digital civilization. In deconstructing this opposition, I propose that though modern Western rationalism perceives itself as liberal, it is actually characterized by the same way of Islamic reasoning. That is to say, I consider both the Middle East and West as fundamentalists in the novel. In order to elaborate on this argument, I will use the term "technology fundamentalism" in order to describe the modern West. On the other side of the dichotomy, I claim that the metaphysical concept of Islamic fundamentalism is typically decentered with Powers's representation of "Jihad" and of religious fanatics in Martin's plot.

It is important to start with the very definition of fundamentalism in order to study its representation in Powers's narrative discourse. The idea of devotion to radical fundamentals is what primarily features the notion of fundamentalism. According to the *American Heritage*

Dictionary, the term "fundamentalism" means a movement, or a way of reasoning characterized by a rigid adherence to fundamentals or basic principles (2965). Still related to this sense, the meaning of fundamentalism is defined as a "literalist" approach to the text (Ramadan, *Western Muslims* 190). Interestingly, the notion o fundamentalism is used to describe the Christian fundamentals. As Roxane L. Euben defines, fundamentalism literally refers to an early twentieth century American Protestant movement that called for a religion based on a literal interpretation of the Bible (16). The use of this term is known to emerge in 1910 with the publication of the *Fundamentals* (1910), twelve pamphlets that attempt to outline the central tenets of the Christian belief (Naydan 100). Taking into account this typical use of the term "fundamentalism" in association with Christianity, one is forced to rethink of this concept in the context of the Arabic language. Surprisingly, a review of such a term proves that there is no word in Arabic that exactly translates as the English "fundamentalism:" the closest word in Arabic that approximates its meaning is "usul," the plural of "asl," which designates "root," "origin," "source," or "foundation." It can be inserted now that the term "fundamentalism" might be Western and its association with religion and fanaticism is Western too. These pejorative connotations brought in contemporary political discourse are what "guarantee(s) misunderstanding" of a religion such as Islam (Shepard 368). With Huntington's thesis of the clash of civilizations, fundamentalism becomes "polluted" with the idea of fanaticism, where the disciples of violence and irrationalism are infused. In this respect, fundamentalists become described as "religious Stalinists," which reflects a caricature of Islam as "the "Green Peril" (green is the color of Islam) advancing across the world stage" (Euben 6).

From the above definition of "fundamentalism," it is surely not necessary to point out which text is involved in defining who a fundamentalist is. Whether Qur'anic Text or otherwise, the concept of fundamentalism remains theoretical. Malise Ruthven is accurate

when she suggests a link between fundamentalism and applied science which she regards as a reason without having to adopt epistemological doubt ("Was Weber Wrong?" 19). Interestingly, in her book *Fundamentalism*, Ruthven also talks about "market fundamentalism" as a dominant policy in Washington that forces economic restraints on the developing nations (21). Another term also presented in today's public discourse is "environmental fundamentalism" or "ecological fundamentalism," which believes in an urgent act to ensure against the possible greenhouse effects, contrary to those who believe in the positive effects of global warming on plant and population growth (Moore 23). Radical feminism is also used to describe feminists who strictly believe in the elimination of masculine authority in society (Willis 117). By now, it is clear that the meanings, or the possible applications of the concept of fundamentalism in the contemporary era, stay far beyond the umbrella of religion. What can be distinguished about the contemporary issue of "fundamentalism" is that it is widely framed that it includes religion, market economy, environment, government, and so on.

If the possible applications of fundamentalism are diverse, then, one can speak about "technology fundamentalism" as a basic feature of postmodern Western thought. This is strongly supported in the novel by Powers in the description of the Cavern as a high technology reality. Mainly, Powers's description of how Virtual Reality is created in the Cavern corresponds exactly to the definition of fundamentalism as a literalist approach. In the Cavern's world of software, it is claimed that reality is created through a "mimic" of codes (52). "A few trillion bits of math," is used "to fool a few billion years of ocular revolution" (22). This might be an exemplification of Ruthven's view that applied science is a pure fundamentalist approach. The programmers' radical belief in the strict rules of mathematics is what I claim here to be an accurate illustration of what I might call "cyber fundamentalism" in the novel. When Adie fails to grasp the rationale of the Cavern, programmers are put to

explain to her Virtual Reality strictly in terms of codes that generate reality. It is as if the programmers do not grasp the functionalism of the Cavern; or as if its program gets "stuck" in a violent cyclic repetition of application of formulas. In principle, the link between mathematics and Virtual Reality is of the same nature as the link between the text and reality in religious fundamentalism. As the novel demonstrates, Islamic fundamentalism functions in this repetitive "non-understood" application of formulas taken for granted. Martin's mother is one example who illustrates this feature, as she memorizes the Qur'an "without her understanding more than one in a dozen words" (556). It is in the same way that the programmers create virtual reality. As they try to convince Adie, who is not a mathematician, creation consists simply in "draw(ing) up genetic algorithms" (62).

In Martin's plot, fundamentalist thought is based on religious text. The capturers of Martin think that world reality is based on "repeated commands" of the Text (558). When Martin bags one of his capturers, Muhammad, to read a book, he answers: "We will do a fatwah to see if you can have a book" (442). It appears to Muhammad that all world phenomena are radically linked to Text. This fundamentalist reasoning finds example in the case of Adie when she asks if "mathematics… is enough to get fake leaves to look real" (58). Kaladjian, one of the programmers, responds her by rectifying: "math is enough to get real leaves to look real" (58). So, again, this statement indicates that the programmers in the Cavern radicalize world reality as an entity of a mathematical code exactly like the Muslim fundamentalists radicalize reality in terms of theology. Again, it fits here to emphasize that religious fundamentalists like Muhammad, Said, and Ali; and cyber fundamentalists like Stevie and other programmers, are in many ways the same. Although they believe in different truths—one presented in the Qur'an and the other in "math…the greatest paint-by-numbers kit in the universe," they do celebrate the same way of reasoning (69).

By following the same analogy with Islamic fundamentalism, one should also demonstrate how cyber fundamentalism manifests as fanaticism in the world of the Cavern. The radical reasoning of the mind of the programmers turns to be a pure commitment to cyberspace. Jackdaw, one of the programmers, cannot address Adie because he does not feel comfortable to talk to "Living female things" because "their firmware algorithm eluded him" (42). This means that Jackdaw is an extremely fanatic to mathematical data and his attitude to a woman resembles in a way the same Muslim fundamentalist attitude to women in the Middle East. The programmers' fascination with cyberspace is perceived as obscene. The power exerted on the programmers is displayed in this enjoyment of this "empty" repetitive creation of VR. Repetition and enjoyment play a significant role in defining extreme cyber fundamentalism in the Cavern. This obsessive fascination with the imitation of abstract formulas can be compared to Islamic fundamentalism itself. In the novel, as Martin reads the Qur'an, he demonstrates that the Text is mere repetition of commandments, "where only endless repetition forces the words to correspond with what they figure" (557-558). Yet, he learns that repetition is what renders the Qur'an a symbol for authority: "But this time through, you already know what the *surahs* hold. And all those repeated commands to Say, Say at least force you to take the idea live, into the realm of surprise, of real listeners" (558). This idea of repetition as a category of fundamentalist thinking can also be compared to the political practices of aggressive Stalinist and Nazi ideologies. For example, the repetition of direct authoritative formulas in the Orwellian world, like "Big Brother is Watching You," creates a mode of addiction to the rules of Big Brother in people's consciousness, which actually leads to an eventual moral indiscrimination. Hannah Arendt, in her *The Origin of Totalitarianism* (1958), explains that a totalitarian regime relies on the principle of stasis in order to maintain power (456). Arendt's understanding of totalitarianism cannot but appear convincing if recognized in the case of the Cavern. Doesn't stasis, as observed by Arendt,

correspond to the idea of everyday machine-like repetition of applied formulas to create VR? The whole plot of the Cavern can be identified in this idea of stasis as the programmers are put to work days and nights in their cubicles in order to obey the demands of TeraSys Company. Importantly, Arendt claims that totalitarian terror erases anything that is idiosyncratic in the subject and it transforms human nature from its root (457). In the Cavern, the annihilation of the human subject finds example in Spider, whom Adie finds sitting, "intent upon the screen, but dazed. Frothy, arrested, viscid, like someone in the first stages of hypoglycemia" (100). Perhaps, Spider's perception of cyber-reality as a virtue is what makes him unaware about his paralyzed mental state. What accounts for Spider, it seems, is the way the ideology of the Cavern is transformed into a dream which continues to legitimize exploitation and domination. The utopian character, according to the programmers, is to be fully asserted to the virtual dream of the Cavern. Therefore, the uprooting of human nature that Arendt maintains manifests exactly in the paradox of enjoying exploitation in the Cavern.

Fundamentalist fanaticism, whether perceived through theology or cyberspace, leads to absolute terror. In talking about the Islamic fundamentalist group "Sacred Conflict" in the novel, it can be noted that radical commitment to religious Text displays not only in creating "black-haired, sleek-bearded" army, but most importantly generates concrete acts of violence, like bombarding the U.S. embassy, bombing American supermarkets, and capturing hostages like Martin (127). To analyze this crime pattern, it can be claimed that it is precisely this belief in a superego authority i.e. God, that such crimes seem heroic and moral to religious fundamentalists. It is this perception of the divine will that legitimizes any possible immoral act in Martin's plot. The functioning of this fundamentalist fanaticism can be paralleled again to all forms of totalitarianisms. If one looks closely at an atheist regime like Stalinism, it proves that a political leader, who can be compared to a fundamentalist subject, is not an authoritative agent who dictates obscene rules to the public; rather, he is exactly as a radical

servant to a particular ideology, like communism. In the Stalinist regime, a true communist perceives himself as a direct instrument of the rules of communism, like fundamentalists perceive themselves as instruments of the Divine. By the same token, talking about Islamic fundamentalism leads one to argue that fundamentalist individuals in the novel are never perceived "authentic beings," to borrow from Heidegger (*Being and Time* 70). Rather, they display as mythic subjects who radically believe in an imagined idealized point of reference which functions even in political resistance. What creates the image of the Oriental in the novel is this representation of "blind" phantasmatic obedience of the divine in politician contexts, so to speak. The fact that Sayid pronounces his hatred to the U.S.: "We like America angry. America makes us angry" demonstrates that the Islamic fundamentalists engage not only in religious fundamentalism but in racist fundamentalism in particular (422). William Butler Yeats is accurate when, in his poem "The Second Coming," says: "The best lack all conviction, while the worst / Are full of passionate intensity" (7-8). These two lines fall true when talking about the representation of Muslims as excessive religious fanatics in comparison to the so-called liberal West. "The best" which is the West, is no longer able to fully engage with God, while "the worst," Muslims, engage in perverted fanaticism.

True fundamentalism, according to Zizek, is practiced without jealousy or hatred (*Violence* 85). For him, an authentic fundamentalist (whether Christian or Muslim), does not lack faith, and is therefore characterized by "the absence of resentment and envy" and a "deep indifference towards the non-believers' way of life" (85). When in his conversation with Martin, Muhammad asks: "do you believe in God?" (293). Martin is consciously aware that Sacred Conflict's fundamentalism is immoral, and hence, wishes to tell him "anything he wants to hear" (508). This means that the Islamic fundamentalism projected in the novel is represented as haunted by the attitude of resentment with regard to the belief in which non-Muslims engage. Interestingly, also, Sayid's declaration "I live in Souq al Gharb," meaning "I

live in the business of the West," means that the primary occupation of Islamic fundamentalism in Lebanon is the West, not religion (501). This implicitly reflects the novel's constructing of a purely political version of religious fundamentalism. One is tempted to restate Lacan's famous reversed dictum of Dostoyeski: "If there is no God, nothing is permitted at all" (*The Ego in Freud's Theory* 128). The same formula is applicable to the religious fundamentalism projected in the novel. If no forced religious authority existed, the very freedom of fundamentalist believers lead to absolute terror.

Cyber-fundamentalist fanaticism, as well, results in absolute terror. Radical commitment to modernity and to high-technology, by which the Western individual perceives himself as liberal, expresses an excessive passion for the abstract cyberspace. The aim of the programmers in the Cavern, it proves, is not to reproduce world reality but to dismantle it and change it. Particularly, the world of the Cavern manifests as an economic company that seeks to undermine the meaning of the human and of existence. Zizek, in his article "What can Psychoanalysis Tell us about Cyberspace?" (2004), well explains the danger of cyberspace when he claims its eventual transformation into a dystopian world: "This, then, is the Real awaiting us, from utopian (the New Age or 'deconstructionist' celebrations of the liberating potentials of cyberspace), to the blackest dystopian one (the prospect of the total control by God-like computerized network…)" (802). Zizek's phrase "God-like computerized network" indeed features in the Cavern. What the programmers seek to do in the Cavern is the divine task to create reality and administrate it. More pointedly, the programmers do not intend to create a copy of reality, but to create the code that corresponds to the ideal reality, the "pure abstraction" of reality (138).

One cannot proceed but put into more plain words Powers's philosophy of the Cavern in his novel in order to arrive at a more comprehensive argument about the programmers' divine will to control the world. In the novel's own terms, the home that the programmers are

after is not a world of "becoming" (688), subject to chance and constant change; it is rather a world of "being," which is stable and eternal (250). The philosophy of *Plowing the Dark* leads to explain the programmers' "God-like" task in terms of Plato's well known theory of the Forms. Plato claims that our world of appearances is less real than the world of the Forms, the world of Ideas. For him, everyday world and its objects is an imperfect imitation of metaphysical ideas outside our physical reality (*Republic* 18; bk. 5). The Forms, for him, are a set of perfect, absolute essences of reality that transcend the empirical world and give it its forms and meanings. Plato asserts that a particular like Helen of Troy is not a Form, like ancient Greeks assumed it, but a copy of the Archetypal Idea of Beauty that partakes in it. It fits to comprehend Plato's notion of the Form/ Idea as a realm of the divine because it is unchanging, eternal, and absolute. In the novel, the world of virtual reality is assumed to be this Platonic world of absolute Ideas and Forms in which the characters seek eternal dwelling. Using software, the ambition of the programmers is to bring the Realization Lab into eternal perfection and find excess to a room beyond representation: "we're putting together a prototype immersion environment we're calling the Cavern" (11). Adie may directly express this Platonic object of the Cavern when she says: "Oh God. You mean, like a big View-Master? That's what you're saying? I'm going to live the next seven years of my life in a giant View-Master?" (45). Adie's articulation of the Cavern as a "View-Master" undoubtedly designates the realm of the celestial. To return to the idea of cyber-terror, the programmers' excessive ambition to transcend the physical world can be read as a gesture of excessive authority. Cyberspace, in its creation of reality itself, reflects the Western desire to create a New World Order.

Therefore, the ideology of the Cavern is shown in its intolerance to world reality. This is well illustrated in Stevie's declaration when he says to Adie: "The computer changes the tasks. Other inventions alter the conditions of human existence. The computer alters the

human. It's our complement, our partner, our vindication, the goal of all the previous stop gap inventions. It builds us an entirely new home" (275). The message of the ideology of the Cavern is clear: the U.S. is an empire that redefines the human in terms of machine. Such an approach exemplifies terror in the authentic sense of the term. The ideology of the Cavern, with its absolute system of codes, its readiness to sacrifice many of the programmers' lives for its goal, is in pure semblance of the violent totalitarian system. The previous definition of totalitarianism proposed by Arendt, that it consists in transforming human existence from its root, seem perfectly to endorse our argument here. Like religious fundamentalists who are claimed to be "unauthentic" following their corrupted fanaticism, the programmers are also unauthentic following their excessive commitment to cyberspace.

Both fundamentalisms manifested in religion and cyberspace technology are represented as "shadows" to cast their state of falsehood and corruption. I use here the word "shadow" following Plato's parable of the cave.[20] Plato's idea of the cave typically applies to Powers's Cavern. Yet, the word "cavern," that comes from "cave" in itself suggests to understand Powers's fictional setting of virtual reality in terms of Plato's "cave." Putting the idea of Powers's Cavern besides Plato's provides a good illustration of the unreality of the postmodern technological West. Like the prisoners of Plato's cave, the programmers are also confined inside the walls of the Cavern. The programmers dwelling inside the Cavern and,

[20] In his *Republic*, Plato compares the condition of human beings as prisoners chained in a subterranean cave with an open entrance to the outside light extending along the entire length of the cavern. The individuals are confined in front of a wall in a way that they are unable to see a light of fire that is at a distance behind them (225; bk 7). Plato continues to describe a number of persons walking behind this wall and carrying objects and statues of men and animals overtop the wall (225; bk 7). All what can the prisoners see are shadows of the objects that they cannot see (see Appendix 3).

like the individuals in Plato's cave, see just shadows of the original images of true reality. Yet, the situation in the Cavern is even worse because what the programmers seek to create are not only copies of the real Forms, but lesser copies of less original Forms encapsulated in paintings. For example, creating a virtual room of Van Gogh's ideal room in his *A Bedroom in Arles* is an imitation of an imitated room by Van Gogh that saw when he was in France, in Arles.[21] To complicate this, what Van Gogh paints is an imitation of a less real room because, in Plato's philosophy, our everyday appearances are less real than the ideal Forms, which he considers them shadows. Therefore, what the programmers think is real is a double imitation, or a double shadow, of the pure idea of "roomness." Hence, rather than being forced to live in the outside world, that according to Plato, is the world of shadow of the original Ideas/Forms, the programmers in the Cavern choose to live in an underworld shadow by incessantly devoting their thought to creating mere illusions. This philosophic illustration about Powers's Cavern indicate extent to which cyberspace technology is misleading in the contemporary era.

The idea of Plato's cave undoubtedly does not escape Powers's attention when he talks about the fundamentalists in Beirut. Surprisingly, as Martin reads the Qur'an, which is the basic reference for the Muslims, he alludes to the image of Prophet Muhammad being in a cave while he receives revelation: "You lie in the Prophet's slime-laden cave, taking the complete dictation all over again. Say: *I seek refuge in the Lord of the daybreak, from the evil of what He has created; and from the evil of the night when it cometh on; and from the evil of the blowers upon knots.* Say: *I seek refuge in the Lord of men, from the evil of the whisper, from jinns and men*" (558 emphasis original). Like the individuals in Plato's cave, and like the programmers in the Cavern, the Prophet is represented to belong to the realm of the cave. Powers is careful to select the ayahs that exactly strengthen his allegory: "The Lord of the daybreak" can be safely associated to the light outside Plato's cave, while "the evil of the

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[21] See Appendix 4.

night" falls accurate to allude to the Prophet's position in the world of darkness, like that of Plato's cave (588). Reading the above passage from a Platonic perspective results in understating the Qur'an, which for the Muslims is the original words of Allah, as just a copy of the realm of the Divine, which for Plato is the Forms or Ideas. To put this in the case of Islamic fundamentalists who find answers of their queries in the Qur'an, it fits to argue that the fundamentalists' ideology is mere illusion of a real religion called Islam. The above allusion to the parable of the cave represents Islamic fundamentalists as having a darkened mind, being unable to recognize its actual character.

While representing both fundamentalisms as two similar corrupted entities, Powers resorts to an ideal form of culture that goes beyond the category of Orientalism. In the novel, Adie creates Hagia Sophia as an ideal place that she seeks to dwell in. The implication of the motif of Hagia Sophia, which is located in Byzantium, is what the remaining pages are going to explore.

I.   9. A World Without Politics

The novel's continuous use of the image of Byzantium is also part of Powers's Orientalist discourse. In the novel, Adie's enthusiasm in recreating art leads her to choose William Butler Yeats's "Sailing to Byzantium" (1926) as one artistic piece[22]. Her ambition to reproduce Yeats's poem is to transcend the world and create an "embodied art; a life-sized poem that (she) can live inside" (275). Consequently, Adie creates an entirely new home that travels space and time to reach the holy city of Byzantium (193). The essence of the Cavern, hence, becomes an embodiment of Yeats's poem; it becomes a sort of a utopian journey towards "Constantinople. Istanbul," the Eastern Capital of the former Roman Empire (585). As Adie fantasizes with Steve on their trip back to Ohio, she pronounces Byzantium as the

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[22] See Appendix 5.

ultimate object of the Cavern: "*that's the room we're supposed to build*. And set upon a golden bough[23] to sing. *The place we're after. Byzantium*" (533 emphasis original). Declaring the interest of the Cavern in representing the space of the Oriental demonstrates that the Other forever remains part of creating the Self. The Western fantasy to encounter the old city of Byzantium symbolizes an attempt to inhabit an extremely distant and ideal order, as pictured in Yeats's poem. The symbolic journey to the East can be read as a quest for the extraordinariness of the peripheral world. One can claim further that the eventual journey to the East can be read as a recycling of classical Orientalist discourse which sees the East as a mythical place. Being a very ancient city existing in far distances, Byzantium can be further regarded as a constructed account of the mythic Orient. Said has repeatedly highlighted that the East, as well as the Orient, are perceived mythic places in traditional Western imagination about the Orient. He says that the Orient is "a kind of second-order knowledge," meaning that it is constructed as a "tale" containing mythic images (*Orientalism* 52). Considering Byzantium as a mythic image, one can claim that Powers seeks to create a pre-colonial version of West. Byzantium can be regarded as a "second-order knowledge" in Powers's novel because it is perceived as an ideal place of civilization to be inhabited (Said 52).

It is essential now to explore the Orientalist implications anchored in the motif of Yeats's Byzantium in order to evaluate its significance in the scale of the Cavern and the

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[23] Powers's reference to "the golden bough" in Yeats's "Sailing to Byzantium" and his eventual dramatization of it in the Cavern indicates that he undoubtedly read the nineteenth century book *The Golden Bough: A Study in Magic and Religion* (1890) by the Scottish anthropologist James George Frazer. The book typically attempts to define the shared elements of religious beliefs and scientific thought. Frazer proposes that human mind progresses from a belief in magic though religion to scientific thought. Surprisingly, *Plowing the Dark*'s thematic concern is centered in Frazer's argument.

West by extension. As many critics agree, one of the main concerns of "Sailing to Byzantium" resides in the notion of temporality. In the poem, Yeats draws a division between the old as attributed to Europe, and the young or the eternal, as attributed to "the holy city of Byzantium" (16). In his perspective, the West is a mortal "dying generation(s)" while Byzantium remains a city of "unageing intellect" (3; 8). Apart from drawing this division, Yeats yearns to leave the "country for old men" and spend the rest of his life in the eternal city of Byzantium (1). Besides immortality, Yeats considers Byzantium a city of dignity and honesty. He views that side of the world as wise and moral: "O sages standing in God's holy fire" (17). For him, the monuments of the city are an undying place for learning: "nor is there singing school but studying/ Monuments of its own magnificence" (13-14).

In relation to the Cavern, one can safely argue that Adie's use of this poem to create reality reflects the extent to which the West appears to her as aging and unwise. Powers visualizes this image of Western decay in the beginning of the novel when he states that "Out in the template world, flowers still spill from the bud. Fruit runs from ripe to rot. Faces still recognize each other in surprise over a fire sale. Marriages go on reconciling and cracking up. Addicts swear never again. Children succumb in their beds after a long fever" (4). In this passage, as I have previously elucidated above, the West is viewed in a state of decomposition. What Yeats's poem suggests with regard to Powers's insight is that Western civilization is absolutely at the end of its history and the East is in the beginning. Yeats's "ageing generation" represents the state of the high-technological West which, as Derrida claims, "seems out of kilter, unjust, dis-adjusted" (*Specters of Marx* 96). What the novel seeks to underline is that the future of Western civilization resides in an obsessive high-technology that produces "robotic prostitution" (Powers 469). Putting Yeats's poem besides Powers's novel helps understand Western excessive technology-culture lacking its ethical and existential measures. For Yeats, since the heart is "sick with desire/ And fastened to a dying

animal/ It knows not what it is" (22-24). These lines exactly reflect the situation when the West embraces an obscene technology that "graduated beyond an esoteric discipline" (269). The destiny of the West, for Powers, is subject to an "inexorable market machine" that "wanted holophonic videoconferencing. It wanted the Ferris wheel-cum-feature film. All talking, all-singing, incarnate sex fantasies" (269). For Powers, as for Marxists, the post-capitalist system is what engenders reality engineering "to become a full-fledged industry" and it is what eventually leads to a meaningless human existence. Zizek's conception of cyberspace leads him to argue that cyberspace will be "the true end of history," the paradox of an affinity far more suffocating than an actual confinement" ("What Can Psychoanalysis Tell" 802). In the novel, Freese himself claims, perhaps too clearly, "it *was* the end. The end of something. An end to the limits of symbolic knowledge" (271). His e-mail sent to the brass at TeraSys suggests that the virtuality industry will come at an end: "The whole fad may quite simply fade before we get the real thing to market. In the current climate, potential clients for genuine immersion environments could well feel burned by their own expectations and sour on all subsequent demos, once the bubble bursts…" (472-473). It is now clear why Adie chooses Yeats's poem as a peculiar artistic theme for the Cavern. Powers's vision of the end of Western history is what Yeats means when he claims the Occident as a "dying generation" (3).

Eternity and wisdom are, however, perceived as categories related to the East. The attempt to reproduce Byzantium in the Cavern can be regarded as a Western desire to transcend its historical world. It can be understood, like Yeats's poem declares, as a fantasy of an eternal life beyond the barriers set by the material world: "An aged man is but a paltry thing/ A tattered coat upon a stick" (9-10). Adie's idea of imitating the poem offers the West to inhabit the artifice of eternity like that visualized by Yeats in Byzantium.

By defining Byzantium as a point of reference, Adie gives the Cavern its authentic taste of the Arab sense of ideal reality. It is as if the Cavern becomes defined in a particular sense of Arab refinement. Since the city of Byzantium is viewed a place of spirituality, it becomes easy to distinguish Powers's ambition to seek recourse in mysticism. Powers attempts to argue the necessity for the Western Man to root his life in the "soul" rather than the material world. For Powers, the heart of the Western individual is empty. His reference to Yeats's poem "The Stare's Nest by my Window"[24] shows his belief that the Cavern is actually an "empty house" like that of the Western subject:

> We have fed the heart on fantasies,
>
> The heart's grown brutal from the fare;
>
> More Substance in our enmities
>
> Than in our love; O honey-bees,
>
> Come build in the empty house of the stare. (Powers, *Plowing the Dark* 366)

At this level, it is essential to remember the historical and political facts related to the motif of Byzantium. Historical research proves that the old empire of Byzantium, which begun in the fourth century and ended in the fifteenth century, was ruled by an "archetypal" emperor, so to speak, who was regarded a universal political entity and the supreme power of Christianity (Genung 51). In fact, the Byzantine Empire was essentially a "theocracy," one in which the emperor was a direct representative of God and a defender of faith on Earth (51). Admired by Yeats, the grandeur of the emperor of Byzantium is shown in the last stanzas: "But such a form of Grecian goldsmiths make/ Of hammered gold and gold enamelling/ To keep a drowsy Emperor awake;" (27-29). With regard to the idea of Byzantine Empire, two elements are fused: politics and religion. Therefore, in trying to reproduce Byzantium as a place of eternal peace in the Cavern, Powers expresses the impossibility of the West to

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[24] See Appendix 6.

incorporate the spiritual with the political. His slide into mysticism, and his rejection to secular politics, his non-trust of his government, can be understood as a discourse of resistance.

In casting the image of the spiritless mortal West *vs.* spiritual eternal East, the novel becomes especially interesting in its Orientalist perspective. Through mirroring these two images of representation, highlighted by the novel's reference to Yeats's poetry, the novel seems to claim that the West is no longer regarded as superior and moral vis-à-vis its Other. As Yeats, Powers turns the Orientalist structure of the Superior West *vs.* the inferior East upside down. The traditional advanced and morally mature West, whose role in the non-Western world was, to discipline non-Westerners, becomes ultimately invalid in the case of *Plowing the Dark*. Powers's weariness of the hypocrisies and double-standards of Western post-industrial culture has pushed him towards the polar opposite, the Eastern Other. His approving remarks on the dignity and honesty of the East, his admiration of their character and their architecture, can be best understood as a consequence of the clearer vision of the American Self. The resort to the other side of the dichotomy affirms Powers's critique and reassessment of Western obsession with postmodern technology. In this sense, Powers offers a re-questioning of the ends of Western civilization.

The only programmer in the Cavern that may represent a critique of Western cyber-ideology and its order is Adie. Techno-phobic, Adie is the only character who perceives herself "standing in an empty space" and who perceives the Cavern as "blind" (18, 5). Adie, conscious of the political orientations of the Cavern, is led to create a Virtual place that transcends the binary opposition between East and West. Soon she recognizes the implication of some interest groups in the Cavern, she starts reproducing Hagia Sophia that is actually located in Byzantium itself. In trying to recreate a Cathedral that has been a locus for prayer for both Christians and Muslims, Adie pronounces her prospect for a future that maintains

cultural harmony rather than division. Being the gate between East and West, "the Earth's navel," the great edifice in Istanbul becomes a metaphor of the rupture of the boundary between the two sides (589). Hagia Sophia was "for close a thousand years, the greatest church in Christendom. And for another five hundred years after that, the greatest mosque in Islam" (585). Virtualizing Hagia Sophia can perhaps be read as virtualization of the very Hegelian synthesis that transcends the opposition of West and East.

What is more interesting about the Cathedral is not only its embodiment of a place of "holy wisdom" in the scale of the Cavern but also in the other scale of Martin's plot (585). The climax of Adie's and Martin's disgust of their worlds actually results in entering the "illusion" of the Hagia Sophia. Martin's ultimate decision to attempt suicide by smacking his head into a wall results in experiencing "a fight against this slide into chaos" (670). This phase in Martin's psychic state can be seen as a leap into the world of Adie, since he seems to encounter something like the Cavern's Virtual Reality. Martin experiences a "hallucination" through which he "soft-landed in a measureless room…A temple on the mind's Green line" (713). Martin finds himself standing

> dead-center, under the stone crown. Then you heard it, above your head: a
> noise that passed all understanding. You looked up at the sound, and saw the
> thing that would save you. A hundred feet above, in the awful dome, an angel
> dropped out of the air. An angel whose face filled not with good news but with
> all the horror of her coming impact…. It left you no choice but to live long
> enough to learn what it needed from you. (713)

This vision is performed not only in Martin's mind but also in Adie's. Adie also experiences a mental chaos when she realizes that she was implicated in helping the American military. She "booted up the cathedral and stepped back in. She leaned into the nave's great hollow, feeling herself move despite her better sense. Pointed one finger straight up, hating

herself even as she gave in to the soar. She let herself rise into the hemisphere apse, then farther up, all the way into the uppermost dome, now inscribed with its flowing surah from the Qur'an" (689). It is now clear that Hagia Sophia is "the gate" between Martin and Adie's worlds. This means that what I have been underlining through previous analysis regarding Powers's structuring of the Orientalist binary opposition between the Western Self and the Oriental Other is being challenged through his eventual reference to Hagia Sophia. Powers's gesture to refer to Hagia Sophia in the novel suggests a total eradication of in East-West relations. He seems to propose that the power of politics that intervenes between religions is meaningless in the contemporary worldview. He tries to defy the fragmenting agonies of world division by structuring a singular world that supports cultural and religious harmony.

I.   10. Concluding Thoughts

It is essential to remember as a first concluding idea that in Powers's fiction, the image of Hagia Sophia (which is a symbol of a transgression of the traditional Orientalist paradigm, or what critics call a form of "post-Orientalism"), is not real (Dallmayr 115). Hagia Sophia, in both Adie's and Martin's plots is virtual, and hence, remains a dream-like motif in the novel. This importantly suggests that Powers's endeavor to rupture Orientalist binary thought is an imaginative invention, and remains fiction. One can go further and claim that Powers's novel implies that all along the ongoing progress of globalization, there is an exit from Orientalism sought or performed. The novel clearly suggests that a future harmony between Christiany and Islam, as epitomized in Hagia Sophia, is an imaginary idea, like encapsulated in virtual reality. Such a representation presupposes the claim that the future of civilizations, West and East, even amid the complexities of Western science and technology, is apocalyptic, a claim

that mimics the apologists of Orientalism for whom the future of the world order is destructed by cultural clashes.[25]

Orientalism, therefore, is a preeminent discourse within *Plowing the Dark*. One could detect a dynamic process of orientalizing the Middle East, including Iran. Through representing Iran as a major terrorist enterprise, and through representing Islamic fundamentalism as its main ideological code, the novel has clearly defined the Middle East as a trope of a political entity that hates the West. It has been argued, finally, that that Powers proposes a world beyond Orientalism. However, the novel ultimately manages to reinforce the very Orientalist presupposition that it appears to subvert. This feature of a dual attitude towards the Oriental is what the second chapter is going to further highlight in the case of John Updike's *Terrorist*.

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[25] See (Huntington, *The Clash of Civilization* 28; Fukuyama *The End of History* 347).

Chapter II

Islam as (Br)other: A Clash of Ideologies in Updike's *Terrorist*

DEVILS, Ahmad thinks. *These devils seek to take away my God.*

John Updike, Terrorist 1

You believe this, I believe that, we all get along—that's the American way

John Updike, *Terrorist* [26]

II.   1. Introduction

The task of this chapter is to investigate Updike's representation of Islam as both a familiar brother and an alien other in his *Terrorist*. Taking into account Said's claim that "all discourses on Islam have an interest in some authority or power," the study highlights the connection Updike seeks in Islam in order to produce his Orientalist discourse (*Covering Islam* xvii). The chapter examines how Updike's positive attitude towards Ahmad and Islam as a moral code of behavior in today's American society translates as a counter-narrative to terrorism and religious fundamentalism.

The two epigraphs taken from Updike's *Terrorist* reflect the presence of two opposing convictions and beliefs in American society. The first quote told from Ahmad reflects a sense of asymmetry between the two terms "America" and "Islam." This asymmetry is apparent when Updike stresses Ahmad's hatred to the American society throughout the novel; it becomes more apparent, yet, when Ahmad proves to be implicated in a terrorist bombing by the end of the story. On the other hand, the second epigraph, told from the voice of Jack Levy,

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[26] Updike, John. *Terrorist* (New York: Ballantine Books, 2006) 36. Subsequent references to *Terrorist* will be cited in text.

a Jewish character in the story, stresses the state of a multicultural society where every individual is free to practice his/her religion. His phrase "that's the American way" is significant because it highlights the unity of Americans in terms of citizenship, not in terms of ethnicity, color, religion, or gender (36). "American-ness" is declared here to maintain a sense of "brotherhood." This chapter, however, tempts to argue that this proclaimed brotherhood is actually utopian. It will maintain that a pure multiculturalism in contemporary American culture, as presented by Updike in the novel, is impossible. On the contrary, the American culture that Updike reflects in the novel is a predominant culture that is intolerant to other customs and beliefs. Though apparent in the above statement by Jack, the study claims that no neutral legal space regulating tolerance exists in modern Western culture. This claim does not stem from a temptation to support extreme religious fundamentalism as part of American culture. Rather, it is part of the persistent insight that the two so-called totally different cultures (the Islamic and the non-Islamic) are both racial and based on extreme political ideologies. Both of these opposing categories, the study maintains, are part of Updike's Orientalist discourse.

The aim of putting together the two epigraphs above is to underline Updike's representation of Islam as a counterpart not only of Christianity, Judaism, or atheism, but of non-believers in general. Updike's definition of Islam in this novel is that of a complex, undemocratic religion, based on a challenge of a multi-religious country. However, his representation of today's American culture is also built on being a counterpart not only of Islam, but of all religions, including Judaism and Christianity. The study sustains that Updike's contemporary American culture is therefore neither secular nor based on political correctness; it is predominantly intolerant to other religions and imposes a privilege of hedonic, materialist, and racist values. The study will ultimately assert that the true clash between Islam and the West as presented in Updike's novel is actually politically neutralized,

no longer perceived as a political or economic conflict; it is rather restated by Updike as a cultural clash.

Before starting to analyze Updike's complex relationship between Islam and the West, it is worthy to investigate his interest in Islam in his previous writings. This part of the study is relevant because it projects Updike's insight on the cultural Other before 9/11 events have intervened in Orientalist discourse.

II.   2. Updike's Interest in Islam

Most commentators credit John Hoyer Updike's peculiar writing for its depiction of ordinary people in everyday life occupations. [27] Reviewing Updike's literary production proves that his thematic focus lies in conceiving Americanism and presenting social critiques on American technological rationalism and materialistic values. In this sense, in their detailed realism of American society, Updike's most famous works, like the "Rabbit" series—including *Rabbit, Run* (1960), *Rabbit Redux* (1971), *Rabbit is Rich* (1982), *Rabbit at Rest* (1990), and *Rabbit Remembered* (2000)— as well as *Couples* (1968), and *The Complete Henry Bech* (2001), contribute in chronicling American culture and its discontents. It is by delving into themes like social identity, breakups of marriage, adultery, illness, death, and Christian theology that Updike builds his insight on what is an American in postmodern lifestyle. In a nutshell, Updike's literary production seems not to get outside the territory of America, and most importantly, does not deal with the Arab Muslim American.

Yet, in looking carefully through the career of Updike, it is significant to underline his interest in Islam. Writing his *The Coup* (1978), a novel narrated by Colonel Hakim Felix

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[27] On Updike's literary style, see Jansen 106-170; Samuels 6; Hermione; Updike "Forward" (xv).

Ellello, the former leader of a fictional Islamic country in Sub-Saharan Africa, Updike admits his interest in writing the Arab Muslim. Also, he writes "Morocco" (1979) from his collected short stories "My Father's Tears" in which he tells an elegiac memory of a civilized American family and the horror they meet in Morocco while they have vacation. The worth of referring to at least these two works by Updike, not to mention *Terrorist*, which is the subject of the ensuing chapter, is to demonstrate that Updike's own conception about the American identity proves unable to be pictured in a non-Western context without a "problematic" excess to images of Islam and Arabness. Updike brings the alien Other in an activity of *différence* to stress the goodness of American culture as typically Judeo-Christian against the cruelty of the Islamic culture. It can be safely argued that it is not 9/11 events that brought suddenly the Oriental Other into Updike's mind. In an interview with Charles McGrath, Updike confesses that his first reading of the Holy Qur'an, from which he quotes persistently in *Terrorist*, was in the course of his working on *The Coup*, as he tried to personify Colonel Ellello, the dictator. Therefore, intentionally or not, Updike's motifs and stylistic gestures in an Arab Islamic framework will inevitably bring about Orientalist, at times even imperialist echoes.

Since the publication of *Terrorist* (2006), critics and readers alike have relied on this novel to understand/ misunderstand Islam's rationalism from a Western perspective. It is significant for this study that Updike dramatizes the protagonist Ahmad as the fellow—not the enemy—who for a significant portion in the story sees the American lifestyle through his eyes. There appears to be a convergence between Ahmad and Updike in their criticism on America's godless hedonic society. The task of this chapter is to examine Updike's strategies of representing Islam as a brother of the Western culture while simultaneously representing it as the dangerous Other. It seeks to study the ways in which Updike constructs the binary opposition of West *vs*. East as mainly identified with a clash of ideologies.

Updike's concern in "Jihad"[28] and Islamic extreme fundamentalism in *Terrorist* makes it appropriate for a discussion on his (neo)Orientalist perception of Islam. What fascinates Western readers more in considering Updike's "extraordinary intervention" he makes after 9/11 is perhaps not merely his account on how the Self perceives the Other, but precisely on how the Other perceives the Self (Herman 692). By telling the story from the perception of an Arab Muslim immigrant, Ahmad Ashmawy Mulloy, who eventually proves to be a terrorist, Updike elucidates the antagonism between Occident and Orient, as Westerners call it, or "Dar al-Islam and Dar al-Harb," as some extreme fundamentalist Muslims refer to it.

II.   3. Synopsis

Terrorist opens in Central High School, in New Jersey, with Ahmad's disgust with the moral decadence of his mates and teachers, whom he describes as "weak Christians and nonobservant Jews" (1). An eighteen year-old boy, from an Egyptian Muslim father who abandons his Irish-American wife Teresa Mulloy, Ahmad grows up in a society "full of lust and fear and infatuation with things that can be bought" (1). Ahmad chooses the Islamic faith at the age of eleven, as "the Straight Path" against what he sees as a Godless society (1). As he tries to learn his religion, Ahmad becomes a victim of a terrorist plot led by an extremist Muslim, Shaikh Rashid. The Imam teaches Ahmad the Qur'an at the mosque and assigns him as a driver in the Excellency Home Furnishings after finishing High School. Ahmad thinks he is a strong believer of the Islamic teachings, even with rank higher than Shaikh Rashid in terms of belief.

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[28] Barber, Benjamin. *Jihad vs. McWorld* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1995) 155. I will be using this term "jihad" to refer to the extreme fundamentalist meaning of "Jihad" that Barber elaborates in his *Jihad vs. McWorld*.

Jack Levy, Ahmad's counselor, tries to guide Ahmad toward college and advices him to get away from a career of a truck driver, what Ahmed intends to do after finishing high-school. Ahmad chooses to become a truck driver on the instruction of his imam because, as the Shaikh believes, driving is a practical skill of good merit whereas academic studies serve only to advance American secular beliefs. As a matter of fact, Ahmad is afraid that academic studies will strengthen his religious doubt. Shaikh Rashid ultimately asks Ahmad to carry out a terrorist plot directed against the American "infidels" (non-Muslims), and Ahmad reluctantly agrees (1). Levy suspects that Ahmad is manipulated by an Islamic group, and seeks to save him from them. The novel ends with Levy convincing Ahmad not to go through with the attack, driving him into believing that the "infidel" Americans "have taken away [his] God" (305).

From this story illustrating the reality of al-Qaida's war on America, it can be distinguished that Updike's "provocative but realistic" representation of Ahmad and Islam is permeated with two major aspects: representing the Self as neo-liberal, and Islam as extreme fundamentalist and anti-modern. In order to discuss the intricate aspects of this representation, I will be assisted in my analyses by Edward Said's ideas on Orientalism and Slavoj Zizek's concept of "ideology" as a sub-theory.

In his "Afterward" to his 1994 edition of *Orientalism*, Said points out that "each age and society recreates its other" (332). As it is shown through the novel, the contemporary era could recreate its Other by stressing godlessness as the world's universal culture in which the non-Western religious Arab does not fit. This tactic used by Orientalists like Updike is significant when put beside Said's *Culture and Imperialism*. In the latter, Said claims that culture is permeated with a politicized ideology that propagates Western dominance over the Other (8). In this respect, I take the capitalist ideology of materialism as a cultural form that engenders imperial attitudes towards the Arab Islamic world.

Using Zizek's idea of "ideology" which he discusses in the context of the contemporary era, I show that Western modern society is (un)consciously manipulated to Orientalize the Other. Before analyzing, it is worthy to revise Zizek's idea of "ideology."[29] Zizek claims that ideology fuses with concrete social practices in order to generate doctrines and beliefs. He says that our postmodern world is ideological, meaning that the existence of

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[29] Zizek understands "ideology" in terms of psychoanalysis. In his *Event*, Zizek understands ideology with reference to Ronald Ramsfled, the US Secretary of Defence in the time of the invasion of Iraq. In 2002, Ramsfled "importantly" plays on the relation between the notions of "known" and "unknown." He says: "There are known knowns; there are things we know that we know. There are known unknowns; that is to say, there are things that we know we don't know. But there are also unknown unknowns—there are things we do not know we don't know." Zizek explains that the purpose of bringing this exercise into Ramsfled' speech is to justify War on Iraq: "we know what we know (say, that Saddam Hussein is the president of Iraq); we know what we don't know (how many weapons of mass destruction Saddam possesses); but there are things we don't know that we don't know—what if Saddam possesses some other secret weapons about which we have no idea…" (Zizek *Event* 9). Most important to our discussion, Zizek continues a fourth relation that he considers the radical essence of ideology in our experience of reality. He says that Ramsfled overlooks the crucial phrase: "the unknown knowns, the things we don't know that we know" (9). This precise relation is what denotes the Freudian unconscious, or what Jacque Lacan calls "the knowledge which does not know itself" (qtd. in Zizek *Event* 9). Zizek claims in reference to Lacan that "the Unconscious is not pre-logical (irrational space of instincts), but a symbolic articulated knowledge ignored by the subject" (9). From this lesson of psychoanalysis, Zizek believes that ideology operates in the same way in our daily reality.

its social reality "implies the non-knowledge of its participants as to its essence" (*The Sublime Object of Ideology* 15-6). For example, he claims that ideology takes part of the very essence of the phenomenon of consumerism. In explaining the paradoxical relationship between social effectivity of the commodity exchange and the consciousness of individuals of it, he says:

> 'this non-knowledge of the reality is part of its very essence': the social effectivity of the exchange process is a kind of reality which is possible only on condition that the individuals partaking in it are not aware of its proper logic; that is, a kind of reality whose very ontological consistency implies a certain non-knowledge of its participants - if we come to 'know too much', to pierce the true functioning of social reality, this reality would dissolve itself. (*The Sublime Object of Ideology* 15)

It is clarified from the above quotation that the danger of ideology does not operate merely as a "'false consciousness', an illusory representation of reality," but rather as reality that necessitates the non-consciousness of it by the individuals (15). Zizek grasps ideology in the inconsistency of the contemporary phenomena of cynicism, totalitarianism, and the fragile status of democracy (xxxi). In the following discussion, I use the term "West" or "Western" to refer to the West as manipulated by Capitalist cynical ideology. Some Western characters, it will be shown, are consciously aware of the Western capitalist ideology of materialism, and hence, represent an anti-thesis of the same West. Therefore, it is relevant to specify that I use "West(ern)" to generally refer to the commonly controlled American society.

Importantly, also, I specify that the term "West" bears an Orientalist echo of cultural differentiation. Despite the fact that the dramatized Muslims in the novel are Americans, and hence Westerners, they are orientalized and rendered an "Other" of the West. It is relevant to specify that my use of "West(ern)" is going to be generic to Updike's epistemology of the "West," not to confuse both sides of the dichotomy—West vs. Islam.

Since 9/11 events, as the novel is going to show, there has been a tendency to find in Islam a new room of evil. It is true that extreme Islamic fundamentalism, confused (intentionally or not) with the Islamic faith, is found as this room of evil. In talking about Islamic fundamentalism, it is worth noting Said's declaration of the crisis occurring in Islam because of traditionalism: "The gradual disappearance of the extraordinary tradition of Islamic *ijtihad* has been one of the major cultural disasters of our time, with the result that critical thinking and individual wrestling with the problems of the modern world have simply dropped out of sight. Orthodoxy and dogma rule instead" (*Orientalism* xxi). Consequently, the East is subject to "demeaning stereotypes that lump together Islam and terrorism, or Arabs and violence, or the Orient and tyranny" (374).

Criticizing Orientalist representations of Ahmad in the novel may involve supporting extreme Islamic fundamentalism. However, rather than discussing merely the stereotypes that support an eternally opposed fundamentalist Islam vs. liberal West, the position of this study, as it condemns the immoral values of both opposites, is to problematize the liberal "democratic" alternative. Perhaps, this reading proves the reality of Islam and elevates its image as innocent. Before proceeding with analyses, the chapter first surfaces Updike's binary opposition of Occident *vs.* Orient in the novel. This will elucidate how Updike's strategies of misrepresenting Ahmad and Islam echo the American culture as racially intolerant and undemocratic. Then, the chapter discusses capitalist cynical ideology as a predominant faith in the West, highlighting Updike's resort to Islam and Islamic culture as a means of criticizing the politics of capitalism and obtaining a critical distance from it. Next, the chapter proceeds with demonstrating the other fact of Islam as a totalitarian religion that threatens the survival of the neo-liberal West. It is important to signal that the study does not discuss the idea of capitalism in its economic dimension but focuses mainly on its implicated ideological object as a form of neo-Orientalist strategy of cultural differentiation.

II.   4. Setting Opposites: Occident *vs.* Orient[30]

In Ahmad's perspective, the West is divided into two major opposites: the Muslims, among whom Ahmad takes part; and the "American infidels," who are "weak Christians and nonobservant Jews," whom he perceives as "Devils" (1). From the Western perspective, the novel also pronounces a striking distinction between the Americans, visualized as civilized and morally good despite their spiritual hunger; and the extreme Muslim fundamentalists, who in spite of their strong relation with God, are reflected as terrorists. Updike's gesture of recounting the essence of Americanism in this strategy of *différence* maintains the Saidian definition of Orientalism as based upon an "epistemological distinction between the 'Orient' and the 'Occident'" (*Orientalism* 69). Updike's strategy of opposing the East to the West is clearly asserted in the representation of the characters and the metaphysical concepts that shape the novel. As generally observed, Updike's writing follows an essentialist approach (Dawes 14). When Jack reflects on Teresa, Ahmad's mother, Updike says: "The Irish in her, he thinks. [...] The moxie, the defiant spark of craziness people get if they're sat on long enough—the Irish have it, the blacks and Jews have it" (204). This essentializing approach to cultural difference is what characterizes the novel as a space of Orientalist representations.

Updike sets the novel in New Prospect, named as such "for the grand view from the heights above the falls but also for its enthusiastically envisioned future" (9). In this sense, Updike suggests New Prospect as a trope for an ideal city in which the American Dream is prospected. As it brings in the "brown(s)," "Anglo-Saxon merchants," "recently immigrant Indians and Koreans" among many other ethnic groups, New Prospect is grasped as a "hybrid" place inviting a plurality of cultures to co-exist (10; Bhabha 5). Since the American Dream is deeply seeded in America's early history, it can be assumed that Updike's concept of "New" added to "Prospect" in a post-9/11 context is to encompass a novel dream, that of a

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[30] See Appendix 7.

peaceful integration of a troublesome culture—the Islamic. Essentially, what Updike sets in the novel is a hypothetical place that maintains both Occidental and Oriental civilizations under one faith—the American Dream.

Nevertheless, it is shown that Updike's hybrid place is impossible because it meets with Islam and its "untrustworthy promises of an unseen God" (21). Ahmad, who himself symbolizes cultural hybridity, metaphorically articulates the danger of marrying the cultural Self with the Other in one space. His despising of the American lifestyle and his eventual intention to commit suicide prove that an Islamic culture undemocratically superimposes its monotheistic existence for the survival of other cultures. In spite of this, Ahmad undergoes "the clash of civilizations" in his identity, Irish and Arab, as a process to achieve the American Dream. For instance, this encounter is manifested in his skepticism with the laws of nature:

> He looks down from his new height and thinks that to the insects unseen in the grass he would be, if they had a consciousness like his, God…He will not grow any taller, he thinks, in this life or the next. *If there is a next,* an inner devil murmurs. What evidence beyond the Prophet's blazing and divinely inspired words proves that there is a next? Where would it be hidden? Who would forever stoke Hell's boilers? What infinite source or energy would maintain opulent Eden, feeding its dark-eyed houris, swelling its heavy-hanging fruits, renewing the streams and splashing fountains in which God, as described in the ninth sura of the Qur'an, takes eternal good pleasures? What of the second law of thermodynamics? (3 emphasis original)

From the above quotation, it is illustrated that Updike shifts Ahmad's perspective from a faithful Muslim to a skeptic postmodern individual. His questions about the existence of the afterlife prove him as a Renaissance man who adopts rebellion as an expression of his *raison*

d'être. This is exactly what projects Ahmad as an ideal American (like Jack Levy), celebrating the unspiritual Zeitgeist of the Postmodern age. His questioning "What infinite source or energy would maintain forever stoke Hell's boilers?" is Copernican (3), reflecting the West' scientific revolution that brought with it the clash between reason (embodied in modern liberal thinking) and faith (embodied in Medieval Catholic orthodoxy). Most of the questions asked by Ahmad are existential, articulating his influence by the complexity of postmodern conditions, including the crisis of meaning and the "death of God."[31]

From his meditation on nature illustrated in the above passage, Ahmad defines himself as a secular humanist, since he revolts against the unquestionable teachings of religion. It can be deduced that it is not in the society of New Prospect that Updike contextualizes Ahmad' struggle with his religion; rather, he locates this struggle in the very scientific rationalism inscribed in his innate thought. Through this, Updike underlines the modern scientific West as naturally contradicting with religious values.

Jews like Jack Levy are unable to survive in the spiritual malady of the West if they don't get rid of their religious orthodoxy. Updike makes of Jack an atheist Jew in order to make him co-exist with other cultures in the godless New Prospect. Many critics agree that Jack is the major representative of Western culture in the novel (Zaki 64). To take this idea a step further, it can be said that Updike maintains Jews as the major representatives of Western culture for their flexibility in co-existing with other cultures. He declares that the Jews are worth integrating in New Prospect because they put their faith in the godless Capitalist culture of the New World: "his [Jack's] grandfather had shed all religion in the New World, putting his faith in a revolutionarized society…" (21). In spite of his criticism of the immoral West,

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[31] Nietzsche, Friedrich. *The Gay Science*, trans. Thomas Common (New York: Dover Publications, 2006) 81. I will be using this expression to refer to the crisis of religion in the postmodern Western worldview.

Jack shows to be a skeptical Jew who sees God as "the tyrant who asked Abraham to make a burnt offering of his only son" (21). In order to integrate into the Western culture, Jack now bears Isaac's resistance against Abraham and eventually against God. He is declared as "one of Judaism's stiff-knecked naysayers" who strives to make 'Jack' out of 'Jacob' and "argue(s) against his son's circumcision" (22). Jack clearly abandons his Jewish heritage for the sake of the American Dream as a code of behavior. By showing the ability of Jack and his ancestors to integrate in a hybrid space with other religions, Updike eventually seems to argue that Judaism and Christianity are able to fulfill the idea of the American Dream.

Ahmad, though born in America, is represented as an alien. Updike situates Ahmad inside the territory of America and sets his identity at its outside. When Ahmad insists in a conversation with Jack, "I am not a foreigner, I have never been abroad," he declares a sense of anxiety of defining himself as American. Bradley Freeman sees Ahmad's declaration "I am not a foreigner" as an expression of "a deterritorialized subject" (12). It can also be added that Ahmad's statement demonstrates the American culture in crisis of assimilating Islam into its consciousness. Though having historically structured its culture through immigration, America, in the name of the secular politics of capitalism, paradoxically rejects its cultural diversity. According to the dictionary of English, secularism means the principle of separating the state from religious institutions (Oxford Advanced learners' Dictionary 1202). Many scholars agree that the present crisis of secularism lies in its unauthentic neutrality against religion. In his *Church, State, and the Crisis in American Secularism* (2001), Ledewitz claims that although the U.S. Supreme court promises government neutrality toward religion, it continues to have a very "religiously oriented, indeed a monotheistically oriented, public sphere" (xvii). Reflecting on this remark, it can be noticed that many critics agree that Updike represents Western culture as secular.[32] I maintain, contrary to these claims, that Updike

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[32] See Zaki 55-79; Herman 701; Salehnia 487; Pirnajmuddin and Selahnia 174; Awan 532.

represents the West as manipulated by a monolithic godlessness which subverts religious existence, a state that totally contradicts with the definition of secularism. In juxtaposing the American identity in opposition with the Islamic, Updike constructs a faked America which contradicts its ontology. Even though the contemporary era is supposedly marked with "global imminence," a term that Susan Buck-Morss uses to refer to "the fact that in our era of global capital…there is no spatial outside, no 'other' of peoples," Updike's narrative presents a model of setting the spatial outside (93). It is through representing Ahmad as controversial that Updike constructs the image of Islam and Arabness as threatening the meaning of contemporary American culture.

Though Ahmad's father left America, his spirit is still there to maintain that the essence of American culture is multicultural. When discussing with Jack Ahmad's situation about his missing father, Teresa brings Freudian understanding of father-son relation: "But I guess a boy needs a father, and if he doesn't have one he'll invent one. How's that for cut-rate Freud?" (115). The Freudian theory of Oedipus Complex does not fit the context of Ahmad because perhaps the father for him represents more culture than masculinity. This illustrates that Jack and Teresa's understanding of the father is more sexual.

In this sense, Updike redraws the boundaries between Western and Oriental civilizations in the same fashion Samuel Huntington sustains it in *The Clash of Civilizations* (1996). Huntington claims that the world is divided into opposing cultural and religious forces that struggle to assert themselves against each other (33). Even though many civilizations are surviving in the contemporary era, like Western, Hispanic, Latin American, Chinese, Hindu, African, Huntington asserts that the most essential clash in determining the new world order in the post- Cold War era is between Western and Islamic civilizations (33). Similarly, though many civilizations are being identified in the novel, black, Mexican, Jews and Indians, Updike elaborates only on the Arab Islamic identity as contradictory to the American Self.

Updike's heavy emphasis on Ahmad's fundamentalism in the context of the godless capitalist culture is understood as a strategy to represent Islam as archaic. In the novel, because Muslims present extreme radical readings of the Qur'an in an incomprehensive way, Islam is represented as outdated. When Jack asks Ahmad if he believes in God, he answers by reciting something out of memory: "He is in me, and at my side" (39). On the contrary, Christianity is associated with modernity. When Ahmad attends the service on the invitation of Joryleen, it is proved that the preacher's speech is related to updated contexts. In explaining the value of faith, he says: "Jesus on the cross had faith…Martin Luther King had faith on the Mall in Washington, and in that hotel in Memphis where James Earl Ray martyred Reverned King—he had gone there to support the striking sanitation workers, the lowest of the low, the untouchable that haul our trash. Rosa Parks had faith in that bus in Montgomery, Alabama" (57). Updike's representation of Islam as archaic and of Muslims as religious fanatics sounds to be a recycling of the classical Western stereotype of Islam that Said talks about. The ultimate intention of the Muslims to perform a terrorist bombing in the novel reverberates Said's claim that "Islam has always represented a menace to the West" (*Covering Islam* xii). This representation does not deviate also from the Holywoodian stereotype of Muslims (before and after 9/11) as violent, intolerant, and hateful to the West, as in movies like *Aladin* (1992), *True Lies* (1994) and *Rules of Engagement* (2000), and *Gladiator* (2000).

All Muslim characters look too occident-phobic or ineffective to survive in the American culture. Because American culture is neo-liberal, for the extremist Shaikh Rachid as for Ahmad, Americans are seen as "devils" (1), "blind animals," who hunt for "a scent that will comfort them" (8). When Ahmad tells Jack about his father, Omar Ashmawy, he says: "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" (33). From this statement, it is

shown that Omar, though owning an American citizenship, proves unable to gain an American identity and co-exist with non-Muslim citizens. Though he is a secular Muslim, as Teresa avows, Omar's eventual quit of his secular wife and country confirms Said's claim that Islamic civilization is an opponent to the West. By stressing the impossibility for the co-existence of Muslim characters with the Occident as highlighted by an ultimate terrorist attack, Updike confirms the incoherence of American culture in the presence of Orientals. Regarding Omar as a secular Muslim, it can be said that the novel seems to argue that neither Fundamentalist nor secular Islam fits in the American neo-liberal culture. It is argued that there is no space or Islam with all its conceptions in American consciousness.

Updike attempts to create a mythologized "ridiculous" Islam based on a mythic narrative. While Ahmad questions himself about the scientific explanation of death, he conjures up the Imam's demonstration of miracles of the Messenger's "journey" from Earth to Heaven:

> So where did that body fly to? Perhaps it was snatched up by God and taken straight to heaven…the Messenger, riding the winged white horse Buraq, was guided through the seven heavens by the angel Gabriel to a certain place, where he prayed with Jesus, Moses, and Abraham before running to Earth, to become the last of the prophets, the ultimate one. (3)

Updike's intertextuality in this context is Orientalist *par excellence*. His bringing of the idea of the miraculous journey in the context of Ahmad's earlier existential and scientific thinking argues that Islam is an irrational faith based on mythical beliefs. This intertextuality actually highlights not only the hostility of scientific logic towards Islam, but more specifically towards religion. However, by directing the reader's attention to Islam as a major preoccupation, Updike creates a kind of meaningful distance between the godless West and the Islamic faith. To construct this image of a mythologized Islam, Updike also radicalizes the

Qur'an into a "poetic" narrative (99). With this, Updike's representation of Islam as a myth comes full circle, giving it a resonance of a Homer's *Illiad*.

Ahmad's marginalization from the American culture does not only relate to his identity as an Arab Muslim, but also precisely to his identity as a black Arab Muslim. Ahmad is portrayed as "flawless dun skin, paler than his father's but not the freckled, blotchy pink of his red-haired mother" (16). A clear empirical discourse is demonstrated in Updike's description of Ahmad's white shirt as the color typical of the white West. At some point, Updike states: "the whiteness of [Ahmad's] shirt *assaults* Jack's eyes" (31 emphasis added). Here, the relation of the white shirt with Jack's eyes constitutes the main idea of Ahmad's cultural marginalization. Jack's discontent in looking at the white shirt is not because of the whiteness of the shirt but because of the difficulty of seeing Ahmad in juxtaposition with the "strikingly clean white shirt" (31). In a sense, it is because there is an "unnatural" constructed relation between Ahmad's (ethnic) color and the color of the shirt. To take this idea further, it can be suggested that Ahmad's wearing of his white shirt represents his black identity as being contradictorily established in a white culture. Hence, the emphasized *assault* can be understood as a violent transgression of the back Islamic identity that contradicts with the old social rules which sustain American whiteness. This essentially argues the novel as what Mita Benerjee claims to be a coming back "to the ground zero of whiteness" (16). After the Civil Right Movement, a significant American literacy resisted against racial discrimination and could, at a certain extent, build America's conceptual freedom regarding black-white relation. Updike's discourse, however, marks a nihilistic "eternal return" to the same anxiety of the American identity that has once conceived color as a cultural dilemma. In the case of Ahmad, it can be deduced that Updike's coming back to "ground zero of whiteness" is perhaps attributed to xenophobia and/or Islamophobia.

Besides being pictured as black, religious fanatic, and occident-phobic, Ahmad is represented as having a marginal lifestyle because of his sexual repression. In the literature prior to 9/11, Arab sexuality is associated with violence. The kidnapping and rape of the American woman by nomad Twaregs in Paul Bowles' *The Sheltering Sky* (1949), Hanna's kidnapping also in Amos Oz' *My Michael* (1968), the Palestinian Dahlia' seduction of the terrorist Lander in Thomas Harris' *Black Sunday* (1975), the young Arab boy's seduction of his boss' daughter and his eventual sexual exploitation of her in Abraham Yohushua's *The Lover* (1977) all reflect the old colonialist projection of Arab excessive sexuality. Similarly, in reviewing the traditional stereotype of Arabs' attitudes to women in Hollywood movies, Shaheen reports the same pattern of representing Arabs as oversexed, vulgar, and uncontrollably obsessed with the American blond woman (63). In this frame of representation, Arabs are generally given roles of raping and kidnapping women like in *Cannonbal Run* (1981), *Jewel of the Nile* (1985), *Protocol* (1984), *Never say Never Again* (1983), *Sahara* (1983), and *Taken* (2008). However, Updike turns this pattern upside down to suppress Ahmad's sexuality as a principle of his Islamic fundamentalism. While he visualizes the American culture as obsessed with sexuality, Ahmad reflects the Apollonian ethics of self-control. His distinction of America's godless physical culture as infatuated with sex soon reflects Islamic civilization as pure and anterior to Western contamination. Nevertheless, I claim that classical representation of Arabs' obsession with sexuality that Updike apparently denies in Ahmad is implicitly visualized in his repressive desires. Though Joryleen represents a sexual taboo in Ahmad's eyes, she represents the object of his fantasy. This is shown in Ahmad's description of her at the beginning of the novel: "she is short and round and talks well in class, pleasing the teacher. There is an endearing self-confidence in how compactly her cocoa-brown roundness fill her cloths, which today are patched and sequined jeans, worn pale where she sits, and a ribbed magenda shortly top both lower and higher than it should be"

(6). It is as if the only liberalism articulated in Ahmad is represented through his gaze to the female body, which also expresses his repressed transgression of the radicalism of Islam. In psychoanalytic terms, While Islam represents the Freudian superego, Ahmad's unconscious can be interpreted as physically visualized in America's hedonic culture. A section in Central High School, being described as, "foul-smelling lairs for drug deals, homosexual contacts, acts of prostitution, and occasional muggings" epitomizes the Freudian libido as the reservoir of America's illicit drives (9). Ahmad's confrontation with the unconscious results in a struggle against his libidinal desires. For this reason, his gaze at Joryleen objectifies her as a sexual commodity: "Ahmad has eyes only for her, the way she opens her mouth so wide, the tongue inside so pink behind her small round teeth, like half-buried pearls" (60). This erotic description of Joryleen clearly indicates Ahmad, the rational egotistic guy, as an agent of sexual obscenity. In short, Ahmad by no means does not escape the traditional Orientalist representation of Arab' sexual obscenity.

The fact that Orientalism is a product of the West, as Said maintains, the particular concept of the repressed oriental sexuality emphasizes Islam as an imaginary repressed desire of the West. In his "Orientalist Representations," Yosefa Loshitzky asserts that "In 'colonial discourse' the quest for the non-Western other involves as well a quest for 'another' sexuality" (55). Following this, it can be suggested that Joryleen's attraction to Ahmad can be interpreted as a colonial discourse based, presumably, on his "different" culture which invites a "different sexuality." Teresa's main source of attraction toward Ahmad's father is typically Orientalist when she states the reason for her marriage: "love mostly with him being, as you know, exotic, third-world, put-upon, and my marrying him showing how liberal and liberate I was" (84).

Said believes that the ideas made about the Orient cannot be grasped without their implications of power (Orientalism 5). He claims that "the relationship between Occident and

Orient is a relationship of power" (5). In the novel, one of the qualifications creating a hegemonic discourse is first and foremost Ahmad's Arabic name. Before being implicated in a terrorist plot, Ahmad is identified from his name as America's sub-culture. Jack's declaration of Ahmad's name as "interesting" probably proves him as a space keen for hegemony. In an interview, Said admits that the Arabic language is perceived as controversial: "I don't know a single Arab or Muslim who doesn't feel he/she has been put in the enemy camp. If one speaks Arabic in public or reads a document in the Arabic language, one is under suspicion" (McDonnell 51). Updike uses the Arabic name of "Ahmad," originally derived from "Muhammad," the last Prophet's name for Muslims, in order to "Orientalize" Ahmad and characterize him with an Arab mind—not a Western. This can be visualized in Ahmad's confrontation with Tylenol Jones, Joryleen's boyfriend. Tylenol's addressing of Ahmad as "hey, Arab" and his satisfaction in powerfully digging his thumb into Ahmad's shoulder in high school represents the Western desire to dominate the Arab Islamic world. Tylenol, as compared with Ahmad, is taller and more powerful. This representation of Ahmad as minimized in power in front of his mates is what "womanizes" him and expresses his being as able to be dominated by Western masculine power.

Taking Jack's relation with Ahmad, it can be said that through this relation between Jack as dominator and Ahmad as dominated, Updike exerts an ideological discourse of hegemony. For Said, the Orient is "Orientalized not specifically because it was discovered to be 'Oriental'…but also because it *could be*—that is, submitted to being—*made* Oriental" (5-6). In the novel, Jack is represented as the wise agent in high school who eventually becomes Ahmad's guide in his school career, which maintains a discourse of power over the cultural Other—Islam. Ahmad's obligatory appointments with Jack in order to discuss his future after high-school graduation produces in him a highly influential model of a voiceless "unspeakable" Oriental identity. Ahmad never speaks for himself in the school, never

represents his emotions, presence, and history. It is Jack who speaks for, and represents him. This idea is well stressed by Said in his epigraph to Orientalism. Citing Karl Marx, he says: "They cannot represent themselves; they must be represented." Said provides a similar example to highlight Flaubert's superior position over an Egyptian woman Kuchuk Hanem: "He was foreign, comparatively wealthy, male, and these were historical facts of domination that allowed him not only to possess Kuchuk Hanem physically but to speak for her and tell his readers in what way she was 'typically Oriental'" (6). This resonates in the same way in the case of Ahmad. Jack's position of power in relation to Ahmad clearly stands for the pattern of a relative strength of the Western Jewish American over the Arab.

Said provides a list of representations that generates the knowledge of the Oriental: "the Oriental is depicted as something one judges (as in a court of law), something one studies and depicts (as in curriculum), something that one disciplines (as in a school or prison), something one illustrates (as in zoological manual)" (40). By setting Ahmad as a student whom the West tries to correct and discipline, Updike applies the same Saidian strategy of representing the Oriental. In relation to this, it would be relevant to take into account Ahmad's minor age in contrast to Jack. Ahmad's representation as innocent and boyish recalls Said's observation that the Oriental is portrayed as childlike whereas the European is supposedly mature (40). In the novel, though Ahmad appears to be wiser than his mates in spite of being eighteen years old, he is pictured as irrational with reference to the mature Jack. The point is that, by way of stressing cultural relationship, the West, depicted as rational and more established creates a dominating framework.

The most important of all, perhaps, does not reside in alienating Ahmad from his culture, but in the crisis of his identity as a matter of fact. It is important to notice that a major problem arising from the severe hostility between Ahmad and the West is not merely attributed to his religion, but to the West's attitude as offensive and hateful to him. One of the

reasons Updike elucidates Ahmad's motivation to commit a terrorist act in the novel is to represent Islam as an ideology that sees the West as its target of resentment and revenge. Before Ahmad is involved in the terrorist bombing, he is continuously provoked by Tylenol, who represents the hostile threatening West. It is not surprising that Ahmad builds his identity against the West. The stressed pathetic question in the novel "Those people out there...Why do they hate us? What's to hate?" resonates hence as a colonial strategy serving to victimize the West (45-6).

Though he is consciously aware of his identity as American, Ahmad recognizes himself at the edge of Western culture, and eventually keeps to his marginal status. It is significant to highlight that Orientalism, in the Saidian understanding, strives to show that Western culture, by setting itself off against the Orient, gains its identity and strength over the Orient (*Orientalism* 3). In the novel, the American identity secures its delineation from Islam in Ahmad's mind through representing it as the target of his resentment. In reverse, gaining this strength is also represented in Ahmad's avowal of his non-Americanness. When Ahmad tells Jack about Omar, he says: "I would like, some day, to find him. Not to press any, or to impose any guilt, but simply to talk with him, as two Muslims would talk" (34). Ahmad's statement of "as two Muslims would talk" highlights his recognized cultural and religious difference from the American. In this way, the non-Muslim American culture gains its identity as American.

The arbitrary and generalizing use of terms such as "we" and "they" (25) draws criticism on Updike, who sees "the culture of the East" as hopelessly problematizing the monotheistic West. In a telephonic conversation with Beth, Herlione says:

> 'They make a little mess for a while but they don't bring the world down…Surely they can keep ahead of a few fanatic Arab—it's not as if they invented the computer like we did'…'No, but they invented zero, as you may

not know. They don't need to invent the computer to wipe us out with it. The Secratry calls it cyberwar. The worms are already out there running around; the Secratry every day has to sift through hundreds of reports that tell him about attacks. (131)

This passage marks one instance among many where Updike reflects the East as the familiar space that constructs the divisive pronoun "we." Updike, whose understanding of American culture lies in the intersection of the Jews and the Christians, and whose notion of *liberté* constitutes the essence of American civilization, argues a controversial anti-Islamic American culture. To which extent does Ahmad remain an alien Other for Updike, expelled in order to preserve and maintain the purity of the American identity? This is what I intend to discuss in the following pages.

So far, it has been shown that Islam is brought into opposition with the American Self. It has been demonstrated how this tactic of setting differences is Orientalist. This approach can appear more significant when put besides President G. W. Bush's imperial strategy in his speech in 2001. In addressing the Congress, President Bush said to the world at large: "you are with us or you are with the terrorists." This unconscious admiration of the world as divided into friends and foes is what I illustrate as a cynical ideology in the following discussion.

II.   5. Islam as a Brother of the West

As has been previously demonstrated, Updike's novel is based on stable binary oppositions mainly articulating the Saidian definition of Orientalism as characterized by the epistemological distinction between the West and the Islamic Orient. It has been shown that Updike's language exerts a rhetoric of differentiation which sets Islam (or religions) against the secular, say apparently democratic values of American culture. It has been reflected

through Ahmad, whose name transcends the religious principles of *Muhamadism* at large, that Islam is an Occident-phobic religion, archaic, mythical, repressive to sexuality, unable to co-exist within other cultures, strictly associated with black Arabs, and worth of hegemony.

Using this method of polarization, Updike's novel can be read as structuring Islam as the enemy of American Capitalist culture. In demonstrating Said's claim in his *Culture and Imperialism* that Western culture bears a hegemonic pattern of domination, I use Zizek's idea of ideology in order to argue that the West's Capitalist neo-liberal culture is subject to deep ideological conditions of eurocentrism in Updike's novel. I claim that the Western characters in the novel are manipulated by late-capitalism as a system of power whose ideological injunction contradicts not only with Islamic values, but with religious values in general.

For Zizek, the relation between people in the contemporary era is mystified and mediated through a web of ideological beliefs and superstitions (*The Sublime Object of Ideology* 31). He believes that in order for ideology to achieve its sublime object, the ideological identity exerts "power" on the manipulated subjects without their consciousness of it. As influenced by Hegel, Zizek compares this relation to that between the Master and the slave, in which the Master exerts his "charismatic power of fascination," and the servant is manipulated perceiving himself as free (31). Zizek sees this relation as best illustrated in contemporary ideological phenomena, like consumerism, cynicism, and totalitarianism.

II.   5. 1. Cynicism as part of Capitalist Ideology of Materialism

For Zizek, as for Marxists and most contemporary critics, the miseries of the contemporary Western culture are mainly attributed to the politics of (late) capitalism[33]. It is generally observed that with the reigning culture of consumption, mass media, and global technology, the traditional cultural values of the West have been "commercialized," as Marxists would pronounce it (Marx 49). Zizek recognizes the danger of (late) capitalist culture as being anchored in the traditional Marxian notion of "commodity fetishism" and embodied in post-ideological cynicism. He claims that the relations of domination and servitude, while was openly articulated in feudalism, became now "repressed" with the ramping post-capitalist era (22). Within this horizon, Zizek claims the contemporary subject as unauthentic, being manipulated by the forms of capitalism incarnated in mass media, consumerism, and the ideological appearances of equality and freedom. How can one not remember here the way Benjamin Barber conceives the idea of "McWorld." In an attempt to visualize the idea of globalism, Barber says: "Welcome to McWorld. There is no activity more intrinsically globalizing than trade, no ideology less interested in nations than capitalism, no challenge to frontiers more audacious than the market" (23). What is significant to our concern is the fact that global capitalistic culture, embodied in secularism, freedom, consumerism and so on, is proved to be today's chief ideology. What is more interesting, however, is not the fact that Barber sees the McWorld culture as the one which dissolves the boundaries between nations, but it is precisely the fact that he enthusiastically idealizes McWorld's culture, though he credits it ideological. The point worth mentioning here is that despite the fact that the contemporary man became adherent to the world's physicality and the

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[33] See Jameson; Baudrillard.

surrounding world of images that substitute the metaphysical reality, he enjoys it. This paradox of enjoyment is maintained by Zizek to be a "symptom" of cynical reason.

Zizek believes that cynicism is the dominant form of our consciousness in the contemporary capitalist conditions in which ideology lies as its deepest secret. His most elementary definition of cynicism is inspired from Peter Sloterdijk' study of "kynicism" in his *Critique of Cynical Reason* (1983). Zizek refutes Karl Marx's famous formula: "'sie wissen das nicht, aber sie tun es'" which means "they do not know it, but they are doing it," and claims that cynicism is rather embodied in Sloterdijk's "they know very well what they are doing, but still, they are doing it" (24-25). The fundamental concept of cynical ideology no longer necessitates, according to Zizek, a "naiveté" but consists in a paradox of what he calls "enlightened false consciousness" (26). That is to say, the meaning of cynicism resides in the paradox of knowing very well the falsehood and doing it instead of renouncing it. To quote Zizek once again, "in [the contemporary cynical attitude], ideology can lay its cards on the table, prove the secret of its functioning, *and still continue to function.*" (*The Indivisible Remainder* 200 emphasis original). From this seemingly simple definition of cynicism, it can be deduced how cynical consciousness is toxic to society's ethical values. In an effort to condemn ideological cynicism, a critic describes it as: "Akin to nihilism…lead(ing) individuals and nations to abandon all moral values and to drown in a fetid sea of intellectual and ethical moroseness and pessimism" (Navia 147).

The symptoms of cynical Ideology are well articulated in Updike's representation of American capitalist culture. The novel, which takes the shape of Barber's "Jihad *vs.* McWorld," represents the characters Jack, Beth, Teresa, Joryleen, Hermione, and Charlie as symbolizing the ideals of capitalist cynical ideology. Updike represents the characters' excessive freedom as Dyonisian, celebrating the ideals of hedonism—sexuality, food, "eternal music," beer, T.V. and so on (21). One example showing the hedonistic values of Western

culture is embodied in the students' celebration of their female bodies in high school, who "sway and sneer and expose their soft bodies and alluring hair. Their bellies, adorned with shining navel studs and low-down purple tattoos, ask, *what else is there to see*?" (1 emphasis original). From the eye of most of the students in the school who are mesmerized by capitalist ideology of materialism, celebrating the body seems to them a model of universal culture. However, from the eye of Ahmad who is not persuaded by the West's obsession with physicality, the girls are perceived as manipulated.

One example of the state of the West as cynical is reflected in the secular teachers of Central High School. Though "mak(ing) a show of teaching virtue and righteous self-restraint," the teachers in Ahmad' school are spiritually empty whose "shifty eyes and hollow voices…betray their lack of faith" (1). Zizek maintains that in cynical ideology, a cynical subject (who knows very well about the illusion and still is obsessed by it) must have an opposite subject who is supposed to believe in his place (*The Plague of Fantasies* 136). To put this in simple terms, materialist ideology does not need to destroy Synagogues, Mosques, and Churches in order to maintain its sublime object. Rather, it is through these religious appearances that ideology keeps its democratic orderliness. In the novel, the teachers are "paid" to teach morality for the supposedly "naïve" students in order to maintain the order of cynical reason in society. This paradox may be clearer when put besides Zizek's example of Santa Claus. He says that the Christian ritual of Santa Claus does not function if the parents disappoint their children by telling them of the faked myth of Santa Claus (107). He says that children "are supposed to" believe in it in order for the myth to work (107). It is in the same way that ideology functions in the institutions of New Jersey. In order for the teachers (who do not believe in religion) not to disappoint the students with the ideology of cynical culture, the teachers are supposed to keep their faithlessness secret. It is through the young adults' religion that cynicism gains its value.

To complicate things further, the students, like Ahmad, are consciously aware of the faked teaching of the materialist teachers. The point is that the students no longer fit Zizek's example of the Santa Claus since they are consciously aware that the school's teachings are made-up to make them believe in religion which for them is a myth compared to what is displayed in the social reality of New Prospect. What makes the cynical West at its most dangerous state is not the teachers' "supposed to teach" morality or the students "supposed to believe" in it, but it is that both teachers and students understand the irrationality of materialist values as rational.

The result of Capitalist materialist ideology is reflected in the children's racism and immorality in Central High School. Despite the teachers' efforts to plant in them virtue and knowledge, the students strive to dominate and oppress weaker students, like Ahmad, to show their power, like capitalist hegemony. In the novel, it is proved that children have lost their essence of humanity. "Like their nihilistic punk-rock heroes," the children in high school show no emotions (14). It is this system of power that Ahmad struggles against; literally against Tylenol who continuously subjugates him, and metaphorically against the capitalist cynical ideology which "seek(s) to take away (his) God" (1).

Amid the immoral students and teachers in Central High School, Ahmad is reflected as blessed, whose strong relation with Allah saves him from being manipulated by Western cynical ideology. It is significant to highlight how important Islam is to Updike as an example of a strong and affirmative religion in the novel. Ahmad's religion "keeps him from drugs and vice," which contrasts the American lifestyle as full of failings (5-6). Updike's typical fascination with Ahmad certainly stems from a desire to experience the most conservative environment Islam has to offer for the West. His use of Islam shows a tendency not to better understand Islam, but to better understand the modern Self.

Updike's representation of the modern Capitalist West shows faithlessness as its mainstream culture. Most of the Western characters in the novel illustrate modern culture that has consciously slain its own God(s) and spirituality. Jewish and Christian Gods are all being proclaimed to be "dead" with the now manipulated society. Christianity, for Teresa, Beth and Hermione, though representing a moral category, is paradoxically deserted in favor of the characters' materialistic lifestyles. However wise and ethical, it is rendered nihilistic, as *Terrorist* proposes. For Ahmad's mother, whose name has been turned into "terr-or" or "holy terr-or," religion does not take part of her everyday life activities. She neither attends to Church services nor expresses spirituality in her discussions. For her, Ahmad's religious practice is ridiculously expressed as doing the "Allah thing" (115). Because religion is irrelevant for her, her lifestyle is characterized rather by estrangement, boredom and pessimism. Zizek's claim that in a cynical society, "ideology consists in the very fact that the people 'do not know what they are really doing'" is clearly dramatized in Teresa (*The Sublime Object of Ideology* 27). As she does not know about the false representation of the social reality of New Jersey to which they belong, Teresa is the kind of a careless single mother who rarely irons, sees her son for less than an hour a day, and never has dinner with him on one table. Her state of loneliness is articulated through smoking in a bedroom which serves also as a painting studio. Teresa's bad housekeeping is also significant to argue her existential situation. Her indifference to home-space expressed in her everyday unclean kitchen and shapeless bed characterizes her cynical identity as nihilistic. Teresa totally rejects the social conventions of domesticity, which articulates her state of homelessness at her own home. To take this idea further, it can be suggested that Teresa's "meaningless dwelling-place" is a metaphor of her absurd cynical subject (Bessedik 565)[34]. The symptoms of ideology that are

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[34] See Appendix 8.

"repressed" in the social sphere—undemocracy, intolerance, and dominance—are literally projected in Teresa's domestic inside.

Though Updike brings Ahmad inside Teresa's dwelling place as a model of an authentic identity, he proves her unable to realize her moral vacuum. Ahmad's religion asks him to pray five times a day, a thing which Teresa deserted since the age of sixteen. It is as if Updike uses Islam as a kind of a mirror in which the blind Teresa might finally see the true condition of her decay. It can be inferred that Updike's interest in the Islamic lifestyle that depends on Allah and the teachings of Muhammad, is certainly attributed to his disgust with excessive liberal culture. Updike is known not only as one of America's significant contemporary novelists but also one of the most important writers influenced by Christian theology. He openly declares in his memoirs his religious literature as an expression of his faith:

> What small faith I have has given me what artistic courage I have. My theory was that God already knows everything and cannot be chocked. And only truth is useful. Only truth can be built upon. From a higher, inhuman point of view, however harsh, is holy. The fabricated truth of poetry and fiction makes a shelter in which I feel safe, sheltered within interlaced plausibilities in the image of a real world for which I am not to blame. (*Self-Consciousness* 231)

It can be said that Updike's expression of truth that has long been anchored in Christianity is no longer efficient in the context of postmodern cynical culture. The novel's conversion to Islamic cult shows Updike undergo what Almond describes as a "cultural claustrophobia" (9).

Teresa's absurd cynical subject is a result of her "leap of Faith, faith in lost causes" (Zizek *In Defense of Lost Causes* 2). Zizek claims that in the endless complexity of the contemporary ideological world, the cause of our (cynical) faith exceeds the limit of our

common sense (2). What lies beyond, he says, involves "a leap of faith in lost causes, causes that, from within the space of skeptical wisdom, cannot but appear as creasy" (2). Teresa's leap of faith not in religion but in the "not knowing what she is doing" is what characterizes her as cynical *par excellence*. This idea can be exemplified in her justification of religion as meaningless:

> Religion to me is all a matter of attitude. It's saying *yes* to life. You have to trust that there is a purpose, or you'll sink. When I paint, I just *have* to believe that beauty will emerge. Painting abstract, you don't have a pretty landscape or bowl of oranges to lean on; it has to come purely out of *you*. You have to shut your eyes, so to speak, and take a *leap*. You have to say *yes*. (89 emphasis original)

Teresa's insight on religion in juxtaposition with her philosophy of paining (i.e. "doing") invites one to analyze cynical reason at its pure metaphysical level. According to Teresa, morality does not need religion in order to be achieved. Her belief in the "matter of attitude" shows that her sense of wisdom resides in the very liberal ethics of her intuition. Saying "yes" to life can be metaphorically understood as saying "yes" to her cynical reason which appears to her intuition as wise (89). The point worth repeating again is that the common sense of this ideological era leads, as Zizek claims, to draw a line between "*doxa* (accidental/ empirical opinion, Wisdom) and Truth, or, even more radically, empirical positive knowledge and absolute Faith" (2). In this respect, Teresa's philosophy of painting, which represents her elementary transgression of religious "absolute faith," is based in the cynical expression of "not knowing what to do." Teresa lets the "lost causes" speak for themselves without consciously knowing her cause of faith in them. Here we fall into the traditional question of human animalistic desires. In fact, Teresa's sense of liberal humanism goes beyond the ethics of what Nietzsche calls the "human, all too human" and eventually

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confronts the inhuman of her humanity (*Human, All too Human* vii). In this way, her claimed "leap" can be understood in the Zizekian leap of faith lost in the myriad of hedonistic principles caused by cynical ideology, and her claimed follow of "purpose" can be read as following purposeless animalistic desires. This can be illustrated by the fact that even though she knows that Jack never leaves his wife, her wisdom still insists on inviting him to have sex with her.

In contrast to such Western identity of "lost causes," Updike finds in Ahmad's authentic identity alternative values to undermine the modern subject. Ahmad's fidelity to religious principles defines his purpose in life as anchored in a "just cause" (Said *Covering Islam* 7). Like driving his own life under "the guidance of Allah," Ahmad is pleased to work as a truck driver "with purity almost religious in quality" (73). In highlighting Ahmad's belief in "the guidance of Allah," Updike reminds of the superficiality of the Western subject. A certain idea of Oriental honesty as opposed to Western self-denial seems to overwhelm Updike's East *vs*. West opposition. In this sense, Updike seems to have been interested in the possibility of Islam possessing a secret.

Perhaps, the most representative of American McWorld society is Beth. Depicted as obese, consumerist, faithless, and hypnotized by T.V., Beth typically represents the cynical West. Beth, who "was" a Lutheran, is no longer a Churchgoer. Her spirituality is rather replaced by Oprah' shows which become her spiritual guide (28). As she learns from Oprah about how to control man's depression, Beth proposes to Jack to see a psychiatrist to cure himself. It can be said that in postmodern New Prospect, the traditional role of the Church or the Bible is dismissed in favor of screen spirituality which proves to be more commercial and fetishistic. Media creates a distance between Beth as a cynical subject and the metaphysical concept of spirituality. It can be read as a kind of emancipation that makes Beth unconsciously believe in an imaginary form of spirituality.

Jack's description of Beth as "a whale of a woman giving off too much heat through her blubber, breathes audibly beside him, her tireless little rasp of a snore extending into unconsciousness her daily monologue" can be read as representing capitalism's industrial mass production. In this line of thought, Beth's obesity can be also interpreted as an embodiment of capitalist ideology of consumerism. Though Jack continuously informs her of the danger of consumer ideology, he proves unable to convince her. When Beth buys a carpet, Jack warns her that it would show dirt, which leads to an inevitable new consumption. However, the seller's argument "it gives a cool, contemporary look…it expands the space" visualizes for her the pleasure principle of consumer cynical ideology (125). Though Beth is given choice not to buy the carpet, she is indirectly forced to buy her enjoyment with the meaning of the carpet.

Unlike the late-capitalist materialist culture of the West, Islam is projected as a consistent economic system that celebrates moral values. Updike finds in Ahmad's religion a serious critique of the corruption of late capitalism and its ideologies.

> 'They believe,' Charlie carefully restates, 'in action. They believe that something can be done. That the Muslim peasant in Mindanao need not starve, that the Bangladeshi child need not drown, that the Egyptian villager need not go blind with schistosomiasis, that the Palestinians need not be strafed by Israeli helicopters, that the faithful need not eat the sand and camel dung of the world while the Great Satan grows fat on sugar and pork and underpriced petroleum. They believe that a billion followers of Islam need not have their eyes and ears and souls corrupted by the poisonous entertainments of Hollywood and a ruthless economic imperialism whose Christian-Jewish God is a decrepit idol, a mere mask concealing the despair of atheists.' (195-196)

From this voice of Charlie, Updike condemns the individualism of capitalism's excessive consumer ideology.

In order to clearly show how cynical ideology manifests in the secular West, it is perhaps worthy to reflect it on Jack as a Jewish character. In the novel, Jack is the only character who condemns the capitalist materialistic culture and who, to a certain extent, is unconsciously dissolved in its ideology. I consider this consciousness credited to his Jewish identity which appears to be most conservative after the supposedly "non-Western" Muslims in the novel. Jack is almost compatible with the popular stereotype of Jewish identity as overly ambitious, smart and successful.[35] His self-consciousness is portrayed in his long experience with teaching—"practically forever" (15), his constant reading and usual wake at "three or four in the morning" (17). Differently from the other teachers of the school who are obsessed with the materiality of New Jersey, Jack shows a deep weariness of his being and existence as he usually ponders on the question of death. The latter, according to existentialists, confirm Jack's "being in the world," to borrow from Heidegger (53). In a sense, Updike demonstrates through Jack that it is difficult for his identity to achieve the status of a cynical subject.

Similar to his attitude to Islam, Updike seems to have found also in Judaism what Nietzsche calls an "affirmative Semitic religion" ("The Will to Power" 145). When Jack refuses to have sex with Teresa after her invitation, she says: "…but no, Jews have to have guilt, it's their way of showing how special they are, how superior to everybody else, God gets sore at just *them*, with their putrid precious covenant. You make me sick, Jack Levy!" (158). It is proved that Jack's case is not different from Ahmad's because of his radical self-

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[35] For strong points of view on different aspects of this aspect of anti-Semitism, see Kahalan and Tranger; Wilson; Schneider 461.

determination. He appears to Teresa as a fundamentalist Jew who "knows what he is really doing" in everyday ideology. In this sense, it is important to underline that Updike reflects Jack's Jewishness as creating inconsistency for the manipulation of cynical reason, like Ahmad actually does.

It is in this case that the paradox of cynical reason might be well illustrated. Though Jack is convinced of the failings and the immorality of Western culture, he remains, as he would appear in the eye of Ahmad, "sinking into the morass of Godlessness…by means of property defacement, an identity" (11). Like the teachers in high school, Jack also shows to follow his pleasure principle though he knows that the teachings of his religion are moral. Zizek's formula "they know very well what they are doing, but still, they are doing it" perfectly fits Jack as a cynical character. He is described as the perfect husband whose Jewish identity never lets him leave his wife, Beth. Though he sticks to the moral values of his religion, he ultimately betrays her with Ahmad's mother who also believes in the pleasure principle of the American culture. Updike's imagination of Judaism as a second affirmative religion next to Islam is radically negated. He rather shows a paradoxical absence of values at the very heart of a faith built in rituals. Differently from Islam in which Updike finds a room of accurately applied conservatism, Judaism is displayed to have been converted to the moral vacuum of modern liberalism.

For Jack, the proper thing to do is to renounce his conservative past in favor of the secular culture. He thinks that Western civilization is godless and it seems to him that the only way to achieve universality is through faithlessness. It is urgent to remark that Jack pronounces a symptom of what Zizek calls "the inversion of cynicism," a state that argues Jack to be living in a "post-ideological society" (The *Sublime Object of Ideology* 30). Zizek says that in nowadays post-ideological society, a subject keeps cynical distance and "blind(s) himself to the structuring power of ideological fantasy" (30). This means that even if the

individual does not take ideology seriously and even if he does not enjoy ideology, he still should do it and keep his religion secret. This might represent the most dangerous face of ideology. Jack's eventual desire to satisfy Teresa after her persistent invitation proves ideology operating not in an illusion like in Beth's case; rather, in an unconscious fantasy that leads Jack to refute Teresa's assumption of being a fundamentalist. The result is, even if Jack does not take sex seriously, even if he keeps distance, he still structures social reality as sexual.

To read this fact seriously, it is ultimately maintained that Jack's Jewishness tolerates the so-forced materialistic principles in order to achieve "the melting pot" of the ideologically controlled society. At first glance, it appears that Jack's Jewishness basically represents an "Other" for the global hedonistic culture. However, Updike's explicit celebration of certain ideals of Jewish culture are soon incorporated (let us say in a "positive" way) with certain materialistic elements. Updike, in this sense, creates Jack as a "difference which does not make a difference" in the common materialistic West. With this constructed version of modern Judaism—a Judaism that tolerates liberal ethics, Updike alludes to the invariant essence of Islam. It is important to notice that according to Muslim critics, the idea of a single Islam, "generally closed, utterly exceptionalist," rejecting any notion of change or diversity, is a product of both Islamophobic as well as Islamophilic discourses (Al-Azmeh 8). While Updike criticizes modern spirituality to be infidel to its tradition, one is led to think that Updike's dramatization of a modern version of Judaism takes part of his Orientalist discourse. Updike's dramatization of Jack as cynical can be grasped as taking part of cynical ideology at its purest form. Showing Jack as ultimately cynical directly casts Ahmad as "unfamiliar" and "alien." Updike is criticizing and reproducing the imperial ideologies embedded in his neo-liberal capitalist culture. It is as if Updike argues that all Western citizens (should) be guided by cynical reason and (should) accept social reality as Jack does. In this way, he not only

represents a new stage in the development of Jewish identity in the postmodern West, but also represents a never coming "new stage" for Muslims like Ahmad in the context of postmodern American culture.

Updike seems to contextualize the solution for the problem of the clash of faiths through ethnicity as Jewish that shows to accept the ideologies of globalization. However, to which extent does Jack represent this solution? Differently from Ahmad who declares his religious identity, Jack shows an unauthentic self as an effect of cynical ideology. American culture is proved unable to control and liberate itself from the politics of its ideology. One might think at this level that the consequence of cynical ideology stands at the level of one person—Jack, which is less dangerous in comparison to the open revolutionary spirit of Ahmad against ideology. However, it is worth realizing that the novel projects the phenomenon of "the subject supposed to believe" in the so-called godless values of U.S. culture (Zizek 106).

The preacher in the Church, who might represent the superego of the American culture, declares America's loss of selfhood as a symptom of modern global capitalism: "nobody *trusts* himself to speak for himself anymore" (51). Some critics argue Jack to be the major representative of Western civilization (Zaki 64). This claim is based on the fact that Jack, though conscious of Western ideology of godlessness, overlooks his faith for the sake of cultural homogeneity. As previously illustrated, Jack falls in the trap of ideology even though he is not convinced of his doings. Following this, I maintain that it is the clergyman who best represents the West because though he is conscious of the cynical ideology of the West, is still attached to his faith, just like Ahmad. The clergyman teaches men and women not to lose faith, and contrary to the secular teachers in the school whose "hollow voices betray their lack of belief" (1), "his voice shrinks and swells like that of a man calling from the topmost mast of a storm-tossed ship" (50). Differently from Jack who renders cynical ideology effective in

his context by converting to secularism despite of his knowledge of its fallacies, the clergyman invites people to be spokespersons of their God, like Moses was (51). The preacher ultimately presents a critique of capitalist ideology and unmasks its reality. While mockingly loud radios from cars are heard from the church, the preacher says:

> 'Would to God that we had died in Egypt!' So why *did* God bring us out of slavery into this wilderness'—he consults his book—'to fall by the sword, that our wives and our children should be a prey'? A prey! Hey, this is serious! Let's hustle our asses—our oxes and asses—back to Egypt!' He glances into the book, and reads a verse aloud: 'they said to one another, Let us make a captain, and let us return to Egypt.' *That Pharaoh, he wasn't so bad. He fed us, though not much. He gave us cabins to sleep in, down by the marsh with all the mosquitoes. He sent us welfare checks, pretty regular. He gave us jobs dishing up fries at McDonald's, for the minimum wage. He was friendly, that Pharaoh compared to those giants, those humongous sons of Anak.*' (53 emphases added)

As emphasized above, the preacher compares the danger of Western Capitalist culture to the Egyptian Pharaonic civilization which, for him, was as totalitarian as the modern ideologies of the West. In this sense, he characterizes the peril of modern capitalist culture as exercising a modern way of slavery, identified by its forced labor, low wages, and invisibly forced faith. Most important perhaps is the emphasis on this system of McWorld as being "friendly," showing a "civilized" form of totalitarianism.

Following the Preacher's discussion in the novel, it is declared that all religion is fundamentalist; creating a superstitious element that denounces the politics of materialist ideology. It is proved that an antagonistic element in contemporary American culture resides in the very notion of religion because it creates a problematic class struggle, to borrow from

Marx, which threatens the survival of the forms of late-capitalism, including market freedom, consumerism, high-technology, and so on. Religion, as embodied in the Jewish Jack, the Muslim Ahmad and the Christian preacher, represents a critique of cynical reason. In this context, Updike's Islam appears to work as a sort of "semantic encounter," represented as familiar to Judeo-Christian theology and sharing its metaphysical ideas (Almond 42). When Ahmad goes to the Church, he describes its inside elements in interchangeable words with the Islamic vocabulary: "When a long prayer is offered by the Christian imam… arising like sweat on the skin, a murmur of assent continues when, in the joke of the second hymn, concerning the joy of walking with Jesus, the preacher ascends into the high minbar decorated with carved angels" (50). Christian and Islamic brotherhood is further strengthened by the conformity of the preacher's criticism of McWorld's ideologies with Ahmad's conservative thoughts.

Here, both Christianity and Islam are seen as points of resistance against the globalization of the world. In relation to this, I claim that the "constructed" kinship of Christianity and Islam as "non-pagan monotheisms" is not to annihilate capitalist materialism but to annihilate its potential danger (Almond 49). It is relevant to link this idea with Zizek's insight on consumerism in the now materialist society. He believes that today's ideology is marked by a contemporary redefinition of politics as tolerating liberal ideology of "materialism without casualties" (Zizek and GlynDaly 105). He illustrates this by stating that today's market includes a whole series of products deprived from their dangerous element: coffee without caffeine, beer without alcohol, cream without fact, and so on (105). It is in the same way that Updike's interest in Islamic brotherhood with Christianity operates in the novel. Using Islamic and Christian fundamentalist doctrines, Updike warns the West of the serious danger of excessive freedom that materialism engenders, like excessive sexuality, obesity, excessive consumption, and loss of individuality.

Though the preacher talks to the people in the Church about the ideological masks of Western culture and its social reality, they still insist upon the mask, so to speak. Joryleen, who believes in the carpe diem motto, passionately embraces the Western materialistic lifestyle even though she is quite aware of its ideologies. Singing for the school's assembly programs "songs of Jesus or sexual longing," she attends the Church services merely for fun (6). As she does not take religion seriously, Joryleen disrespects its sacredness. Ahmad best condemns Joryleen's secular culture as it lessens the purity of Jesus. He states: "I did not understand many of the words. In what way is Jesus such a friend to all of you…the Prophet is many things to his followers, but we do not call him our friend. We are not so cozy, as your clergyman said" (66). It can be said that Joryleen embodies Western cynical ideology. Though she appears friendly and beautiful as the American McWorld culture does in its spirit of physical enjoyment, her judgment dangerously rediculizes the divine as a normal ethical belief.

Most interesting is when Ahmad gets in a discussion with Joryleen about the prohibitions of Islam. Her questions "what does your Mr. Muhammed say?" (65), "what do you do for fun?" (67), and "Instead of being good, don't you ever want to *feel* good?" also represent Ahmad as the target of Joryleen's ideology of mockery of religion (67). It is reflected through these questions that Joryleen's cynical distance from Ahmad, her laughter, irony, and mockery are, so to speak, part of the same game. It is indirectly stated that differently from Islamic ideology, Western capitalist ideology is not meant to be taken seriously or literally. Zizek claims that the greatest threat of totalitarianism is people who take its ideology literally" (*The Sublime Object of Ideology* 24). In relation to this, it is clear through Joryleen's questions that Ahmad embodies a dogmatic belief which does not laugh. He is rather visualized as a totalitarian figure, "outdated, a kind of living dead, a remnant of the past, certainly not a person representing the existing social and political powers" (Zizek

24). Zizek identifies cynical reason as a popular rejection of an official culture by means of irony and sarcasm (26). He says that the traditional cynical procedure "is to confront the pathetic phrase of the ruling official ideology—its solemn, grave tonality—with everyday banality and to hold them up to ridicule, thus exposing behind the sublime *nobleness* of the ideological phrases the egotistical interest, the violence, the brutal claims to power" (26). It is in such a way that Updike's positive insight on Islam turns into an Orientalist insight of an alien Other.

So far, it has been demonstrated that the traditional cultural values of New Prospect are degenerating under the influence of Materialist cynical ideology. The social reality of New Prospect is mainly cynical. Postmodern New Jersey is identified as a place where materialism, consumption, and media are overwhelming its spirit. In this city, the true meaning of spirituality is rendered unreal. Despite realizing its future decay, characters continue to exercise the Capitalistic values of excessive freedom, a freedom that has led to a public "talk about same-sex marriages" (121). The notion of paradise, which for the preacher and Ahmad is "unseen," is believed to be anchored in worldly physicality for the hedonistic West (8). This state of barren spirituality in New Jersey can be safely paralleled with What T. S. Eliot calls "Unreal City" in which Ahmad shows its terror "in a handful of dust" (60; 30).

Most importantly, it has been shown that Updike bears positive attitudes toward the Islamic Other exclusively for the purpose of criticizing the West. It has been illustrated that Updike's interest in Islam is rooted in using it as what Almond calls a "barometer of difference," a source of alternative customs and values to undermine the Universalist claims of Western cynical ideology. This yearning to learn from Islam is incorporated with Updike's vocabulary, adapted and used as a key motif to his arguments. So far, I have stated very little of what Islam is for Updike but only what it is not. Islam is reflected as a constructed anti-modern and anti-Western values fundamentally built on conservative ethics.

II.   6. Islam as an Other of the West

One of the strategies of Orientalist representations that Said elucidates in his *Orientalism* is "historical sympathy" with the Orient (118). He claims this element as a way for modern Orientalism in which the Orientalist thinker is found considering all cultures as "organically and internally coherent, bound together by spirit" while ultimately breaking "the doctrinal walls erected between himself and the Orient" (118). In the novel, Updike's declared brotherhood between Christianity and Islam soon turns into a declaration of a tyrannical Islam based on totalitarianism. In what proceeds, I will demonstrate Updike's conscious hypocrite sympathy with the Orient.

In order to carry out the discussion regarding Updike's representation of Islam in the context of the previously stated ideals of Western culture, one might stop and think of two serious questions: What does Ahmad represent? What is the central problem(s) in Updike's novel? The answer to the latter can be at least restated in the idea that the West is "mainly" excessive liberal; however, Ahmad's revolutionary terrorism represents the most serious trouble in the novel. It is important to recognize that Ahmad not only represents the Islamic faith but, because of his encounter with the religious extremist imam, also represents Islamic extreme fundamentalism. Hence, talking about the "Other" of American culture is actually talking about "Others" for there is no single Islamic Other in Updike's thought. Aziz Al-Azmeh, among many critics, has been one of the most prominent figures in asserting that "there are as many Islams as there are situations that sustain it (1). In the novel, it can be deduced that Updike's representation of Islam is too simplistic, provoking confusion regarding the origin of terrorism, whether attributed to Islam (which is as fundamentalist as any other religion) or to extreme fundamentalist Muslims. In his "Terrorism and the Critique

of American Culture," Peter C. Herman writes that Updike's writing about a terrorist who is converted first to Islam and then to the ideology of extreme Islamic fundamentalism goes against the conventions described in Obert Appelbaum and Alex Paknadel's taxonomy of terrorism novels (427). His explicit interchangeability of Islam with Islamic terrorism radicalizes Islam into an illegitimate position. His tactic of suppressing the Islamic faith in the novel (differently from his attitude to Judaism and Christianity) operates in two central ways: on the one hand, Updike wishes to reduce Islamic Orientalism to the status of an innocent; on the other hand he wishes to claim that the Orient is too complex to exist in the neo-liberal West. In this sense, Updike's interest in Islam is shown to be derived not from curiosity but from fear of "Islamization" of the West. In an interview with Alden Mudge, Updike declares that he is interested in Islam as "more fiery and absolutist and, some would say, fanatical brand of theistic faith" in itself reflects his use of Islam as more fiction than faith" (Holy Terror). This proves that Updike's attention to Islam is mainly an attention to fictional extremism rather than real faith. This meets with Said's claim that the meaning of the term Islam is used today as "part fiction, part ideological label, part minimal designation of a religion called Islam" (*Covering Islam* x).

After drawing a positive attention to Islam, Updike represents it as alien and radically different from its Jewish and Christian cousins. It is important to notice that the religious critique of the godless West has been represented at three different levels in the novel: repressed in the case of Jack; verbalized in the case of the preacher; and revolutionized as I am going to show it in the remaining case of Ahmad. As Ahmad's revolution leads to terrorism, Updike hints to the idea that American neo-liberal culture needs a Christian or a Jewish version of Islam. Beth's Lutheran faith, which is mainly extreme fundamentalist Protestantism, had to be repressed with the liberal ethics of capitalism in order to provide peace in the West. In this sense, Updike proves to be radicalist in his representation of the

West *vs*. East dichotomy; he creates mainly the image of the West of excessive freedom in opposition to the image of the East of excessive deprivation. There is no place for religious freedom in the unspiritual West as there is no place for secular ethics in the religious West. It can be stated that Updike's Orientalist discourse shows the symptoms of late-capitalist ideologies that rejects fundamentalism at its system. Zizek states that the problem of Western society resides in its inability to blend conservative liberal values with radicalism:

> Intelligent conservative democrats, from Daniel Bell to Francis Fukuyama, are aware that contemporary global capitalism tends to undermine its own ideological conditions (what, long ago. Bell called the 'cultural contradictions of capitalism'): capitalism can only thrive in the conditions of basic social stability, of intact symbolic trust, of individuals not only accepting their own responsibility for their fate, but also relying on the basic 'fairness' of the system —this ideological background has to be sustained through a strong educational, cultural apparatus. Within this horizon, the answer is thus neither radical liberalism *à la* Hayek, nor crude conservatism, still less clinging to old welfare state ideals, but a blend of economic liberalism with a minimally 'authoritarian' spirit of community (the emphasis on 'social stability', 'values,' and so forth) that counteracts the system's excesses —in other words what Third Way social-democrats such as Blair have been developing (*In Defense of Lost Causes* 2).

The above illustrated clash of excesses is what identifies Updike's epistemology of West *vs*. East. His inability to fabricate an image of a blended fundamental Islam with liberal Western ethics has its consequence on extreme Oriental discourse. His perpetual criticism of the American culture through the voice of Ahmad and his eventual admiration of its values can be read as a form of cynical ideology. Importantly, Zizek considers cynicism as the

answer of the ruling culture to cynical subversion (*The Sublime Object of Ideology* 26). In illustrating this claim, Zizek says that:

> This cynicism is not a direct position of immorality, it is more like morality itself put in the service of immorality—the model of cynical wisdom is to conceive probity, integrity, as a supreme form of dishonesty, and morals as a supreme form of profligacy, the truth as the most effective form of a lie. This cynicism is therefore a kind of perverted 'negation of the negation' of the official ideology: confronted with illegal enrichment, with robbery, the cynical reaction consists in saying that legal enrichment is a lot more effective and, moreover, protected by the law. (26)

Since late-capitalism's major enemy is fundamentalism, it fits to state that Updike "wears" the mask of Orientalism and finds a reason to retain it, to follow Zizek's terms. His othering of Islam is understood as put in the service of the "morality" of the materialist West. His use of Islam as a radical, archaic, and exotic religion can be said to be a strategy to hide the contradictions of capitalist ideology itself. In this way, Updike actually reverberates the shared view of the political class that seeks to maintain social stability by maintaining the order of global capitalism. Islam plays this political role of maintaining social stability in the West by way of being subverted.

By demonizing Islam, Updike visualizes capitalist cynical culture as the major moral value that (should) govern American culture, or perhaps the world's cultures in general despite its contradictions. It is in this position that Updike succeeds to "other" the Orient, just like his fellow politicians. Huntington arrives at the same result when claiming that the West is not controlled by capitalism; it is the propagator of capitalism as the final form of

civilization that may not perish until the end of history thesis of the "clash of civilizations" (28).

Since the novel focuses on the antagonism between excessive liberal culture of late-Capitalism and the extreme fundamentalism of Islam, I maintain that this clash occurring in the novel, which some critics maintained as a "clash of civilizations" is rather argued here to be a "clash of ideologies" (Zaki 55). Like the West who is hypnotized by the global Capitalist ideology of materialism, I claim that Ahmad is also hypnotized by the ideology of Islamic terrorism, represented by Sheikh Rashid.

II.   6.1. "The Obscene Underside of Liberal Democracy"[36]

In face of the liberal West, Updike dramatizes Ahmad, Shaikh Rashid and Charlie as the major representatives of the rationalism of Islamic terrorism. The ideology of Islamic terrorism is represented as humanphobic, showing extreme radical readings of the Qur'anic text. One instance of an extremist interpretation of the Qur'an is displayed through Shaikh Rashid's teaching to Ahmad of verse fourteen Sura sixty four: "*ya ayyuha 'lladhina amanu inna min azwdjikum wa awlddikum 'aduwwan lakum fa 'hdharubum, wa in ta'fu wa tasfabu wa taghfirii fa-inna 'llaha ghafurun rahim*" (105). Sheikh Rashid's immediate interpretation of the idea of enmity between a man and his family projected in the aya is based on his extremist understanding of "Jihad," as he explains: "Well, maybe because they distract you from *jihad*, from the struggle to become holy and closer to God" (106). His understanding of Jihad is further sustained by relating it to the notion of death, as he says: "are you afraid of entering into Paradaise?" (106). The imam's irrational elaboration on the aya and his neglect

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[36] Kovacevic, natasa. "The Obscene Underside of Liberal Democracy: Slavoj Zizek" Mescillaneous, 10 Aug. 2010. Web. 7 Dec. 2015.

to scholarly references on the context of the aya fit to argue Shaikh Rashid as what Ramadan would call him "salafi literalist" (Western Muslims 25). The latter is a school of Islamic thought whose faithfulness to ahl al-hadith (i.e. to the pious Muslims of the first three generations of Islam) insists on an exclusive reference to text and forbids any interpretation based on the context of the aya ot its objective "qasd" (25). The result of this approach to the Qur'anic text amid the global neo-liberalism of the West is a hostile and violent doctrine that represents "the obscene underside of liberal democracy" (Kovacevic).

For most Muslim characters in the novel, the Islamic faith is the "Straight Path" that not only contradicts the neo-liberal ethics of the West, but contradicts humanism at large. As we learn from Shaikh Rashid, who embodies the teachings of Islamic terrorism, Islam is radicalized to the totality of lifestyle. Ahmad's conception of beauty, which he eventually learns from Shaikh Rashid, is too liberal to be appropriate. He dangerously thinks: "it is a sin to be vain of his appearance: self-love is a form of competition with God; and competition is what He cannot abide…he wishes to keep (his body) as its Maker formed it" (16). Differently from his mother's insight on beauty as represented in her artistic paintings, Ahmad's (extreme) fundamental notion of beauty is visualized in his physical appearance, always wearing "white shirts, narrow-legged black jeans" (6). The opposing colors, black and white, that Ahmad wears reflect his mentality as strictly Apollonian.

Like in Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty Four*, the extremist world of Islamic fundamentalism is of a total sexual repression except for husband and wife relation. Islamic sexual politics in the novel is strictly linked to the ideology of anti-liberalism. In this way, the limitation of "eros," can be read as a form of ideology that opposes Western neo-liberal ethics. A Western woman, in Ahmad's mind, does not fit for a marriage with a Muslim because she is impure. In this sense, sexual repression does not take its pure meaning as related to religion. Rather, his ethics of sexual repression is undemocratic and strictly related to the totalitarian ideology

ruling him. His emotional involvement with Joryleen and his eventual sexual repression can be seen as a challenge against the evil "American way" (36). Like extreme liberals who express their revolution with extreme physical nudity, Ahmad expresses the fundamentalist challenge to liberal ethics with his excessive repression.

For Ahmad, as for Shaikh Rashid, the moral value of the slogan "Knowledge is Freedom" highlighted in Central High School is irrational. For them, it is anti-religious (and pro-liberal) to learn science because it eventually leads to "the death of God." Shaikh Rashid, however, is paradoxically most conscious of the importance of science:

> It was Islam…that had preserved the science and simple mechanisms of the Greeks when all Christian Europe had in its barbarism forgotten such things. *In today's world, the heroes of Islamic resistance to the Great Satan were former doctors and engineers, adepts in the use of machines as computers and airlines and roadside bombs. Islam, unlike Christianity, has no fear of scientific truth. Allah had formed the physical world, and all its devices when put to holy use were holy* (139-140 emphasis added).

If earlier representations of Islam used the classical stereotype of Arab Muslims as uncultivated and less educated, Updike injects the image of scientific Arabs who know about technology in *Terrorist*. In his analyses of the clash of civilizations in *Terrorist*, Amin Zaki maintains that modern science represents a "'Westoxification' of Islam" for Shaikh Rashid, a term that Huntington uses to describe the toxic ideological invasion of the West, as it imposes its civilization upon the other cultures (70). Zaki says that Shaikh Rashid probably emphasizes the importance of science in Islamic civilization so as to "give a pretext for Islam's modernization" (70). However, the image of Arabs as "former doctors and engineers, adepts in the use of machines as computers and airlines and roadside bombs" emphasizes the

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Arabs as terrorists who understand technology solely for the sake of bombarding the enemy (140). In this respect, it is urgent to state that Shaikh Rachid does not represent fundamentalism in this case. He thinks that science leads to skepticism but is also beneficial in fighting the enemy. It should be emphasized that there would be no "but" for a true fundamentalist who sticks to his radical values. A similar scene can be exemplified in his explanation of "Surat Al-feel" (The Elephant), where he draws an analogy between the birds' stones and the modern weapons in their exact current name. The fundamentalism of the imam contradicts Barber's conception of "Jihad," maintaining that Jihadic warriors, whether Muslims, Christians or Jews, are "people who detest modernity—the secular, scientific, rational, and commercial civilization created by the enlightenment as it is defined by both its virtues (freedom, democracy, tolerance, and diversity) and its vices (inequality, hegemony, cultural imperialism, and materialism)" (xiv). In this sense, neither Shaikh Rashid nor Ahmad is best representatives of fundamentalist thinking. In the novel, though Ahmad is not thrilled with T.V. as he is aware of the ideologies of "the lords of Western Capitalism" (11), he enjoys "venturing to a movie or two and marveling at the expenditure of Hollywood ammunition and *the beauty of its explosions*" (140). This paradox can be further argued to be a transgression of fundamentalist thinking. As the meaning of "transgression" bears a sense of "excess," it is relevant to insert that it is excessive fundamentalism that leads Ahmad and his imam to terrorism. Like Capitalist excessive liberalism leads to terror, Islamic extreme fundamentalism also leads to terror. The difference, however, between the two "terrors" resides in appearances. Islamic extremism, because it applies the literal essence of "terror," appears more chocking and visible than the materialist ideology which applies its metaphysical, say metaphoric meaning. This shows that Western ideology is more intelligent than the fundamentalist ideology of Shaikh Rashid.

It is perhaps more interesting to see Islam as an economic and a political alternative to contemporary global capitalism in the novel. The clash between the extreme liberal West and the extreme fundamentalist Islam can be understood as a return to the cold war. What divides the West and East is based on what Said has pointed as a classification of the world into procommunist nations and anticommunist nations (xxiv). Ahmad's economic view of Islam is strictly linked to his faith in God, like a true communist would have faith in the identity of communism: "the God attached to him [Ahmad] like an invisible twin, his other self, is a God of enterprise but of submission" (181). As the Islamic faith for Ahmad rejects social classes and believes in a free access to the common good, it is grasped in the novel to function as a communist ideology. The Threat that Islam represents for the West that one Muslim critic has expressed as a "return of the God that the West thought they had killed," finds a similar expression in Derrida's formula "a specter is haunting Europe—the specter of Communism" (Al-Azmeh 8; *Specters of Marx* 2).

The meaning of the novel is rendered Orientalist when the corrupted liberal West is reflected as secure, while its only source of corruption is located in a particular entity, the Muslim. This strategy is supported by what Zizek calls "condensation" (27). The figure of Ahmad condenses opposing features associated with both spiritual and ideological beliefs. What gives energy, so to speak, to the orientalization of Ahmad is therefore the way he condenses a series of heterogeneous antagonisms: economic Muslim as procommunist, political Muslim as schemer, retainer of a secret power, immoral-religious Muslim as corrupt antichristian and anti-Jew, and a fan of "Hitler" (20). In a nutshell, the figure of Ahmad is a symptom in the sense of a coded message of social antagonism.

Consequently, the novel pictures the ideology of Islamic terrorism as totalitarian. If the materialist West could be compared to T. S. Eliot's "the waste land," the Islamic world can be paralleled with the tyrannical world of Orwell's "nineteen eighty four." According to Zizek,

totalitarianism propagates from a dogmatic attachment to the official words (*The Sublime Object of Ideology* 23). He believes that excessive commitment to Good is what creates the greatest Evil, stating that "real Evil is any kind of fanatical dogmatism, especially that exerted in the name of the supreme Good" (23). Fanatical dogmatism finds exact expression when talking about Shaikh Rashid's excessive fundamentalism. Throughout his teaching of the Qur'an, he mainly focuses on Arabic pronunciation while disregarding meaning:

> Ahmad recites the invocatory formula *'bi-smi lldhi r-rah-mani r-rahim'* and, tensely because of his master's demand for a feeling rhythm, tackles aloud the long first line of the sura: *'a-lam tara kayfa fa'ala rabbuka bi-asbdbi 'l-fil.'* … the shaikh admonishes, "S, h: two distinct sounds, not 'sh.' Pronounce them as in, oh, 'asshole.' Forgive me; that is the sole word in the devils' language that comes to mind. On the glottal stop, don't overdo it; classical Arabic is not some African click-language. Sweep the sound in gracefully, as though it's second nature. Which it is, of course, for native speakers, and students sufficiently diligent… 'Strengthen that *Hit*,' 'Shaikh Rashid says, his eyes still closed, trembling as if with a weight of jelly behind them. 'You can hear it even in the Reverend Rodwell's quaint nineteenth-century translation: 'Did He not make their guile to go astray?' 'His eyes half open as he explains, 'The men or companions, that is, of the elephant. (99-100)

What shows his commitment to words is also shown in his anger for correcting Ahmad's mistakes. The imam's tyranny is further shown in his lack of laughter and use of "devil's language" (100). Yet, like a student in a totalitarian regime, Ahmad represents a hostile agent when presenting paradoxical remarks for his imam (74). Also, like for the Nazi, violence is depicted as a means of communication throughout imam's teachings of Ahmad. Shaikh Rashid chooses verses of Hell to warn Ahmad about the danger of disbelief. Despite

the fact that Ahmad is a true believer, he is made to recite suras about punishment like in the fourth sura ("Al-humaza"), in which the crushing fire is reported; surat "Al-feel" (The Elephant), in which Allah punishes disbelievers with celestial stones. With all these facts, Ahmad does not learn the fundamentals of Islam, gravely thinking the Prophet is the creator of the Qur'an (59).

In other words, Updike's representation of Prophet Muhammad is strictly related to his medieval stereotype of a source of terror. As Said puts it in his *Covering Islam*, in the Middle Ages and during the beginning of the Renaissance is Europe, Islam was imagined to be "a demonic religion of "apostasy" and "obscurity" (5). He importantly states that it did not matter for the Medieval West that Muslims considered Muhammad a prophet and not a god; rather, "what mattered to Christians was that Mohammed was a false prophet, and a sower of discord, a sensualist, a hypocrite, an agent of the devil" (5).

As Shaikh Rashid is obsessed with the goodness of the Qur'an and with a corresponding hate for the "unbelievers" of Qur'an, Shaikh Rashid's obsession turns into a force of evil. For the imam, the concept of enemy is based on religious belief and consequently the entire unspiritual West seems to him as enemy (66). In this way, the conception of terrorism in the novel takes the concept of a holy war. Perhaps, Updike's gesture to open the novel in "early April; again green sneaks, seed by seed, into the drab city's earthy crevices" is like the Chaucerian use of April in his *Prologue*, serving spiritual regeneration for Islamic terrorism. It is perhaps worth noticing that the result of extremism, whether conservative or liberal, brings about the same effect—nihilism. Like extreme liberalism which results in the boredom and meaninglessness in the life of the Western characters, fundamentalist extremism leads to "Jihad" as a form of nihilism. It follows that a true faith in both ideologies, liberal or fundamentalist, shares the same underlying feature, which is "the loss of the ability to believe in the proper sense of the term" (*In Defense of Lost*

Causes 36). For both ideologies, faith is manifested through direct knowledge: The West'
cynical reason believes in it without taking it seriously, while the terrorist Muslims seriously
accept it as it is. For Zizek, both of the believers share the "absurd" act of decision not
grounded on "reasons,' in positive knowledge" (36). For this reason, perhaps, Ahmad is
addressed by Charlie as "madman." Differently from Charlie who pretends to believe in the
ideology of Shaikh Rashid, Ahmad manifests a naïve belief that leads him to decide on
suicidal bombing. Charlie, as his name proves, shows on the contrary a belief in the Western
ideology of materialism. In his discussion with Ahamd, he shows a fantasy of the fetishistic
West.

What is striking in Updike's discourse is the rhetorical figure of the Islamic God.
Unlike the Jewish and the Christian God, the Islamic God is portrayed as totalitarian. Allah is
said to be "sublime beyond all particulars," whose place is everywhere (5). Like Big Brother
who represents the monolithic ruler whose telescreen is placed in every Party member's room,
Allah is also "unseen" and close to Ahmad like "a Siamese twin attached in every part, inside
and out, and whom he can turn at every moment in prayer" (37). Allah's association with
violence is illustrated in the Muslims' being His "sole custodian" (37). Instead of representing
Allah with characteristic features of divinity like he does for the Jewish and the Christian
Gods, Updike's blasphemous representation humanizes the Islamic God, picturing Him as a
sadistic agent when using wrong contextualization of the following aya: "*Let not the infidels*
deem that the length of the days we give them is good for them! We only give them length f
days that they may increase their sins! and a shameful chastisement shall be their lot." (74).
In this way, Updike constructs the identity of Allah as the Big Other of the West which does
not tolerate its materialistic values.

The ideology of Islamic terrorism is also manifested in the mosque where Ahmad
attends his courses. Theorists of space claim that a place bears physical as well as

psychological qualities that give it meaning in the world (Norberg-Schulz 18). A place is believed to have a "spirit" i.e. a "character" or "identity" that distinguishes it from other places (18). In the novel, the mosque, which is supposed to echo a sacred spirit, frightens Ahmad the first time he came (97). Situated in the second floor, between the nail salon and the establishment, with a flaking door numbered $2781^{1/2}$ and with masked window, the mosque loses its original meaning of a place of worship and spirituality; it is rather objectified as an unusual odd place of commodity. The extreme fundamentalism of terrorist ideology is expressed in the very inside architecture of the mosque. Like room 101 in Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty Four,* the mosque' stairs are narrow and windowless leading to "*al-masjid al-jami*'" that includes imams' office. This view of the mosque as such can be regarded as a space of depravity and/ or deprivation suppressing the liberalism of the outside. According to philosophers of space, the essence of a place is conceptualized according to how it is specifically used (Lefebvre 16). It can be said that the inside elements of the mosque, most importantly the office and the "Spartan chair of molded plastic such as might be found in the luncheonette of a small city airport," are what identify the character of the place as that of a place of a manipulating/ed theology—not of a place of pure faith (99).

It has been illustrated that the opposition of liberalism is embodied primarily in Islamic fascism. With the previously demonstrated clash of ideologies in Updike's novel, Ahmad is radicalized into the terrific image of the Other, though he appears innocent. It can be inserted that representing Ahmad as (br)other, the West perceives Ahmad as an extension of the American Self. This picture can be shown at its macro level when analyzing Ahmad's family. Though religion is "nothing" for Teresa, Islam is "less than nothing, to be accurate" for her (83). Despite the fact that Ahmad bears a blood relation with her, he represents the unconscious of his mother and of the West at large. In return, Ahmad also perceives his

mother's ideology as a source of terror, like America's ideology. In this sense, the West, illustrated in the Mulloy family, shows a religious crisis supported by extremism.

The term "extremism" has proved to be efficient in analyzing the clash between East and West. Many critics, it should be underscored, agree that the problem between Islam and the West is rooted in Islamic fundamentalism.[37] However, differently from these claims, this chapter has specified that all religions are fundamentalists, whether Islam, Christianity, or Judaism. The problem has been proved to be anchored in the Muslims extreme fundamentalism. To be sure, this claim meets with Said's claim that "Islamic fundamentalism is specifically an American contribution to colonial discourse, a sort of specialized jargon expertise" (*Orientalism* xvi).

So, one of the conclusions that can be drawn from Updike's representation of an extremist version of Islam is an Orientalist conception of a radical singularity of Islam. Ignoring the radical diversity of Islamic traditions—for instance, Egyptian Sunni, Lebanese Shiite, Syrian Alewite…etc—results in an attempt to shape a "non-transmissible Muslim lifestyle" (Almond 45). It is now clear that Updike' sense of being as an outsider of American culture, which had to take a favorable position towards Islam, stems from the fact that it is less "modern." The inclusion of Islam as more honest in Updike's insight on the superficial West offers the Orientalist idea that Islam radically refuses democracy. Updike, who had never concretely encountered a Muslim lifestyle and whose only visit to the Orient was a part of Morocco, had to rely on an extremely unreliable canon of interpretations for his information about Islam and Arab culture. In contradiction to the spirit of Updike's positive

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[37] Many argue that the specifically Western origin of the word "fundamentalism," is coupled with the pejorative connotations attached to it by journalists and academics who condemn the phenomenon, make it a term that "almost guarantee[s] misunderstanding" (Shepard 368). See for instance Gunderson 23; Kepel.

attitudes concerning Islam, what the chapter has found is rather a religion just as manipulative, dishonest, and life-denying as the neo-liberal modernity it is contrasted with.

Chapter III

DeLillo's War on Terror in *Point Omega*

Technology is our fate, our truth. It is what we mean when we call ourselves the only superpower on the planet. The materials and methods we devise make it possible for us to claim our future. We don't have to depend on God or the Prophets or other astonishments. We are the astonishment. The miracle is what we ourselves produce, the systems and networks that change the way we live and think.

<div align="right">Don DeLillo, "In the Ruins of the Future" 37.</div>

I still want a war. A great power has to act. We were struck hard. We need to retake the future. The force of will, the sheer visceral need. We can't let others shape our world, our minds. All they have are old dead despotic traditions. We have a living history and I thought I would be in the middle of it. But in those rooms, with men, it was all priorities, statistics, evaluations, rationalizations.

<div align="right">Don DeLillo, *Point Omega* [38]</div>

III.   1. Introduction

The aim of juxtaposing the above two quotations is to demonstrate how Western superiority over Oriental backwardness translates itself into a hegemonic discourse. In the first quote, taken from his famous essay "In the Ruins of the Future" published after the fall of

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[38] DeLillo, Don. *Point Omega* (London: Picador, 2010) 38. Subsequent references to *Point Omega* will be cited in text.

the two towers, DeLillo explains that American culture celebrates technology as a hegemonic enterprise that dominates world's cultures. What is most surprising about DeLillo is his support for war on the cultural Other, as he openly declares it in the second passage from *Point Omega*. Reading DeLillo's decisive statement "a great power has to act" proves that DeLillo's tone is as if revenant from a major political figure, like Donald Rumsfeld, the secretary of Defense in the years following 9/11, or President George W. Bush when they declared War on Iraq. Not surprisingly, many critics, who have expected from DeLillo a direct and an explicit condemnation of U.S. foreign policies about War on Iraq, are severely disappointed when reading DeLillo's position in *Point Omega*.[39]

The task of this chapter is to discuss DeLillo's attitude(s) towards the Oriental Other in his novel *Point Omega* (2010). Since it is set along with the political atmosphere of the War on Iraq, *Point Omega* perhaps represents the most significant of DeLillo's novels that allow interpretation on his neo-Orientalist writing. While Powers and Updike have talked about the Islamic Other as a dangerous source of terror before and after 9/11 events, DeLillo explores the radical notion of "terror" in both its physical and metaphysical dimensions so as to justify War on Iraq. This notion of "terror" is relevant for a study while trying to answer how the American Self conceptualizes terror in the context of post-9/11 events and the conditions of Western postmodernity.

However, *Point Omega* presents a challenge. The world in which DeLillo's characters are set is portrayed with a complexity beyond our comprehension. Due to its abstract narrative perspective, *Point Omega* is admittedly regarded as absurd and ambiguous, bearing what commentators have identified as a "problem of representation" (Paul Eve 1). The non-

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[39] Many commentators on DeLillo's fiction consider *Point Omega* as a political narrative that actually supports the Pentagon's implications in the War on Iraq and its dramatic consequences. For illustration, see (Paul Eve 2), and (Surdulescu 1).

explication of the events occurring in DeLillo's novel meets with what Jean François Lyotard calls "the unpresentable in presentation itself" (*The Postmodern Condition* 81). Following Immanuel Kant and Edmund Burke's analyses of "the sublime," Lyotard believes that the "sublime" bears "witness to the inexpressible" (*The Inhuman* 93). As he further explores on postmodern aesthetics, Lyotard maintains that "the postmodern would be that which, in the modern, puts forward the unpresentable in presentation itself, that which denies itself the solace of good forms" (*The Postmodern Condition* 81). That is, for him, the aim of new forms of presentation for postmodern art is not to give attention to these forms for their own sake, but rather to render presentation itself unpresentable. Following Lyotard's reflection on the postmodern sublime, DeLillo's fiction can be safely viewed in association with postmodern aesthetics, given the fact that he celebrates the unattainable, "the inexpressible" (*The Inhuman* 93). This fact is not surprising while considering DeLillo's postmodern tendency to celebrate ambiguity his fiction. As one character in his *Players* (1977) puts it, "behind every stark fact we encounter layers of ambiguity" (104). Michael J. Shapiro, an American cultural and political theorist and writer, perhaps said it best when he identified DeLillo's text as "an assembly of encounters among the conflicting codes of sociopolitical order, a Kafkaesque system of clashing intelligibilities that defy coherence" (19). As a result, in *Point Omega*, while most critics believe the novel to be a meditation on major apparent themes like time, modernity, and "the exhaustion of human consciousness," others support that it is interested in less visible ideas like domestic trauma, as a fact related to 9/11 events.[40]

At any rate, many critics overlook the novel's direct interest in war on Iraq and in neo-Orientalism. As previously mentioned in the review of the literature related to DeLillo's novel, different views hold the novel's "innocent" discourse about War on Iraq propaganda.

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[40] For more sampling of material that reflect *Point Omega*'s interest in 9/11 terrorist events, see Rollins 641; Jamieson 1; and Dyer.

Among these views are David Banash's, David Price's, and Liliana M. Naydan's which see the novel made of one mode of perception free from any ideological thought.

Differently from these views, and despite the novel's conceptual focus on the existential situation of the postmodern West, this chapter tends to argue that DeLillo's novel is directly related to Iraq as a territory of American neo-Orientalist representation. The present study proposes that the novel displays an account of what David Palumbo-Liu, in his reflections on contemporary fiction, has described as "the disruption of literary realism by excessive otherness" (28-29). To state this clearly, the study will maintain that the novel's ambiguity is particularly a feature of colonial discourse that contributes in the ideological construction of otherness in DeLillo's text.

Martin Paul Eve, in his study of the representation of Iraq War in *Point Omega* in "Too Many Goddamn Echoes" (2014), claims a textual allusion to the desert as a metaphor of War on Iraq in the novel (4). He considers what he calls the "ontological and epistemological indeterminacies" of the novel as a major category that implies War on Iraq (7). While Paul Eve centers his attention on textual allusions, the following study departs from his analysis by exploring both textual and spatial allusions of the desert. As valuable as studies of textual discourse are, they often foreclose the possibility of trans-cultural conversation by limiting the text to be studied to farther ends. However, this chapter allows DeLillo's text to be read as an exchange of ideas about the ways space can be used to claim dominant paradigms of neo-Orientalism.

The novel's striking ambiguity can be a direct expression of the omega title of the novel. Driven from the philosophy of the French paleontologist Pierre Teilhard de Chardin[41],

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[41] *Point Omega* is particularly influenced by the work of the paleontologist Pierre Teilhard de Chardin. Also a Jesuit priest, De Chardin died in New York on 1955, during the spring semester of DeLillo's year at the Jesuit University in Fordham, New York City. DeLillo's

"Point Omega" describes the highest point in the evolution of consciousness and complexity, a point which DeLillo regards as "reaching a point of exhaustion" (Alter). The novel's evoking of the war on Iraq and its setting in an unknown desert leads one to interpret the omega point of DeLillo's novel in relation to otherness. It can be suggested that the novel marks the limit of representation which, like Teilhard's omega, operates outside the limits of space and time. This sort of representation finds expression in the character's statement, "the less there was to see, the harder he looked, the more he saw. This was the point" (6). In this respect, one of the tasks of the following analyses is to decipher "point omega" as one mode of DeLillo's representations about Otherness.

Since Orientalism deals with the relationship between depictions by Westerners of non-Western subjects, it remains a significant form of critical analysis in this chapter to understand DeLillo's discourse on the War on Terror. It has been repeatedly stated throughout this thesis that Orientalists describe the East and the Orient in a way in which it highlights an expression of strength *versus* weakness. These representations bring about Western domination over the East, and create authority and power over its economic, social, cultural, and political realms (Said, *Orientalism* 3). Orientalist knowledge, it needs to be emphasized, is based on political knowledge; it is "ultimately a political vision of reality whose structure promotes difference" (44). This claim will be confirmed in this study as it tries to decipher the Orientalist echoes emanating from the representation of the desert. It will be illustrated that

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epistemology of the End reflected in his novel owes debt to Teilhard's evolutionary theory in his *The Phenomenon of Man* (1955). The omega point is Teilhard's name for the final transformation beyond human consciousness; in Elster's terms, "a leap out of our biology" (66). In Teilhard's theory, things become more and more complex, drawn on to their ultimate end in the Omega point.

the major interest of DeLillo's *Point Omega* is an imperialist ambition, the point which Said has already argued with a variety of Orientalist fiction in his *Culture and Imperialism*.

In *Orientalism*, Said highlights the importance of imaginative geographies and their representation, and *Culture and Imperialism* provides an opportunity for rethinking geography through "a contrapuntal perspective," i.e. in terms of how the world is divided geographically in the imperial imagination (*Culture and Imperialism* 32). This involves, as Said contends, a fictional representation of the dominated territories in "far-flung and sometimes unknown places" (64). In light of this Saidian claim, the chapter will argue that DeLillo's depiction of the unknown desert in *Point Omega* is actually political. As the reading of the novel will suggest, the desert conveys U.S. operations of imperialism in terms of struggle over the geography of the desert.

In *Point Omega*, DeLillo depicts Richard Elster's settling in a far desert situated "somewhere south of nowhere" (25). Throughout his depiction of Jim Finely's experience, the storyteller who joins the desert in hope to make a documentary to report Elster's secret experience with Iraq war planners, DeLillo projects the "the desert" as a philosophical idea that constitutes an exotic as well as a desired place in modern Western consciousness. While he also explores its existential meaning, he ultimately represents its "spirit" as absurd and violent. Many studies have focused on the notion of time and temporality in the novel, but none has considered place, embodied in "the desert," as a major element in the formation of neo-Orientalist attitudes towards the Orient.

For Said, the image of Iraq as a prosperous and a diverse Arab country has disappeared since the first Gulf War (*From Oslo to Iraq* 315). He states that the image that has been spread about Iraq is that "of a desert land" (315). This statement leads to a curious discussion about the politics of writing the desert in *Point Omega*. Hence, the first task of the ensuing chapter, after exploring DeLillo's interest in the binary logic of East and West, is to

examine how the image of the unknown desert has been deployed in the formation of oppositional categories of superior dominating West *versus* inferior dominated East. I will discuss "the desert" as both a place and an idea that compresses metaphysical features to articulate Orientalist and neo-Orientalist discourses in the novel. It will be demonstrated that the figure of the unknown desert operates as a strategy that fuses with discourse of fundamentalist terrorism.

Although Said stresses the demeaning aspect of Orientalism, he admits that idealization implies derogation as well, since it does not aim at showing the Other as it is, but only as a fantasy which serves the author's agenda: "True, the relationship of strong to weak could be disguised or mitigated, as when Balfour acknowledged the 'greatness' of Oriental civilizations. But the essential relationship, on political, cultural, and even religious grounds, was seen—in the West, which is what concerns us here—to be one between a strong and a weak partner" (*Orientalism* 29). Said's claim fits to be applied in reading *Point Omega*, for DeLillo's desire to encounter the Other resonates, to a surprising extent, as a sympathy towards the Other, or more particularly, as a counter-narrative to War on Terror discourse in some instances. Western culture, as highlighted by DeLillo, is so dominated by media and technology that it eclipses everyday reality and the meaning of things in the world. For this reason, the West fanaticizes to encounter the less modern Other which appears as Real, because it is distanced from the distracted reality of movies and screens. I will be using the term "Real" in the Lacanian sense to refer to the Absolute reality, the external dimension of reality that exists beyond the technological world. As DeLillo centers his attention on the notion of "the Real" as part of his War on Terror discourse, I will argue that DeLillo centers his attention on the notion of the "Real" as part of War on Terror discourse. In so doing, part of the analysis will be anchored in Slavoj Zizek's idea which he explores from the French philosopher Alain Badious's argument that modern Western culture is characterized by "the

passion for the Real" (Zizek, *Welcome to the Desert of the Real* 5). I will translate DeLillo's celebration of the categories of the Real and unreal as a discourse of violence that highlights the difference between domestic media violence and foreign international violence coming from the Islamic Other.

The method of this chapter, hence, will not deviate from the previous, as it tries to investigate how DeLillo's critique on the terror(s) of Western post-capitalist cultures construct the Orientalist relation between the primitive East *vs.* the modern West.

Before an in depth examination of *Point Omega,* it is significant to summarize the consideration of the Oriental Other in DeLillo's fiction.

III.   2. DeLillo's Interest in the Relation between East and West

Don DeLillo is known for delving into crucial historical events that define the contemporary world, from the mid twentieth century as the rise of Adolf Hitler's fascism, the assassination of President John F. Kennedy, and the Cold War, to more recent events like terrorism and War on Iraq. DeLillo is most known to write about psychology of the crowds shaped by high technology and globalization, while delving into issues of domestic and international terrorism. The Texas serial killer in *Underworld* (1997), Oswald's role in Kennedy's assassination in *Libra* (1988), the hostage taking and bombings by Middle Eastern terrorists in *Mao II* (1991), and the seizure of the Nasdaq exchange by anarchists in *Cosmopolis* (2003), are all examples of DeLillo's interest in domestic and international terrorism. Among other prominent 9/11 writers in American fiction, DeLillo also directly addresses 9/11 terrorist attacks. In his (post)9/11 novels, DeLillo explores the ways in which contemporary American identity, as fragmented as it may be, is related to larger social, cultural, and political antagonisms between East and West. It is significant, therefore, to explore DeLillo's vision and version of representing the East in his novels.

Perhaps, before looking at what DeLillo says about the Oriental Other, it might be worthwhile considering what he does not say. The first epigraph above is part of a significant intervention about the "us" and "them" dichotomy that DeLillo has introduced to 9/11 discourse. His underlining of the Self as "superior" directly projects a discourse that hardens the opposition between "us" and "them." This binary logic is reinforced by modern technology as it entails the non "depend(ence) on God or the Prophets" ("In the Ruins" 37). What makes this intervention remarkable to the ensuing discussion is not merely what it says about 9/11 events or even about "them." What is more interesting is DeLillo's complicity with the ideologies of postmodern phenomena that has long been the target of his critique in many of his novels. The liberal values of the world of global capitalism which DeLillo condemns along his literary career are paradoxically admired when targeting the Other. Hence, what is the real reason for DeLillo's decision to support the ethics of his culture? DeLillo is most regarded as the "high priest of postmodernism" for his critique of the world of mass media and "simulacra" in which reality and illusion are intertwined (Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation* 5). In this perspective, his writings resonate in defining himself as a novelist whose particular interest is being "a photographer who simultaneously documents and criticizes the culture in which he resides" (Osteen 145). In the case of the epigraph, Macro Abel notes that DeLillo resists to talk "with moral clarity" and claims that the essay lacks a mode of representation or what he calls "the ethical how" (1236). This leads one to think that DeLillo' stylized representation of the Self in his novels can bear indirect "politics of representation" about the Other (Martin 1). That is, writing the Self in a post-9/11 novel, for DeLillo, holds not only a discourse on the Self but most primarily an indirect critique of the Other.

It may seem peculiar, even absurd, that reflecting on DeLillo's literary production proves in fact that Oriental Islam stands at the margin of his thought. Differently from Updike

who openly puts Islamic theology at the center of his attention in *Terrorist*, DeLillo barely invokes religion in his novels. In an interview, DeLillo declares that religion is not a major element in his works, claiming that "the true American religion has been 'the American People'" (PEN Saul Bello Award).

Quite apart from his attention to religion, there still lies an indirect way in which the Orient and Islam appear to operate in DeLillo's fiction. When Maria Nadotti asked him in a 1992 interview on what topic he would write next, DeLillo answers, "'war in the Middle East' because I was very interested in the events occurring in that place" (Nadotti). DeLillo's persistent preoccupation with the notion of "terror" in its diverse forms, including mass media, hyper-capitalism and globalization, has also led him migrate his attention to Islamic fundamentalist terrorism like in *The Names* (1982), *Mao II* (1991) and *Falling Man* (2007). It has to be said that DeLillo, like many who rely on an Orientalist bulk of knowledge about the Orient, sets the American identity off against the Islamic Orient as a cultural entity hateful to the West. As DeLillo states from the voice of an Arab terrorist in his *Falling Man*, "Islam is the world outside the prayer room as well as the *surahs* in the Koran. Islam is the struggle against the enemy, near enemy and far, Jews first, for all things unjust and hateful, and then the Americans" (79-80). In such a narrative, DeLillo uses Islam to justify, or yet, to conceptualize the meaning of global terror, making it a possible technique to condemn capitalist consumer ideals. In his works, as John A. McClure declares, DeLillo seems to assign traditions and practices he distrusts, like Islam, Pentecostalism, and the Unification Church, in order to illustrate any practices of self-surrender in his fiction (174). It is in this way that Islam operates as an Other in DeLillo's thoughts. In Western postmodern conditions like projected in DeLillo's texts, Islam becomes a tool to know the Self.

It is significant to notice that DeLillo's representation of the image of a Muslim as a terrorist Other took place before 9/11 events, the reason for which many commentators

cobsider his pre-9/11 novels to bear "prophecy echoes" (Rowe 183). His *Mao II* is particularly described as a historical prescience and anticipation of 9/11-events. DeLillo's conception of terrorism in his novels as *Players* (1977) and *Mao II* (1991), for example, provides a good frame of reference for a (post)9/11 text before the fall of the two towers. For this reason, DeLillo's later post-9/11 novels are considered an extension of his project specifically initiated with *Mao II* which mainly tackles the rising threat of terrorism rooted in the Middle East and directed against the West. *Point Omega*, as it deals with a Western character— Richard Elster, a former war-planner implicated in the war on Iraq and who goes to an exotic desert, affirms DeLillo's interest in the relation between West and East after 9/11 events and in colonial discourse in particular. The question that remains significant to ask up to this point is: what are DeLillo's strategies of representing Iraq and the East in *Point Omega*? While this chapter tries to investigate this question, it will first explore *Point Omega* in the ways in which it proves to be anchored in the Orientalist logic of dividing the world between two parts—East and West. Further, the chapter will investigate how DeLillo's novel fuses with discourses of terrorism and War on Terror. In order to achieve this task, the analyses will be centered in the character Elster. Though some interest will be also given to Finley and Elster's daughter, Jessie, it is through Elster that the present study will examine DeLillo's War on Terror discourse.

However, before starting analyses, a review of the events of the story is necessary to provide here.

III. 3. Synopsis

Point Omega opens with a scene in a dark gallery in New York, where a unanimous man obsessively watches Douglas Gordon's *24 Hour Psycho*, a video that plays Hitchcock's *Psycho* slowed down for twenty-four hours. The narrator is a film-maker, Jim Finley, who hopes to make a film with Richard Elster, a seventy three year old former war-adviser involved in the War on Iraq, through starring him "just a man and a wall" talking about his secret work with Iraq War-planners (26). As the novel consists in recounting the experience of the American intellectual, i.e. Elster, in the Pentagon during the first part of the Iraq War, it offers an analytical view of Bush's administration when war was almost in a point of sending military troops to Iraq. Elster is specialized in the humanities and has recently published an article about the semantic load of the word "rendition" (39). He tries to find romance and mystery in this word employed by the state security and eventually conceptualizes it as a synonym of "surrender." His article, hence, contains some hints to the strategic interrogation technique used by the American military on Iraqi insurgents.

In the prospect of recording the reality of War on Iraq, Finley follows Elster in the desert "somewhere south of nowhere" (25).The two men sit, talk, and drink, reflecting on the silence of the desert and its time. Elster' daughter, Jessie, intelligent but strange and detached, joins them. One morning, she mysteriously disappears and the two men encounter the desert as a pure expression of terror. They are led to look for Jessie and eventually leave the place of the desert.

III. 4. Two Different Worlds

It is significant to remember as a beginning that Orientalism consists in viewing the world divided into two major blocks: the West, identified as the European/ American Self; and the East, identified as the non-European/ non-American Other (Said *Orientalism* 7). This subjective division of the world as such resides in the very essence of *Point Omega*. In trying to redefine modern American identity and build his discourse on the War on Terror, DeLillo creates a division between two opposing worlds: modern Western identity situated in the global city—New York—*vs.* the unknown Other situated in the far desert. As it literally depicts the characters' stay in an unknown desert, the novel invokes the Orientalist logic of distinguishing modern Western culture from the unfamiliar culture of the East. The traditional binaries situating the West in opposition to the East—for example, good *vs.* evil, civilized *vs.* barbaric, liberal *vs.* radical, rational *vs.* irrational, progressive *vs.* backward—shape the novel's conception of the American Self. This gesture of *différence* resonates mainly with the image of the "desert."

In considering "the desert" as an element that merits investigation, it becomes significant to account its different representations in Western discourse before considering its role in *Point Omega*. It is true that the image of the desert has long been present in Western imagination, in different genres, writings, and in different contexts. This recurrent reference to the desert in writings about the Orient necessitates comprehending and deciphering its traces and significance in Western discourse. The analyses of the desert, its ideologies, and nostalgia, either in nineteenth-century travel writings or in postmodern fiction, invite one to view the apprehension of the West vis-à-vis its Other.

III.   4. 1. The Representation of Desert Spaces in Western Discourse

The American desert has long been a subject of writing by many American authors at different periods in history. It has served as an expression of a variety of themes, like travel (as in Mark Twain's *Roughing It* [1879]), adventure and religious duty (as in Willa Cather's *Death Comes for the Archbishop* [1927]), survival (as in the end of Frank Norris's *McTeague* [1899]), violence (as in Cormac MacCarthy's *Blood Meridian* [1985]), and environmentalism (as in Gary Hansen's *Wet Desert* [2007]). The latter thematic concern with ecological protection also finds examples in twentieth century literature, as the American frontier reached the Pacific Ocean and society turned to a more industrial age. Many writers have found resort in the motif of the American desert in order to highlight the relationship between nature and modernized human civilization. Mary Hunter Austin's *The Land of Little Rain* (1903) explores California's Owens Valley and gives an ecological vision of landscape in the tradition of early nineteenth-century American transcendentalists like Thoreau. In similar fashion, Joseph Wood Krutch's books *The Desert Year* (1952) and *The Voice of the Desert* (1952) focus on the Arizona desert to account for natural history and environment. Edward Abbey's *Desert Solitaire* (1968) also gives expression to the desert as a place that merits sympathy and protection.

Arabic literature has also been always fed by the motif of the desert, or "Sahara," in various contexts. Ancient Arab poets, who can be said as real desert dwellers, celebrated their feelings and lifestyle in close relation to the desert. In pre-Islamic poetry, Umru al-Qays, (i.e. "the Vagabond Prince"), in his *Mu'allaqat* (or *Hanging Odes)* uses the image of the desert in his description of the departure of his beloved:

> Stop, oh my friends, let us weep on account of the remembrance of my
>
>   beloved,

And her abode situated on the edge of a sandy desert between Dakhool and

Howmal.

And between Toozih and Maqrat, whose traces have not been obliterated,

On account of what has blown and re-blown over them from the South wind

and the North wind. (qtd. in 97)

Labid's description of place in his *Mu'allaqa* is more ecological. In search of places of watercourse and vegetation for camels, tribes used to cross the desert in different climatic conditions. Labid's *Atlal*, as translated by Michael Sell, describes an empty eroded oasis and contrasts it to his reminiscence of its past green state: "the torrent beds of Rayyan / naked tracings, worn thin, like inscriptions / carved in flattened stone" in contrast to "The rills and the runlets / uncovered marks like the script / of faded scrolls / restored with pens of reed…" (35). Though Arab Bedouins travel to seek water, the desert of Inner Arabia remains their true home, and Labid's *Atlal* serves as a memory of enjoyment of homecoming. This shows that the ancient Arab poet's vision of the desert is not that of victim dwellers, but of dwellers interactively engaged with it.

This Arab cultural identity recorded in ancient Arabic literature is also reflected in Modern Arabic poetry. For the Sufi poet, Assad Ali, the motif of the desert expresses a sense of Arabic common identity. Adopting the voice of the desert, beginning each poem, "I, the Desert," he says, "the grains of my sand rush in asking, / begging You [God] to keep my descendents / and nation united" (66).

Relatively, according to Orientalist studies, the image of the "desert" is strictly regarded as a "timeless" metaphor of the Orient (Shohat and Stam 148). Through a process of what Gersdorf calls "imaginative incorporation," the Orient has been associated with the image of the wild desert, as a place at the margin of civilization (100). In Western imagination, romantic journeys to the desert are always experienced in Oriental deserts. In

their narratives about desert places, French Romantic thinkers like Renan, Chateaubriands, Lamartine, and Merval construct the image of the desert as an Oriental aspect. For example, in *Carnet de Voyage*, Chateaubriand's portrayal of his experience in the desert identifies the place as having an East Arabic identity:

> At first you feel a great shock, and then great boredom; but moving through from solitude to solitude, you see the desert extending everywhere before you, and drawing you into the sands of Arabia and the jagged rocks of the Dead Sea, and little by little the boredom dissipates, the heart is seized by something noble and sad, one experiences a secret terror that, far from lowering the soul, gives it courage and elevates the spirit. (163)

The image of the desert as an Oriental place is also found in English Romantic poetry. In *The Prelude* (1805), William Wordsworth writes, "He saw before him an Arabian Waste/ A Desart; and he fancied that himself … /He seem'd an Arab of the Bedouin Tribes" (71-58). Such verses ethnicize the place of the desert i.e. they strictly reduce the identity of place to Oriental culture. For Wordsworth, as well as for others, writing the desert consists in exploring the Arabs and the East. The history of the desert, for such writers, is the history of the Orient. For this reason, writing the desert from a Western perspective leads to a form of conquest and appropriation of desert places, like illustrated in the association between the sword and the pen used in the writings of Al-Mutanabbi, as used by Gertrude Bell in Arabic and English, "Al lail w'al khail w'al be'da ta'rafuni/ wa saifu wa r'amhu wa lkirtassu wa lkalamu" "Night and my steed and the desert know me/ and the lance thrust, battle and parchment and the pen" (108). Based on this insight, the desert becomes an Oriental object of desire for the West.

The image of the desert in American writing has been accompanied with expressions of despair and trauma. In *The Sheltering Sky* (1949), Paul Bowles narrates the story of a

married couple coming from New York and travelling to the North African Sahara after World War II. The story suggests the destructive nature of the absolute solitary desert. As Kit and her husband Port advance farther and farther into the desert, they finally arrive at a distant isolated outpost. Kit observes that at last there is no "visible sign of European influence, so that the scene had a purity which had been lacking in the other towns, an unexpected quality of being complete which dissipated the feeling of chaos" (252). In his *Let it Come Down* (1952), Bowles explores the danger and chaos that results from encountering North African society. The story concerns the American Nelson Dyar who comes to Tangier to search a new job and a new life, but ends up in his exploration of brothels, drugs, and unpleasant characters.

The realism of travel writing, its minute depiction of desert places, their inhabitants, and their culture proves to be a Western desire to conquer the Orient. The Western fascination with the primitivism of the Arabic desert in the early literature of the West makes it easy to conceive Western imagination as traditionally fascinated with power and dominating the Other. E. M. Forster's *The Other Boat* (1957), for instance, in which the character Captain Lionel March travels into the desert and eventually encounters savages, is loaded with Western politics of imperialism; as Said affirms, in Forster's fiction, "empire is everywhere a crucial setting" (*Culture and Imperialism* 63). The same holds for Thomas Edward Lawrence's *The Seven Pillars of Wisdom* (1922), which historicizes the adventure of the British soldier of the writer against Arabic revolt in the desert, and Hammond Inns' *The Doomed Oasis* (1960), which describes the experience of a Welsh character in a hostile desert and his eventual adaptation to a radical life. These texts all meet in representing the desert as a place that needs to be conquered.

Post 9/11-novels, also, have created new possibilities for the desert to be engaged in contemporary Orientalist discourse. For instance, Dana Marton's novel *The Sheik's Safety*

(2005) portrays the love experience of a woman in the desert with a powerful assassin with a connection to al-Qaeda, Sheik Saeed, the target of American soldiers. In his science fiction novel A *Desert Called Peace* (2007), Tom Kratman dramatizes a war against the oppression of Earth's corrupt Caliphate. In this novel, the image of a peaceful desert is attained through the destruction of its Salafi warriors. Following this, it cannot be denied that the figure of the desert plays a significant role in War on Terror discourse. The omnipresence of the desert image in these post-9/11 novels indicates that the Middle East is deeply embedded in American popular imagination as its target colonial possession.

The desert is also viewed as a source of spiritual enlightenment. Chateaubriand's insight on the Judean desert, as illustrated in Said's *Orientalism*, proves the desert as a place of divinity:

> When one travels in Judea, at first a great ennui grips the heart; but when, passing from one solitary place to another, space stretches out without limits before you, slowly the ennui dissipates, and one feels a secret terror…God Himself has spoken from these shores: the arid torrents, the riven rocks, the open tombs attest to the prodigy; the desert still seems struck dumb with terror, and one would say that it has still not been able to break the silence since it heard the voice of the eternal. (173)

The image of the desert as a didactic place offering spiritual meditation is not new. In Western as well as in Eastern thought, the desert has always been a place where people escape from the evils of society in order to become good. As the poet and philosopher Edmond Jabès notes in one of his poems, "What is a book but a bit of fine sand taken from the desert one day and returned a few steps further on," meaning that the desert sands of Arabia are saturated with "good reason" (47; Jasper 3). It is noteworthy to remember that Semitic religions and their holy books— the Torah, the Bible, and the Qur'an—employ a rich imagery about the sublime

and powerful manifestation of divine revelation in the desert. This image finds examples in both Western and Oriental writings as in Paulo Coelho's *English Patient (1992)*, *Nazif al Hajar* (1990) and *Anubis a Desert Novel* (2005) by Ibrahim el Kuni.

What is interesting in this discussion is not an understanding of the desert as a sacred place. If religions of the West and the East have interpreted the desert as a place of contemplative retreat and of belief, their position can at a certain extent be considered "in a positive sense," as the critic George Williams would argue (138). What intrigues this discussion is, further, the image of the religious desert as an archetype of the Orient. As Edgar Quinet notes in his *De la Renaissance Orientale* (1841), "l'Asie a les Prophètes, l'Europe a les docteurs" 'Asia has Prohets, Europe has doctors' (673). That is to say, the European conception of the desert as spiritual and purely Oriental actually feeds the stereotype of religious terror in the case of the contemporary era. For the postmodern West, whose secularism has dwelt in its techno-capitalist spaces, the image of the desert would undoubtedly metaphorize a space of religious radicalism.

Most interesting in Oriental studies, perhaps, is the image of the desert as a silent and an empty place. According to Said, European travel to the Near East justifies its military conquest. He states, "It is Europe that articulates the Orient; this articulation is the prerogative, not of a puppet master, but of a genuine creator, whose life-giving power represents, animates, constitutes the otherwise silent space beyond familiar boundaries" (57). The representation of the silent desert has been central in nineteenth century works like Richard Francis Burton's travel writings in his *Personal Narrative of a Pilgrimage to Al-Medinah and Meccah* (1855), Charles Doughty's *Travel in Arabia Deserta* (1888), Gertrude Bell's *The Desert and the Sown* (1908), and T. E. Lawrence's *Seven Pillars of Wisdom* (1926). Though such writings are scientific, i.e. proving an objective view about desert places, they prove to be good examples of Orientalist texts which legitimize colonial explorations.

The construction of the desert as empty in 19th century fiction, which some critics would call "the fiction of *Tabula rasa*," helps argue the logic of dominating the Oriental Other (Collis 180). In the case of American Literature, empty wild deserts have also been regarded as the target of colonial expansion since nineteenth century transcendental writing. To be sure, in his "Writing the Wilderness" (1895), Henry David Thoreau conceptualizes wilderness as the future civilization of America, stating: "The West which I speak is but another name for the Wild; and what I have been preparing to say is, that in Wilderness is the preservation of the world….The West is preparing to add its fables to those of the East. The valleys of Ganges, the Nile, and the Rhine having yielded their crop…" (23-4). Targeting the East, its valleys and wilderness, is a pure confirmation of the American desire to conquer the Oriental.

In this perspective, other stereotypes associated with the heat of the desert are inscribed to the culture of the Orient and Third World regions. Some critics point out that the burning sun of the desert and its wild barren wilderness metaphorizes the repressed "hot" desire of Oriental sexuality and culture. The Oriental desert is, in psychoanalytic terms, metaphorized as "the world of the out-of-control id" (Shohat and Stam 148). The repeated image of the Sheikh with oppressed women and of sex slavery in the desert like in *Arabian Nights* allows to draw sexual and racial boundaries of the desert.

While the exotic East has been proved a place of projection of colonial fantasies, it operates also as an imaginary timeless location for Western women erotic fantasy. The exotic East becomes an imaginary zone for British women erotic fantasy. This image can find examples in works by women novelists like Edith M. Hull's *The Sheik* (1919), *The Desert Healer* (1923); and Cathlyn Rhodes' *Will of Allah* (1908), and *Desert Dreamers* (1909). In such desert romance novels, Oriental heroes are represented as typically handsome, rich, and brutal. Critics note that it was E. M. Hull who, with *The Sheik*, first put the desert on the map as an exotic place of sexual pleasure (Frost 98). When H. V. Morton went to Biskra (Algeria)

in January 1924 to report for the *Daily Express*, he describes a city full of Americans seeking erotic adventures. He states "I want Sheiks. I want the real Edith M. Hull stuff. I want to see how perfectly ordinary people from London, Paris, and New York behave under the influence of the Sahara" ("In the Garden of Allah" 5). In this connection, it can be drawn as an analogy the exploration of unknown places and the heroine's discovery of her suppressed sexuality. Lucy Blan, in her *Modern Women on Trial* (2013), asserts that the heroine's frequent move with speed across the desert on horseback conveys a metaphor of freedom and sexual liberation (98). Nevertheless, what is specific to the most of desert romances, and potentially so threatening to white men, is that the object of the heroine's desires and fantasies is considered racially "Other."

Therefore, what such discourse of sexuality emphasizes is colonial power over the desert and its culture. Control of sexuality and civilized white gender relations, demonstrated through Christian marriage, define white masculinity as superior by rational thought and "gentlemanly values" (Bush 131). Western bourgeois respectability and discipline, as conceptualized by Foucault, are integral in the development and stability of modern empires and involve the moralization of colonized societies (*Discipline and Punish* 6). In this sense, such policy defining European culture of colonialism represents the desert as a place radically immoral that lacks colonial authority.

Other eurocentric metaphors identify the desert as a place "where the water of life is lacking" (Auden 22). It is also viewed as a place of "solitariness," "silence," "fear," "criminality" and of "shifting identity," "where identities are lost and discovered in a silence that speaks" (Jasper 2; Auden 23). As the poet Edmond Jabès says:

> You do not go into the desert to find identity but to lose it, to lose your personality, to become anonymous. You make yourself void. You become silence. It is very hard to live with silence. The real silence is death and this is

terrible. It is very hard in the desert. You must become more silent than the silence around you. And then something extraordinary happens: you hear silence speak. (qtd in. Taylor 270)

Now, it is clear that despite the diversity of the East and Third World countries, it is only one image that fascinates the Occident about the desert—that of terror. After accounting for the metaphors associated with the desert in Western imagination, it is urgent to explore the desert metaphors in *Point Omega* which meets with the worldviews of postmodern conditions and War on Terror. Contemporary discourse on the War on Terror, it is claimed, uses the metaphor of the desert to indirectly pronounce the Western desire to dominate the East (Jarmakani xi). However, DeLillo sets the novel in a desert place "somewhere south of nowhere" (25). In view of such unknown environment, it might be supposed that exploring the novel's Orientalist representation about the East is an unstable and an inefficient criticism. Derrida has insisted that the infinite play of meanings, the struggle between present meanings and implied absent ones, make any text unstable, and therefore lacks resolution and wholeness. However, what this means also is that DeLillo's text calls for deciphering its meanings and pursue a course of a detective study. In simpler terms, interrogating *Point Omega* means breaking down the illusion of the desert—by taking it a metaphor of Iraq.

Another problem that may complicate an Orientalist reading of the desert in *Point Omega* also concerns the neutral and objective position of DeLillo's text. The story of *Point Omega* is basically narrated from a moral perspective. DeLillo dramatizes a hyper-intellectual specialist in the humanities, Elster, who tries to find romance and mystery in the desert that "inspired themes" (25). Hence, as the novel treats the idea of the desert in both its physical and metaphysical levels, it builds a philosophic insight of place, giving the novel its thoughtful and objective tone. In this respect, one might think that the novel's ultimate complaint of the violence of the desert is built on an objective perspective. For this reason,

perhaps, no study has tempted to investigate how the image of the desert functions in War on Terror discourse in *Point Omega*. However, as has been demonstrated through nineteenth century travel writings, the scientific insight and realistic portrayal of the desert takes part of Orientalist discourse itself.

It is impossible to neglect at this level the idea of objectivity as it suggests the undemocratic reading of the desert as a place of terror. It is significant to recall Foucault's theory of the statement at this level: "Although the statement cannot be hidden, it is not visible either…. It requires a certain change of viewpoint and attitude to be recognized and examined in itself" (*The Archeology of Knowledge* 125). Remembering this conception of statement, it becomes more important to consider DeLillo's way of delivering his invisible statements about the desert through the idea of War on Iraq.

Theories of place and of phenomenology may correct the reading of the novel from an objective insight. In particular, such theories admit that a place gets its meaning from the individual's personal attitude towards it. Gaston Bachelard, in his *The Poetics of Space* (1994), determines a place as "anthropo-cosmic," suggesting that its meaning is not only "geometric" but is inspired also from Man (vii). This subjective essence of place can be also reinforced by the claim of Christian Norberg-Schulz, a postmodern philosopher of place influenced by Heidegger, who admits that the identity of a place, which he calls "spirit of place," is related to man's experience in it (1). Norberg-Schulz considers the essence of a place in relation to its existence within the world i.e. as a "being" among the world's phenomena (9). In simpler terms, he maintains that the meaning of anything consists in what it comprises as phenomena experienced and understood by the individual (11). Indeed, Elster's vision of the desert confirms phenomenology as one mode of perception that governs the novel's narrative discourse, as Elster is said to "stand there and relates the complete experience, everything that comes to mind, personalities, theories, details, feelings" (26-27).

Interestingly, also, Pierre Teilhard de Chardin's theory, that is credited to sustain the novel's mode of perception of the world, also confirms what I have argued above. Elster's declaration that he "studied the work of Teilhard de Chardin" does explain his theoretical vision of the desert in terms of interconnected phenomena, including matter, time, and consciousness (65). For Teilhard, humankind is viewed as an interrelated whole. Elster explains that the human "is not the static centre of the world—as he for long believed himself to be—but the axis and leading shoot of evolution, which is something much finer" (36). This reference to Teilhard's theory is to argue that Elster's insight of the desert absolutely involves his vision on the East and Iraq. Building on this phenomenological insight of the desert, it follows that the function of the desert in *Point Omega* cannot overlook Orientalist representations. Said maintains that "every writer on the Orient assumes some Oriental precedent, some previous knowledge about the Orient, to which he refers and on which he relies" (*Orientalism* 20). The constructed image of the desert in the novel, hence, cannot dismiss American colonialist discourse on Iraq, as Elster's personal experience in the desert makes him remember the war on Iraq in which he was involved.

Admitting the desert image to comprise an unrestrained range of metaphors in DeLillo's novel, it becomes now central to underline that the process of reading the desert as a discourse of neo-Orientalism inevitably involves reading how both territories of cultural difference *i.e.* East and West, are inscribed in the desert image. To study the stereotyped image of the desert on the basis of neo-Orientalism is to dismiss half of the binary of East *vs.* West if to neglect the West as also part of the desert metaphor. Taking into account the Western subject in relation to colonial discourse may prove its ideological repressions and elucidate the productivity of colonial power in the novel. Only then it becomes possible to understand the object of DeLillo's articulation of War on Iraq.

Hence, in what follows, the discussion will explore how the image of the desert reflects the American Self from the one hand, and projects the Oriental on the Other.

III. 4. 2. Mirroring the Self through the Desert of *Point Omega*

In the novel, after serving in American international politics, Elster, who lives in a city where individuals "study electronic records on computer screens and still others look at salvaged videotapes," makes the conscious choice to travel to an "unnamed" desert (42). This displacement from a metropolitan place to a place equating "the zero in mathematics" can be read as a direct metaphor of Elster's postmodern existential situation (Glenn 4). Reflecting on the place of an unknown desert may indicate its function as a place of nihilism, which suggests the crisis of Western selfhood. Elster seeks to encounter a place which denies physical existence, including "organic matter," bodies, society, and technology (43). Most importantly, his view of the desert as a place of seclusion is not only based on non-existence of urban spaces, but also of metaphysical categories of time, culture and even language. While Elster discusses the word "rendition" with Finley, he says that "words were not necessary to one's experience of the true life" (43). This means that Elster considers language as non-consistent in one's existence. Since the desert is perceived as a total barren place, including language, it proves to be a fictional place constructed to contradict the meaninglessness of the modern West. It can be suggested that because of its emptiness and radical dereliction, DeLillo's desert further represents a place where oppositions, like rationality *vs.* irrationality, morality *vs.* immorality, and liberalism *vs.* radicalism "seem out of place" (44).

In his reflection on the place of the desert, the postmodern French philosopher and poet Edmond Jabès observes, "And what is the desert if not a place denied its place, an absent place, a non-place?" (qtd. in Taylor 269). Jabès's use of the expression "non-place" is significant in the case of the desert of *Point Omega*. Elster's attempt to encounter the desert as

an empty place that negates its proper existence demonstrates his existential desire to encounter with his self-consciousness. Relatively, the desert cannot suggest here a place of ennui or meaninglessness for Elster. Rather, his desire to desert the global city can be interpreted as a search for understanding his "being" and an escape from its terror that "wanted a war. Just a better one" (38).

To introduce a new term in this discussion, the desert encountered by Elster meets with what Foucault dubs as a place of "heteretopia" ("Of Other Places" 1). Foucault claims that there are fundamentally unreal places which exist physically and metaphysically but take place "elsewhere," bearing "curious property of being in relation to all other sites" (1). Exemplifying with the space of the mirror, cemeteries, prisons, and honeymoon hotels, Foucault explains that heterotopia functions when individuals arrive at a sort of absolute break with their traditional time (6). In the case of the novel, the desert can indeed be read as a highly heterotopic place since, for Elster, "there were no mornings or afternoons" (46), "none of the usual terror" (56), "nothing" in the desert (51). An important feature of DeLillo's desert as a place of heterotopias is that it has a function in relation to New York City as "another" place (8). Foucault explains that heterotpias create either a space of illusion or a space that is "other, another real space, as perfect, as meticulous, as well arranged as ours is messy, ill constructed, and jumbled" (8). This latter type, which Foucault would call "heterotopias of compensation" meets with the desert of the novel (8). For Elster, one of his reasons to desert New York is because "other people are conflict" (51). For him, New York is a place of "violent movies," "dead or wounded people" (63), and of "the contradiction of the universe" (59). In this sense, the place of the Other attracts the Western subject. The idealization of an Oriental place like the desert functions here as deconstructing the binary opposition that stresses Western superiority. DeLillo's desert seems to challenge the Western conventions of stereotyping the image of the Other, making it a utopian place.

It might be suggested that Elster's romantic journey to the heart of the desert is also a metaphor of experiencing a post-9/11 trauma. The desert, in other words, can be read as a metaphor of "ground zero," the place that remains reminiscent of devastation after the destruction of the World Trade Center. In this sense, the desert represents American post-capitalism itself, since the World Trade Center is generally regarded as a symbol of global capitalism. DeLillo's dramatization of Elster, who shares the secrets of President Bush's administration in the Pentagon and who retreats to the desert, necessarily entails the aftermath of his political experience.

In line with this thought, it can be further argued that the image of the desert in *Point Omega* casts what some critics call "DeLillo's apocalyptic satire" (Dewey 53). DeLillo's dramatization of a cosmos in which time seems "to fall away" (91), and in which the West is "the last billionth of a second in the evolution of matter," is a portrayal of Western culture approaching extinction (64). Since the destruction of the World Trade Center, many postmodern thinkers relate the end of American history to the fall of global Capitalist system. For Zizek, for example, the ultimate danger threatening Western consumerist society comes from the West itself, its moral weakness and lack of clear capitalist values (*Welcome to the Desert of the Real* 154). In the novel, the "animal diseases" that Elster talks about, the "transmittable cancers" (64), "extinction" (25), "famine," and the climate that raises "a North American camel," leads one to think that DeLillo satirizes an ecological apocalypse engendered by the crises of modern American capitalist culture (65).

It is through the desert, the Other culture, where DeLillo locates his understanding of the Western subject. DeLillo is aware of his positive position regarding the space of the Other and the outsider status he gives to the West. However, this very "outsiderness" that he projects will simultaneously be redirected to the Other as the following study is supposed to

demonstrate. In what follows, the figure of the desert is still a subject of analyses, but will prove to be no less than Orientalist imagery.

III.   4. 3. Mirroring the Other through the Image of the Desert: A Travel to the Heart of the Desert

If Orientalism typically presupposes essentialist assumptions that define the Orient as the "contrasting image and idea" of the West, "space" or "location" would be this element of contrast to prove DeLillo's neo-Orientalist vision in *Point Omega* (Said, *Orientalism* 4). As it is the center of the characters' attention in the story, the desert becomes the object of numerous descriptions and representations which contributes in the creation of the line between the East's appetite for violence and the West's alleged tendency to claim War on Terror. In narrating Elster's exile from the consumerist West, DeLillo draws the boundaries between two main spaces: the desert, the object of Elster's romantic journey which eventually proves to be a place of terror; and New York, which manifests as a place of "conflict" from which Elster escapes (51). Whether there might be a reversed hierarchy of New York as the periphery and the desert as the center in the characters' thought, that may play also a part in the production of neo-Orientalist discourse in the novel, is a question to which I will return below. As far as it is possible to tell from the novel's spatial division, it can be said that though Elster chooses to explore the "unknown desert" in order to find redemption and meaning of true life, and though he finds his sense of "being" [42] through its landscape,

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[42] The term "being" used in this sentence is meant in the existential sense used by Heidegger in his philosophy on phenomenology and existentialism. In his account, the essence of "being" or "*Dasein*" is homogeneous and cannot be understood in separation of its context or other entities in the world (*Being and Time* 192). As he insists, "Dasein is never 'proximally'

vastness, and heat, he is eventually convinced of an overwhelming threat in the desert (Heidegger, *Being and Time* 21).

It is worthy to underline that my hypothesis of DeLillo's unknown desert as a metaphor of the Middle East is built on the logic of Orientalist theory that considers the basic distinction between East and West as its starting point. One might think of the presence of a nuclear weapon planning in the desert of *Point Omega* as a consistent metaphor of Iraq. However, DeLillo's narrative style does not offer certainty. Elster, at some point, declares that "Iraq is a whisper" and that "the nuclear flirtations we've been having with this and that government" are also "little whispers" (56). Like these "nuclear flirtations" which have been described as "whispers" by Elster, the image of a nuclear site in the desert of the novel also functions as a "whisper" so to speak, in the sense that DeLillo does not state any genuine evidence that confirms the actual presence of a secret nuclear site in the desert. It is as if DeLillo' style of presenting the idea of the nuclear weapon in the desert resembles the same policy used by the Iraqi state when it declared its possible possession of a nuclear weapon. One might argue that this DeLilloan way of presenting only possibility in the story epitomizes postmodern narrative style as anchored in irony, ambiguity, and playfulness. Given this fact, it is important to highlight that the present interpretation of the desert as a metaphor of the Orient is also subject to postmodernists' uncertainty. In the context of our analysis of DeLillo's desert, misinterpretation can be determined; however, it remains consistently compatible to Orientalist theory. To be sure, Said himself declares it when he states in an

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an entity which is, so to speak, free from Being-in, but which sometimes has the inclination to take up a 'relationship' towards the world." (84). For this reason, he coins the terms "Mitsein, 'being-with;' 'Beisein' 'being-at, presence'; In-sein 'being-in,' and so on (149). Elster' sense of "being" projected in the above paragraph, thus, resonates in the same Heideggerian meaning of "being," i.e. of being in unity with the world.

interview that "every context produces different readers and different kinds of misinterpretations" (423). He eventually affirms that his book *Orientalism* is based on the notion that "interpretation is misinterpretation, that there is no such thing as the correct interpretation" (423). Therefore, it is possible to carry the discussion on the image of the desert as a metaphor of otherness in DeLillo's novel.

It is important to note in the beginning that Elster, who probably functions as DeLillo's fictional alter ego[43] in the novel, asserts a self-awareness of his own ethnic and cultural identity. DeLillo's use of the plural pronoun "we" through the voice of Elster in "We want to be the dead matter," and the possessive "our" in "This is time draining out of our lives" declare DeLillo's essentialist conception of American identity (64; 57). Most important

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[43] Though DeLillo presents his extreme critique of Elster as representative of the values of postmodern American society, he nevertheless proves in some instances to project DeLillo's ontological view of reality in *Point Omega*. Being an intellectual, speaking in an abstract frame, and criticizing media in reporting the reality of war, Elster sometimes fits to be considered as DeLillo's spokesman in the novel. Also, Elster's resort to Teilhard's philosophy to explain the theory of the End undoubtedly bears correspondence with DeLillo's personal reading of Teilhard's books. Considering the fact that Teilhard had died in New York in 1955, during the same semester DeLillo was at the Jesuit University in New York, it becomes hard not to presume that the publishing of Teilhard's book *The Phenomenon of Man* later that year would not have escaped DeLillo's attention. In connection with this idea, Elster's ontological vision of the world in the desert is close to DeLillo's philosophy in the novel: to transcend the available physical patterns of the natural environment and maintain a complex thought beyond the human consciousness. It is therefore possible to assume that DeLillo creates Elster as his fictional alter ego.

to note is DeLillo's use of the pronoun "they" like in "they have old dead despotic traditions," which confirms the novel's explicit articulation of the Orientalist binary logic (38).

Elster's physical presence in the desert is not enough to makes him part of its spirit and in the phenomena that govern it. Within the space of the desert, Elster makes effort to understand the passage of time in the way Teilhard's theories of evolutionary development direct his attention. Though he is consciously aware that "time is enormous" and that it is not passing, he does not consider himself part of the same temporality (56). Interesting to this argument is Sara Jaye Hart's study on time and matter in *Point Omega*, in which she sustains that Elster develops within himself a transitory understanding of his temporal experience in the desert (311). Hart maintains that though Elster's vision of the world is influenced by Teilhard's work which claims that man is part of the whole universe, it deviates profoundly from his scientific understanding of it. Rather, his vision remains alien from the durational perspective he has cultivated (311). Hart states that Elster does not relate his own life to the geological scale he experiences in the desert landscape (311). In addition to Hart's vision, it can be added that Elster's inability to maintain his sense of belonging in the temporality of the desert does not hold in New York. This can be demonstrated when the novel begins and ends with the anonymous man watching Gordon's *24 Hour Psycho*. In that scene, though Alfred Hitchcock's *Psycho* is slowed from its original rate of twenty-four frames per second to a rate of approximately two frames per second, the man is capable to merge "at a depth beyond the usual assumptions, the things he supposes and assumes and takes for granted" (7). This articulates that the character, despite his living in the rush of the modern West, declares his sense of belonging within an unfamiliar temporal context similar to the desert's. This paradox sustains that it is place, not time, which defines the character' sense of "being" within his own culture (Heidegger, *Being and Time* 21). Following this argument, DeLillo's construction of

cultural difference in the novel becomes more visible. It is clear that a demarcating line is drawn even to distinguish the nature of Oriental existence from a Western eye.

With regard to space, DeLillo pronounces the desert as typically defining Oriental culture, as he inserts expressions like "Eastern standard time" (86) and "Iraq is a whisper," juxtaposing them negatively against the culture of the West (63). In his description of the desert, Elster declares at some point that "light and sound, wordless monotone, an intimation of life-beyond, world-beyond, the strange bright fact that breathes and eats out there" (15). The phrases "life-beyond," "world-beyond," and "out there" assert Elster's perception of place as a stranger culture. Also worthy to note is that despite its vastness, the desert is perceived as a place of enclosure for Finley, as he declares: "it [is] outside my range, it [is] an alien being" (25). This exactly shows, if to follow Orientalist logic, that the fictional desert DeLillo has set for his characters is perceived as non-American, manifesting as a peripheral space vis-à-vis the culture of the Self. New York, on the contrary, functions as the center to which the characters' thoughts are actually "dwelling" (Heidegger, "Building Dwelling Thinking" 146). The desert, which reminds Elster of Iraq, is viewed as a "lost place" that exists as a set of values attached, not to modern reality, but to realities related to a distant past (110).

At this level, one cannot proceed but delve into the pure theoretical ideas that frame the novel. It has to be remembered that *Point Omega*, differently from other postmodern Orientalist texts, states its discourse in a "language that's struggling toward some idea outside our experience," a thing which echoes its omega title (72). Because the novel's discourse about the desert engages in "thinking and speaking about transcendent matters," images about the East and the Orient are given inchoate, unspecific forms. The West, however, is clearly understood because it is personified though the characters Elster, Finley, and Jessie. I propose that the novel's abstract narrative perspective on the desert bear political extents. Because

Otherness is represented through abstract phenomena, like time, unknowingness, absurdity, and silence, I want to think through some of the ways in which these metaphysical ideas prove binary oppositions, a hierarchy in which the West is privileged and the Other is unprivileged. In this sense, the sub-title "A travel to the Heart of the Desert" inspired from the famous Orientalist narrative *Heart of Darkness* by Joseph Conrad becomes a metaphor that resumes the process of exploring the novel's ideological construction of binaries and stereotypes that DeLillo inscribes in the image of the "desert."

III.   4. 3. 1. The "Unknown" Desert

One of the important features characterizing the novel's Orientalist insights on the place of the desert is the idea of the "unknown." Before narrating Elster's experience in the desert, DeLillo stresses that the characters are set in a place utterly unknown: "somewhere south of nowhere" (25). The ultimate mysterious disappearance of Jessie confirms that the characters confront a place persistent with the unknown. Perhaps, the most illustrating feature of mystery and the unknown in its purest form is when the landscape or the void turn the gaze to the characters, emanating a kind of weird unknown: "the longer I stood and looked the more certain I was that we would never have an answer" (116-117). This ambiguous feature is further reinforced by DeLillo's narrative technique. In the novel, Elster and Finley are waiting and watching the desert for some revelation, including the reader. The novel's style of prose is characterized by short descriptive paragraphs permeated with short loaded sentences, like: "the landscape inspired themes. Spaciousness and claustrophobia. This would become a theme" (25). Such a paragraph introduces serious questions but does not explain them. Instead, a new paragraph follows to stop the chain of thought, like: "Richard Elster was seventy-three, I was less than half his age" (25). Significantly, paragraphs are separated with white space in each page, which becomes also essential in declaring the mystery of the

novel's setting. In a nutshell, the narrative style of *Point Omega* calls the reader to stop and meditate the unknown, much like Elster meditating the unknown desert.

In dramatizing a character that travels and settles in an "unknown desert," DeLillo articulates a discrete imperial motif. The story of Elster especially reminds us of fictional narratives that portray travelers settling in unknown places while expressing colonial allusions. Much like Robinson Crusoe, whose colonizing mission permitted him to create a new world in the African, Pacific, and Atlantic wilderness, Elster also creates his world in the desert. If Crusoe constructed a physical home and succeeded to achieve a sense of security in a distant island, Elster could construct a psychic sense of dwelling in the uninhabited desert. His personal comfort consists in "sit(ting) and think(ing)" far from the culture of the late-capitalist space overwhelmed with media and movies (58). Significantly, also, Elster settles in the desert in hope to be far from the U.S. government, which after his experience with war-planners about conquering Iraq, proved to be "a criminal enterprise" (41). Crusoe's reason for embarking on a journey to distant places is also important to remember because he refused to carry on his career possibly in the field of his father—law. This radical denial of Western morality expressed by both characters is perhaps theoretically implicated in colonial discourse itself. *Heart of Darkness*, the narrative that Said argued as politically and aesthetically imperialist, also leaves us with the sense that there is no way to judge colonial power since Conrad shows us through Marlow a wisdom that defies Western colonial enterprise (*Culture and Imperialism* 24). Elster's affinity with Crusoe that I have drawn here is to stress that DeLillo's narrative is recycling colonial discourse present in the nineteenth-century realist novels. Like such novels which were less assertive about colonial ambitious than later twentieth-century fiction such as Conrad's and Kipling's, DeLillo's novel is also less direct about the war of Iraq.

According to Said, one of the cultural stereotypes projected by Western imagination about the Other is "the mythology of the mysterious Orient" (*Orientalism* 52). He observes that the Near East is perceived unknown because of its exotic Arab Islamic culture (26). Quite accurately explained in Carpenter's study on Western Transcendentalists' insight on Asia, the East is eventually described as "a symbol of the unknown—for the other half of the world—for mystery, and romance, and poetry" (ix). As a matter of fact, this discourse ultimately implies the colonialist fantasy to encounter the unknown. As Said puts it, "the facts of empire are associated with sustaining possession, with far-flung and sometimes unknown spaces" (*Culture and Imperialism* 64). On this regard, one is tempted to refer to a philosophical observation. In his *Phenomenology of Spirit* (1807), Hegel, who examined what he calls "the unknown-in-itself," notes that "behind the so-called curtain which is supposed to conceal the inner world, there is nothing to see *unless we go* behind it ourselves, as much in order that we may see, as that there may be something behind there which can be seen" (103 emphasis added). The significance of what I have emphasized lies in the natural desire to explore the Other, a thing which confirms the political desire to invade other unknown geographical and epistemological spaces. As some Orientalists would argue, the role of the explorer is "to make known the unknown, to defy the constraints of nature and conquer all that was conquerable" (Sale 201).

In the novel, the desert is perceived as an Other of the West because it is unknown, situated in an unknown place. The novel's plot, as it consists in a travel to an unknown desert, is indeed part of the background of many colonialist narratives, as G. M. Yong writes:

> the ever-growing literature of travel and adventure, always pushing further into the unknown and always leaving something for the next pioneer. Still armies might march into the mountains and be lost for weeks, as Roberts marched on Kandahar: into the desert and be lost forever, as Hicks was lost at

El Obeid. Still false prophets might arise in the wastes beyond Wady Halfa, still Lhasa was unvisited, and a man might make himself as famous by riding to Khiva in fact, as by discovering King Solomon's Mines in fiction. The ways of adventure stood wide open … .(179)

Point Omega is set around this same repetitive pattern of exploration and loss in an unknown place. Especially with the disappearance of Jessie, DeLillo makes his plot bear the weight of Western culture's fears concerning unknown outside cultures. To explain this further, it is significant to think of the relation between the unconscious and the conscious in psychoanalysis as a metaphorical representation of the connection between West- East binary. The East, being perceived a world suppressing desires and unknown fears, can be read as the geographical, cultural, and political unconscious of the West. In the novel, the desert is portrayed as "science fiction" (25), being "too vast" (116), unknown, mute, irrational, and possessed by a primordial terror. These features represent the unconscious in the true Freudian sense. In psychoanalytical theory, the unconscious is known to represses fantasies, dreams, memories, fears, and desires (Freud "The Interpretation of Dreams" 65). In the novel, also, the desert can be read as the reservoir of Western colonial fantasies, fears of nuclear weapons, trauma, and unpleasant memories about wars. As Finley is interested in recording Elster's "time on government, in blat and stammer of Iraq" in the desert as its background picture, he definitely articulates the desert as an unconscious territory of invasion (26). Significantly, also, is the fact that the desert in *Point Omega* functions, like the unconscious, as a place of disordered psychic expressions free from the constrains of causality. It is a place for "someone free to say whatever he wants, unsaid things, confidential things, appraise, condemn, ramble," as Finley asserts (57). What is important is that at some point, the whole idea of the desert becomes the product of the characters' unconscious thoughts. An exemplary case of this is when Finley is sometimes unaware of "what we think we're seeing when we're

not" (69). He eventually assumes the place as "not real" (116). Following this, it can be argued that the terrors recognized in the desert, in the guise of the Impact Area, the place of nuclear testing, is in fact the recognition of the West's own evil existing within itself, as psychology argues. The U.S. fantasies to exert terror in the War on Iraq manifest in the desert as a Freudian "return of the repressed" in the desert (*General Psychological Theory* 29). This claim supports the idea that terror itself is part of the Western subject in particular. Structuring the Silent Other as a threatening space can be viewed as a Western imagination that Said has talked about.

What has been interpreted above about the place of the desert as the West's unconscious highlight the importance of considering the notion of the unknown in an Orientalist reading of the novel. In the end of their experience, the characters are unable to unveil the mystery of the desert, a thing which makes the desert a more threatening entity. DeLillo's resistance to unmask the terror of the unknown in the desert contributes to project the West as a more globalized place and the Oriental Other remaining a world beyond comprehension and which needs to be conquered.

The desire to conquer and dominate the unknown Other can be further explained especially in reference to Donald Rumsfeld's response in a 2002 public discourse about the lack of evidence about Iraqi weapon of mass destruction. As a Secretary of Defense, Rumsfeld mainly highlighted the idea of the unknown as a major reason for invading Iraq: "there are known knowns; there are things we know we know. We also know there are known unknowns; that is to say we know there are some things we do not know. But there are also unknown unknowns—the ones we don't know we don't know" ("Press Conference"). In the novel, Finley affirms this neo-Orientalist prospect of exploring the unknown desert as he says "Iraq is a whisper…These nuclear flirtations we've been having with this or that government. Little whispers" (63). In relating the unknown of the desert with the mystery of Iraqi nuclear

weapons, it cannot be denied that Finley understands place from a political point of view. Notably, also, the narrator describes the zone where Jessie is suspected to have disappeared as the "impact Area," and therefore clearly links the desert nuclear testing. This "orientalization" of a natural desert related to the secrets of Iraq contributes in the novel's neo-Orientalist idea that desert cultures are a source of terror.

The elements of the "unknown" and "mystery" are omnipresent in DeLillo's fiction. As Duvall notes, DeLillo's narratives are saturated with power, a power that "can be mentioned but never fixed within the categories of our understanding" (167). In this respect, one might argue that DeLillo's use of mystery and the art of unknowing in his works is simply a feature of postmodern aesthetics. However, as John A. Mcclure argues, DeLillo's narratives call the reader to perform a discrimination of mysteries (167). In the case of *Point Omega* which alludes to War on Iraq, the mystery built on an unknown desert directly creates its image as an "Other" rather than a neutral place of "sit[ting] and think[ing]" (58). Such image projected about the desert illustrates how the novel's Orientalist logic constructs place hierarchically and reflects it as a contemporary as well as an eternal place opposite for the West.

III.   4. 3. 2. "Silent" conflict between East and West

Besides the metaphor of the unknown desert, the image of the silent desert is also particularly relevant in creating Orientalist difference in the novel. In defining Elster's reason for his exile, Finley states:

> This was the desert, out beyond cities and scattered towns. He was here to eat, sleep and sweat, here to do nothing, sit and think. There was the house and then nothing but distances, not vistas or sweeping sightlines but only distances. He was here, he said, to stop talking…May be it was the age difference between us

that made me think he felt something else at last light, a persistent disquiet, uninvented. This would explain the silence. (22-23)

From the above quotation, it is understood that silence is an important element of meditation for Elster. In a sense, also, one can understand the image of the desert as a desired object, being curiously interesting in and of its silence. On this regard, it is important to remember that scholarship on postcolonialism, feminism, and even green studies has long emphasized silence as an aspect of the dominated Other. It is undeniable that the silence of the desert is natural, and therefore, the interpretation of the silent desert in *Point Omega* might be considered more systematic and exaggerating. My reading of the silent desert in the novel can be however useful, given the fact that the natural silence of the environment has been taken by critics as a metaphor of suppressed voices. For example, Lyotard, in his "Ecology as Discourse of the Secluded" (1993), discusses the word ecology not as an object that we speak of, but rather as that which resonates beyond the phenomenological world (195). He ultimately understands nature as a metaphor of a political voice for the secluded, including women, children, and the servants (135). In addition to that, ecocritics and feminists alike agree that the physical reality of nature as a silent being transcends the passivity of the subjugated women (Warren 1)[44]. In her "Naturalized Women and Feminized Nature" (1995), Kate Soper also associates human political issues with naturality. In a feminist perspective, Soper conceptualizes nature as a specific instance of the duality between mind and body, since, for her, "it goes together with the assumption that the female, in virtue of her role in reproduction, is a more corporeal being than male" (139). As well, postcolonial theory asserts that "masterful silence" in narratives of empire celebrate the colonial politics of muting the

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[44] One of the tasks of ecocritics is to interpret the use of the natural environment in literary texts as part of the authors' discourse on human subjugation. For an example of this study, see (Bessedik, *The Representation of Meenachil River* 37-43), see Appendix 9.

Other (Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* 123). Such metaphoric interpretations of nature are admittedly a subjective thinking, perhaps because it is difficult to find words to express "feelings," so to speak. Lyotard, in his same article on ecology, admits that the property of the realm of the words "lies in our ability to pay attention to feeling" (137). That is to say, I am obliged to admit that my interpretation of the silent desert as an Orientalist metaphor is in its turn subjective.

In the same way, one can interpret the desert's silence of *Point Omega* as part of neo-Oriental landscape. In silencing a landscape associated with Iraq and with the Orient, a political boundary is created between the womanized dominated Orient and the masculine dominating West. If a colonial narrative strives to construct the image of colonized people and support the reasons for a people who deserve to be ruled, DeLillo's narrative shows nothing of these attitudes. Rather, his narrative strategy seems to pursue what Martin Paul Eve would call "a quest for silence" (2). In its far distance out beyond the temporal and the spatial settings of "cities and scattered towns," the silent desert operates as a metaphor of the Orient as a Virgin Land (22). One should bear in mind that in American history, or in the history of any postcolonial state, colonial England has pictured a similar image around the sixteenth century in order to conquer the New World. In her *Constructing Colonial Discourse* (2005), Noel Elizabeth Currie affirms that the "sexualized" metaphor of the Virgin Land identifies European explorers as a husband to the colony, which assumes a lawful possession of its body (6). She further states that this metaphor supports the project of identifying the original inhabitants primarily as part of nature rather than culture (6). In the case of *Point Omega*, the silent desert can also be claimed as part the rhetoric strategy that represents the silent presence and past of Oriental culture, and more particularly, that represents the silenced political implications of Iraq and its authorial presence in front of the West. In meditating the desert, Elster, whose past experience has been spent in the third floor of the E ring at the Pentagon, is

authentic in conveying his imperialist ambition for the East: "I still want war. A great power has to act…We can't let others shape our world" (38). If one reads and rereads this statement in relation to the setting of the novel, it proves that the silenced Other, expressed in the desert, and the presence of "they" appearing in Elster's speech, show the unconscious desire to silence Iraq. This only confirms that the silence of the desert owes much of its discourse to 9/11 events and to the subsequent war on Iraq. In representing silence as a significant character of the desert, the novel projects the American subject as a subject of desire, perpetually seeking to overcome the desert by making it a silenced object of desire. The novel effectively silences the Oriental "Other," shapes it as a different identity, and tries to represent it by occupying it. In this sense, the disappearance of Jessie in the silent desert is quite defeating, which articulates a sort of a direct resistance against American imperialist attitudes. Like the white whale's resistance against Ahab in the heart of the sea in *Moby Dick* (1851), and like the ultimate attack of the Africans to Kurtz's colonialist expedition in *Heart of Darkness* (1899), the repressive desert of *Point Omega* is also put to speak.

However, it is absolutely crucial to bear in mind that DeLillo's imperialist discourse is not persistent in the novel. His portrayal of the exotic desert is not reinforced by a direct American colonial possession. His writing is marked by allusions such that to war on Iraqi nuclear experience, a thing which qualifies the text with discursive gaps that destabilize its political claims. The only two elements that create suspicion about Iraqi nuclear testing in the novel are the notions of Iraqi "nuclear flirtations" (63), and the "Impact Area," a zone where Jessie has possibly disappeared (114). In his "Too Many Goddamn Echoes" (2015), Eve supports that DeLillo's discourse in *Point Omega* shows a stylized representation of a cold war between America and the Middle East, maintaining that the novel's postmodern perspective proves the environment of Iraq War as "explicitly virtualized" (13). Hence, this invisibility of a direct imperial discourse in the novel can be read as part of the politics of

silence; it might be an expression of a hope for invasion and/or, at the same time, of a fear of a nuclear apocalypse. In both cases, the expressed silence is what signals a worried need for superiority over the Oriental Other.

Dramatizing a silent vast place eventually means dramatizing the post-traumatic psychic terror of the American Self. In this respect, silence becomes a realist description of the symptom of a culture overwhelmed with anxiety and phobia of a future tragedy. Psychoanalysis helps here to support silence as one symptom of anxiety that occurs after a traumatic situation (Ritter 176). Freud claims that the impossibility of speech is an expression of a neurological disorder (15). Following this, one can argue that silence not only expresses American neurosis following 9/11 terrorist attacks but also signals that American culture is not ready for a future catastrophe. If in earlier novels, DeLillo has expressed 9/11-trauma through repetition of scenes and events like in *Falling Man*, in *Point Omega*, he expresses it through silence to maintain that America is still traumatized.

One should not go far in interpreting the image of the "silent desert" as long as DeLillo's novel puts its own narrative discourse in terms of a "language that's struggling towards some idea outside our experience" (17). This means that the present analyses are, in the same way, also "struggling" towards an absolute interpretation of the novel's post-9/11 colonial politics. Renée van de Vall, a critic on art and media, notes that "silence indicates inevitable gaps in our comprehension, gaps that should be respected, rather than bridged" (69). In the case of *Point Omega*, it is nevertheless relevant to respect DeLillo's highly expressive silence and the fact that irony qualifies his philosophy of writing.

Elster's silence may show a melancholy of reproducing the Other while discussing his existential situation in the desert. When Finley asks him whether he has been to Iraq, Elster "needed to consider the question," and eventually does not answer him. After a pause, he answers "I hate violence" (63). It becomes clear that the challenge for Elster is to reproduce

his thoughts about War on Iraq and translate Otherness. As such, this process of working towards this point after which there is nothing to say, and which DeLillo epitomizes in the title "Point Omega," is the crucial problem in understanding the novel's political silence. Elster simplifies his philosophical insight of the world as "the true life is not reducible to words spoken or written" (17). How can one formulate, then, the determining role of "silence" in *Point Omega* without falling into the trap of misunderstanding DeLillo?

The point is that the expressed silence in the desert becomes a different mode of representation that fits to be described, to borrow Eve's words, as "a tragic representation" (2). One is tempted to claim, following DeLillo's abstract political vision, that the concept of "unrepresentatbility" of the Oriental Other resides at the heart of the novel. For Postmodern thinkers like Jean-François Lyotard, silence is viewed as the opposite of discourse; but essentially also, it is the very condition of discourse since it is part of the things "*which* one must speak, *that* one must express" (8 emphasis original). Lyotard observes that there is no discourse "without this opacity in trying to and restore this inexhaustible" silence (8). If we take silence as a discourse, following Lyotard, it becomes clear that the absence of representative language and symbols in the novel actually indicates the crisis of neo-Orientalist representation. One can thus say that DeLillo's desire to be silent towards the "unpresentable" does not indicates the absence of Oriental civilization in the Western mind, but actually reflects Western culture in neurosis (Lyotard 38). What the omega point might indicate particularly is not an impossible Western representation of the East; rather, it shows a discourse of a decentered Western subject. For Lyotard, the real silence, which psychoanalysis would interpret as a real psychic neurosis, is understood as a trope of postmodern silence—a symptom of the fragmented postmodern psyche (38). Following this chain of thought, I argue that *Point Omega* does not maintain the traditional mode of representing the Other through articulation; rather, it hardens its Orientalist discourse through

expressing the crisis of the Western subject. I claim that this strategy is politically stronger, for the power of DeLillo's representation lies in unrepresentation, which proves that the antagonism between East and West is still at work.

III.   4. 3. 3. Temporality "Orientalized"

Another metaphysical idea that transcends Orientalism in the novel is the slowness of time in the desert. DeLillo's sophisticated treatment of temporality is striking in the novel that it appeals to be read as a tool to express an Orientalist discourse. DeLillo openly declares his Orientalist vision of the desert by defining slow temporality as "Eastern standard time" (86). For the characters, who spent their lives amid the technological developments of the modern West, time is stagnant in the desert: "Day turns to night eventually but it's a matter of light and darkness, it's not time passing, mortal time" (57). In contrast, "there's an endless counting down" in New York, as Elster observes (45). Thus, the characters' observations about the slow time of the desert is a consistent trope of representing the Near East, Arabs living in the desert, and Islam as archaic and decadent in contrast to American modern, say futuristic culture. This representation of temporality calls into attention one of the many Orientalists who believe in the inactiveness and powerlessness of the East. Panayiotis Vatikiotis, an American political scientist and historian of the Middle East, well illustrates this concern when he discusses the inability of the Middle East to attain a radical revolution. He says, "Until the states in the Middle East can control their economic activity and create or produce their own technology, their access to revolutionary experience will remain limited. The very political categories essential to a revolution will be lacking" (12-13). This deeper inactiveness expressed by Panayiotis is basically given reason through perceiving the East as typically static in history.

The sense of the slow temporality that Elster experiences as "becoming slowly older. Enormously old" is noticed as such perhaps because of the absence of Western technological advancement in the desert (91). The old opposition between the primitive East and the modern technological West is projected to highlight the importance of technological power—attributed to the West. This is what Elster perceives when he says: "cities were built to measure time, to remove time from nature" (57). It is significant to stop at this idea and think of the powerful hostility against the culture of the desert as also attributed to the fundamental difference between the city, as a large town, and the desert, as a rural area. Before he recounts the story of Elster in the desert, DeLillo is attentive to depict Western identity as obsessively attached to the culture of camera and movies. In his study *The Country and the City* (1973), Raymond Williams argues that the city is generally understood as a form of civilization, a place of noise, communication, and ambition, whereas the country gathers meanings of backwardness, ignorance, and limitation (1). Relevant to our concern, this conception helps to stabilize the subjective division DeLillo has built on Iraq as a pastoral, invisible space, compared to America as a metropolitan, global cityscape. In his "The Postcolonial Aura" (1994), Arif Dirlik resonates that global capitalism is a powerful aspect that conceptualizes the relations between the colonizer and the colonized, "the West and the Rest" (295). It is then significant to comprehend American late-capitalism as a political organization that, not only defines the spatial meanings of Western and Oriental spaces, but structures oppressive hegemony in drawing these places.

After demonstrating rural and city spaces as features of cultural difference, it remains to analyze temporal practice in these spaces as also part of the same feature. To do this, it is worth considering Elster's temporal experience in the supermarket after being inactive in the "enormous" time of the desert (56). As Finley recounts, "In the market he moved along the shelves choosing items, tossing them in the basket. I did the same, we divided the store,

moving quickly and capably and passing each other now and then in one of the aisles, avoiding eye contact…When we were off-road, on rubble, he reduced speed drastically and the easy bouncing nearly put me to sleep" (94-95). In this passage, the clear boundary drawn between the intransient time of the desert and the rapid time spent in the supermarket is a key factor in projecting an Orientalist view of the place of the desert. The characters' quick movement in the supermarket helps celebrate American or Western essentialism and create the stable and divided geographical entities of East and West. Interestingly, there is another, equally compelling, reason for taking into consideration this passage. For, if one rereads Finley's remark, it quickly proves a central, if not rather more camouflaged sign that invokes an Orientalist assumption in the statement: "he reduced speed drastically and the easy bouncing nearly put me to sleep" (95). Doesn't this mean that the slow time of the desert is actually fictionalized? What Elster illustrates through slowing down his car in the desert, despite the fact that the supermarket is present not in a so far distant region, is a construction of a subjective difference vis-à-vis the place of the Other through its temporality.

Ontological theories of time may help outline the ways in which Elster and Finley experience the different temporalities displayed in *Point Omega*. The theories of Henri Bergson and Edmund Husserl which conceptualize time in relation to consciousness are worth noting to claim the novel's subjective vision of time. In the first half of the twentieth century, Bergson notes two temporal aspects of conscious life:

> our perceptions, sensations, emotions and ideas occur under two aspects: the one clear and precise, but impersonal; the other confused, ever changing, and inexpressible, because language cannot get hold of it without arresting its mobility or fit it into common-place forms without making it into public property. (*Time and Free Will* 129)

According to Bergson, there are two different types of time: "Quantitative" or chronological time, which he calls "le temps;" and "qualitative" time, which he calls "la durée" (121). *Le temps* is the time that can be measured and divided by linguistic and mathematical terms. Convention appeals to respect this type of time, or people would miss trains, arrive to work late, and eat lunch at late hours. *Le temps* offers an objective temporality, ordering society by offering common terms for its use. Qualitative time, on the other hand, is the personal experience of time that endures. Characterized by the melting of moments into one another, it is composed of fragments that cannot be detached from its whole. Qualitative time remains outside of language as a subjective and disordered entanglement of moments. Husserl also identified sensation-based time of human consciousness, which he terms "internal time-consciousness," and the objective time of the physical universe (429). As a phenomenologist, Husserl posits a "temporalizing consciousness," as he calls it, that constitutes both "external" worldly time (the time of clocks) and the "internal" or inner time of consciousness and its mental or conscious processes (184). For him, the present is a "no fleeting punctual now, but rather as a stretch of time whose extent depends on the duration of a process that fills it up, a process felt as cohering without a break" (Dahlhaus 74).

Two points interest us in the theoretical and philosophical details established above. The first idea that deserves discussion is the novel's distinction between linear and non-linear time. It can be noticed that people of New York, and the West by extension, are described within the constraints of linear, objective time. Elster's conception of linear time is portrayed as the logical paradigm of an individual accustomed to and desirous of constant state of physical flux. While in the supermarket, Elster and Finley are spontaneously "moving quickly and capably and passing each other now and then in one of the aisles, avoiding eye contact" (95). It is as if the characters recognize the supermarket under the constrains of objective

linear time that moves from past to present. In this sense, the supermarket spatially embodies the entire post-industrial West that operates under the measures of the clock. Indeed, the characters' sub-ordinance to the dictates of the industrial world is the root cause of Elster's inability to embrace and recognize the geologic time of the desert.

While the West is set in the linearity of objective time, the East is positioned in stagnant temporality. Time in the desert, or "Eastern standard time" as DeLillo calls it, is mainly featured in terms of Bergson's qualitative time (or Husserl's "inner time-consciousness), being elastic, expanded, or a thickened present (429). This is the temporal plane on which Elster, Finley and, ultimately Jessie, operate—an infinite present into which the past is continuously filtered. As Elster reduces speed after experiencing the objective time of the supermarket, he reinforces the fact that life in the desert is actually like a temporal segment in the past. The Orientalist stereotype portrayed here is that of decadence. The Orient is considered to be the negation of the metropolitan West i.e. the other side of temporal rationality, development, economic growth, prosperity, and so on. One can go further to claim, following this representation, that the concept of an Islamic civil society, Islamic political ideologies, and modern Islam, though they don't figure in the novel, are maintained controversial by nature vis-à-vis Western culture.

Nevertheless, what is more interesting in referring to theories of time is not merely the idea of objective temporality as a point of reference. It has to be signaled that none of the theories identifies a still, motionless time in conscious life as the novel intends to celebrate it in portraying the desert. While exploring inner experience of time, Bergson encounters "a continuous flux, a succession of states, each of which announces that which follows and contains that which precedes it" (vi). For him, even though subjective time, or what Bergson refers to as "la durée vécue," is supposedly described as contracted to a mathematical point; it is actually heterogeneous and is subject to continuity (vi). This means that temporal

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inactiveness used to portray "Eastern standard time" is rooted in his conception of the Orient itself. What I shall try to claim is that in representing temporal stillness in the desert, the novel incites justifications for some political intervention in the East, being stagnant in history. Just as Elster crosses the physical boundaries of the desert, so, too, he moves across time, demystifying any notion of cause and effect. In this sense, DeLillo displaces the concept of the coherent, natural causality of time theorized by scientists like Einstein, Heinsenberg, and Prigogine, and subverts the conventions of realism to subjectively construct an "Orientalized" insight on time. This means that DeLillo's text, in canonizing Eastern time as a homogeneous duration and Western time as its rational point of reference, is based on the Orientalist idea that views the West as scientific, rational, more objective, and the East as a reference of passivity and stasis.

While it is not clear to which extent the force of geologic time is recognized as positive in the desert, it is certainly clear that the narrative intends to expand as well as intensify our temporal imagination about desert locations. This "mythologized" temporality expressed in the novel articulates that the culture of the Orient is static, frozen, and fixed eternally. It claims that the very possibility of change and development for cultures settled in deserts, in the true sense of the term, is out of question. For Said, the Orient has been always represented as immobilized and unproductive, "identified with a bad sort of eternity" (*Orientalism* 208). This "bad" sort of eternity is what Elster sustains as he becomes consciously aware of "an unusual terror" in the time of the desert (56). For him, the usual terror is embodied in modern Western time dominated by the "nausea of News and Traffic. Sports and Weather" (23). Sympathetic readers may argue that DeLillo's reference to the "unusual terror" is clearly self-ironic, attempting to set a critique of the modern postindustrial West (56). However, what this might insert, indirectly, is the fact that the word "unusual" means not merely a radical reverse of the usual terror of Western time, which reflects the idea

of the Orient as the antonym of "contemporary." Yet, it also implies that Eastern Time contradicts the rational linearity of "time of watches, calendars," which argues the Orient as the antonym of "common sense" (75). From this double discourse identified in DeLillo's narrative, it can be distinguished that an unstable critique is held on the ethical effects of Western rapid consumption of time. What lies behind DeLillo's critique of the pollution of industrial manufacturing is in fact a way to reinforce an unarticulated privilege and maintain that Eurocentric modernity is the only way to develop cultures in the world. Without truly preserving cultural diversity and assimilating it into a universal logic, the result of representing desert temporality might be recognized as what Kristeva calls in her *Strangers to Ourselves* (1991) "ethnocentrical reduction" (114).

In the desert, human time is minimized so completely that Elster is able to sense the physicality around him: "I feel the landscape more than I see it," he tells Finley. Elster says, "I never know what day is. I never know if a minute has passed or an hour" (24). What is interesting to signal in relation to the expressed negativity in "I never know" and "I don't get" is that Elster claims that the desert and its culture lack the sense of freedom that a Western liberal society affords. To be sure, even though time is eternal in the desert, it paradoxically "imprisons" characters in making them unable to do anything, just "sit and watch in silence" (46). If one contemplates Elster's words, it can be noticed that he articulates a desire to "know what day is" and to "know if a minute has passed or an hour" (24). This means that Elster belongs to modern Western space of freedom. The exercising of Western judgment upon the hopeless desert can be argued as an eventual expression of power.

In his study on time in *Point Omega*, Scott Dill discusses the novel's unclear essence and claims that "time is not the problem" in the novel's lost meaning. For him, the source of the missed meaning in the novel is a lack of love among human relationships (92). What has to be inserted, in relation to Dill's research, is however the fact that time itself, Eastern or

Western, represents a human character in the novel. Many studies on DeLillo's temporality in *Point Omega*, among them James Gourley's "Terrorism and Temporality" (2013), do not interpret the role of temporality and its metaphorical significance. It has to be stated that the dramatization of time in *Point Omega* represents a character with identity and acts, like in Shakespearean poetry. It manifests as a person that exists in space and time, being watched again and again in similar process Jessie is being watched by Finley and in similar way the famous "shower scene" of the film *24 Hour Psycho* is being watched. In these activities of watching and waiting, a powerful colonialist discourse is perceived. In juxtaposing desert temporality with Jessie, who both are contemplated and waited for a crucial event to happen, how can one not assume time as a theoretical extension of the colonized Other—"as a stable category fixed in a position of subjugation" (Parry 84). The true terror is Finley himself who is immersed in the enjoyment of Jessie's female body that he perturbs her regular existence. The colonial gaze articulated in waiting in the desert, and the sexual gaze articulated in watching Jessie, are expressions of colonialist/ masculine attitudes towards the female/ Orient. Then, like the ultimate disappearance of Jessie reads as a female resistance against masculine power, the elastic everlasting contraction of time can also be read as a narrative of resistance against the violation of Eastern temporality.

Till now, it has been demonstrated that the representation of desert temporality in *Point Omega* is a powerful Orientalist discourse. It has been illustrated that temporality is employed to draw a distinction between the decadent Orient and the modern West. This is not naively to overlook the fact that the novel's representation of the static temporality of the desert articulates that within the progressive timeline of development and modernity, Iraq and Saddam Hussein are understood to take the figure of the medieval. The novel's politicization of the notion of time holds, in contrast, that the U.S, the West, and Christianity appear to be modern and experienced in matters of civilization. Static temporality appears not as a sort of

wisdom, as Elster would think it would be at the beginning of the novel; rather, it appears to dislocate the chronology of the modern world. It is claimed that the time of the "Pleistocene desert" is "the rule for extinction" (72). If one is supposed to read this statement politically, it proves that the desert is a source of terror. In linking the mere act of watching that appears in the man viewing the murder scene of the film *Psycho* with Elster's experience of watching the desert, it fits to be claimed that the novel is about a slowed watching of terror itself, present both in the culture of the desert and in the murder scene.

It remains still interesting to ponder on temporality as one of the strategies of neo-Orientalist representations. One has not to overlook the fact that 9/11 discourses on temporality, including past, present, and future, are absolutely related to the politics of War on Terror. To be sure, Lee Jarvis neatly asserts in his study *Times of Terror* (2009) that specific references to temporality in post-9/11 writings and speeches reflect 9/11 as an aggressive event in Western history (89). Arriving on American soil unexpectedly and without warning, terrorism is perceived as an event abstracted from any historical contextualization which confronts the temporal chronology of postmodernity (80). In this way, it can be safely claimed that 9/11 discourses conceptualize conflict with terrorism as a conflict of distinct temporalities. Jarvis takes seriously the various representations of temporality within the Bush administration's unfolding War on Terror. For instance, he takes the following presidential speech for the sake of analysis:

> Just three days removed from these events, Americans do not yet have the distance of history. But our responsibility to history is already clear: to answer these attacks and rid the world of evil. War has been waged against us by stealth and deceit and murder. This nation is peaceful, but fierce when stirred to anger. This conflict was begun on the timing and terms of others. It will end in a way, and at an hour, of our choosing. (qtd. in Javis 1)

It is relevant to notice that in the above speech said three days after 9/11-events, the President's comments invoke time to claim national unity and innocence in order to declare 9/11 the "first war of the 21st century," as Bush declares (*Public Papers of the Presidents* 1103). It is obvious from the above passage that the President's references to "distance of history," "on the timing," and "at an hour," renders his speech coherent and a strategic totality which locates 9/11 events as both a declaration and an instigation of war itself. Jarvis explains on this regard that President Bush's reference to national history positions 9/11 as a moment defining temporal discontinuity in American culture, breaking the sense of confidence and assuredness gained by the linearity of American time (63).

Reflecting on such political discourse on temporality intertwined with the politics of War on Terror, it becomes clear that the novel draws our attention to time not as an objective entity one may typically imagine it to be, but as a narrative that poses significant implications about national identity production and political conflicts on terrorism. Following Javis' analysis, one is tempted to hold that Elster, who has worked in Bush's administration before moving to the desert, may have been drawn on by the same politics of the War on Terror precisely through his explicit appeal to temporality. Elster's confession of his desire for war on Iraq reinforces this argument. He declares:

> I still want a war. A great power has to act. We were stuck hard. We need to *retake the future*. The force of will, the sheer visceral need. We can't let others shape our world, our minds. All they have are *old dead despotic traditions*. We have *a living history* and I thought I would be in the middle of it. But in those rooms, with those men, it was all priorities, statistics, evaluations, rationalizations. (38 italics mine)

What can be noticed in the above passage said by Elster is that his reference to temporality is permeated with the same politics of War on Terror characterizing President

Bush's speech. In a sense, just like President Bush invokes temporality to position terror beyond American borders and declare war on it, the novel also recounts terror by referring to a distant location within a paradoxical and an inconsistent temporality. Elster's reference to time as "blind" (81), and "inferior" (57) resonates as a powerful argument to declare war as a moral political conviction. Most obviously, Elster describes Western civilization as a "living history" and Oriental civilization as "dead" (38). In so doing, he reflects time as a form of cultural disparity bearing an inherent political character, what declares the clash between East and West as precisely based on far existential differences. In declaring "We need to retake the future," and "We can't let others shape our world, our minds," it can be noticed a rhetoric of sureness and predictability that proclaims Eastern Time as a bringer of an eventual rupture in the temporality of the world (38).

DeLillo's reference to Western temporality as distinctively linear identifies the American Self among a more coherent social order. For DeLillo, hence, time in New York City, though being the matrix of the technological age and of the "urban inferno," presents itself as the ultimate feature for producing the basic human need for identity. In this way, the novel recounts otherness by referring to Western temporality as modern: "We have a living history and I thought I would be in the middle of it" (38). Eastern Time is however perceived as decadent: "All they have are old dead despotic traditions" (38). It is represented as the progenitor of a subsequent violence, as the characters are especially waiting for a terrific event to happen. In the novel, Eastern Time is in its metaphysical nature a point of confusion for the characters. Though Jessie is convinced to quit the violent effects of New York City, she eventually finds no chance to live in the temporal scale of the desert. Implicit to this fact is the proposition that with the acceleration of modern time, the possibility of terror is highly expected.

III. 4. 3. 4. Infinite Desert *versus* Finite Mortal West

Another opposition drawn through the image of the desert is the infinite East *vs*. the finite West. The "too vast" space of the desert and its elastic, "becoming slowly older" time define the figure of the Orient as set in an infinite order (116; 91). On the other side of the dichotomy lies a finite West. In fact, the existential state of the figure of the West is profoundly ambiguous in the novel. Although depicted as a place of liberation and infinite power, it is presented as subject to finitude—death: "all of us, we become ourselves beneath the running thoughts and dim images, wondering idly when we'll die" (21). Being a global capitalistic universe where the notion of "nothing is impossible" is promised in all its perverse forms, technology, money, sexuality, enjoyment, etc, the West is nevertheless declared mortal: "we want to be the dead matter we used to be. We're the last billionth of a second in the evolution of matter" (64). The slow shower scene exhibited in the gallery, then, resonates to the same extent, i.e. representing the slow "hellish death" of Western civilization, "bloody water curling and cresting at the shower drain, minute by minute, and eventually swirling down" (11). Elster himself compares the experience of watching *24 Hour Psycho* to "watching the universe die over a period of about seven billion years" (59).

It can be said that the infinite desert, being without points of orientation and without the markings of modern civilization, represents a radical counter-space vis-à-vis the finite West. Jean Baudrillard's observation on the idea of the desert as an "ecstatic critique of culture" fits to be inserted here in relation to the novel (*America*, 5). At a fundamental level, Elster targets the desert as a place of his destination of exile in order to "reclaim [his] body from what he called the nausea of News and Traffic" (22). Against the destructive forces of

history and modern civilization, the desert's infinity appears to provide Elster with a luminal space, an apparent *tabula rasa* that makes him reconsider the ideologies of "the fantasists in the Pentagon" (24).

In its feature of infinity and eternity, doesn't the desert stand for a post-apocalyptic vision of the capitalist West? The general argument I shall explore here is centered in the idea that capitalism is a hegemonic entity. It is significant to remember that in a capitalist society, the interesting command of time, space, and money are the basic forms of power (Harvey 227). This means that political and ideological hegemony, as Marxist critics would argue, lie in the ability to control and "materialize" the meanings of time, space, and money (Harvey 227). In the novel, destruction is conceived as a result of technological advancement: "the blur of technology, this is where the oracles plot their wars" (66). Elster claims the American government as "a criminal enterprise" because of its excessive power (41). The state of its criminality is described in his confident presumption that:

> In future years, of course, men and women, in cubicles, wearing headphones, will be listening to secret tapes of the administration's crimes while others study electronic records on computer screens and still others look at salvaged videotapes of caged men being subjected to severe physical pain and finally others, still others, behind closed doors, ask pointed questions of flesh-and-blood individuals. (42)

The above depiction of the future is very Orwellian in its reflection on a dystopian destiny of the post-industrial government. However, in its pessimistic report especially of the dystopian future of the Capitalist West, one can predict that this picture drives history as well as consciousness to its end, the point which DeLillo understands as the "Omega point" (67). Technology is the basic form of freedom in the quotation above. What remains is terror. Therefore, one is led to interpret the image of the desert as an epitome of what can happen in

a capitalistic culture defined by the category of liberalism. The terror of infinite freedom that I argue to be embodied in the image of the desert can be reinforced by Elster's comment that man, who is manipulated by technology, will end in nothingness itself: "Do we have to be human forever? Consciousness is exhausted. Back now to inorganic matter. This is what we want. We want to be stones in a field" (67).

This interpretation cannot neglect the theory of the end of history put forward by Francis Fukuyama. In his *The End of History*, Fukuyama believes that "in the end of history, there are no serious competitors left to liberal democracy" (211). The desert, hence, embodies this state of apocalypse where no economic or political competitor exists. In this sense, none of the Hegelian Master-slave dialectic fits to exist in the desert of world's cultures. Neither Capitalist, Communist, nor Islamic rivals survive because "armies carry the gene for self-destruction" (66). What remains is the antithesis of Western power in its pure form.

Although I specified that the space of the desert stands as a critique of modern Western culture, it is still necessary to carry a discussion on its significance in relation to the Orient. Nevertheless, after claiming the infinite desert as marking the end of history, and so, marking the end of East-West dichotomy, how can one read Orientalism in the eternity of the desert? Does the concept of infinity highlight the end of Orientalism in the novel? Is there, in fact, any Orientalist reading left in the image of the eternal desert? Much of what I have to say here relates the concept of the infinite to the Oriental Other. It is imperative to remember that the concept of "the infinite" is a subject more associated with Romanticism in general, and Romantic Orientalism in particular. As previously noted in the beginning of this chapter, the infinite is fused with ideas and images of the East. In the Romantic era, the Orient is viewed as infinitely elastic. This finds explanation in Andrew Warren's observation that: "the space between a concrete detail from the Near East and the projected *Orient* of which it is allegedly

a part will always remain infinite because the Orient *is* that gap, is that unifying excess inherent in the naming of the Orient as such" (110 emphasis original).

Theoretically speaking, according to German Idealists, who are the precursors of Romantic philosophy, the infinite is typically a synonym of pure thought. The meaning of an object, for them, is regarded as "the thing-in-itself," an expression that Hegel uses to refer to the pure idea of that object (24). They tend to understand the infinite as all pervasive unity, a mystical oneness, the Absolute itself, a point after which there is no thought. Coleridge illustrates this concern in an ideal way when he says "I would make a pilgrimage to the burning sands of Arabia, or etc. etc. to find the Man who could explain to me there can be oneness, there be infinite Perceptions – yet there must be a oneness, not an intense Union but an Absolute Unity" (556). The capital "A" in the "Absolute" is definitely Hegelian. Because Coleridge perceives the desert as the locus of the infinite, he seeks to encounter it to find answer. The desert, for Orientalists like Coleridge, is a place that remains a universal object of quest and desire. The meaning of the desert represents infinite thought, and the capitalized "Man" then means mankind, which resonates in the quote that no human is capable to find an answer for infinity.

This Romantic understanding of infinity, the point after which there is nothing to say, manifests mainly in "the omega point" of the novel. As Finley recounts, "I thought of his remarks about matter and being, those long nights on the deck, half smashed, he and I, transcendence, paroxysm, the end of human consciousness. It seemed so much dead echo now. Point omega" (124). One can presume that Elster's time in the government followed by a visit to the desert is to meditate on the question of war on Iraq. This means that the novel's perception of Iraq and the ideas related to it, especially after 9/11, are embodied in the infinite desert because it could not be and cannot be understood by the West.

To reformulate what has been argued, DeLillo's neo-Orientalist connotations regarding the "infinite" are a recycling of the radical ideas framed by Romantic thought. This is most effectively identified in Elster's escape from New York and in his return to nature. Philip Nel confirms that DeLillo is influenced by Romantic thought (19). He admits that DeLillo is wary of the Romantic project of bridging the gap between word and world (22). This argument finds illustration in Elster's statement: "the true life is not reducible to words spoken or written, not by anyone, ever" (21). It can be argued, following this, that this change in neo-Orientalist representation in postmodern writing is instigated both by the rapid technological developments in Western society during the 1960's and the changes identifiable after the 9/11 attacks.

Till now, it has been demonstrated that DeLillo's metaphysical concepts cast on the desert bear neo-Orientalist echoes. Silence, temporality, unknowingness, and infinity, all impose social, cultural, and political hegemonies on the space of the desert. The result of the novel's metaphysical categories shed in the narrative is nothing less than shaping the desert as an outside culture, as said through the voice of Finley, "the desert was outside my range, it was an alien being" (25). This perception is rooted in Said's idea that Orientalism is rooted in the dream of the infinite distance between the dominating Orientalist and the mysterious, impenetrable subject of the Orient:

> Orientalism is premised upon exteriority, that is, on the fact that the Orientalist, poet or scholar, makes the Orient speak, describes the Orient, renders its mysteries plain for and to the West. He is never concerned with the Orient except as the first cause of what he says. What he says and writes, by virtue of the fact that it is said or written, is meant to indicate that the Orientalist is outside the Orient, both as an existential and as a moral fact. (*Orientalism* 21)

As such, the desert, "as has been Orientalized" by previous Western discourse, is objectified in the image of the alien eternal desert in *Point Omega* (Said, *Orientalism* 104).

If in previous analysis, DeLillo's desert has been understood as a voiceless being, mysterious, and confined to the past, how can one overlook reading the desert as a representation of the identity of radicalism? Is there any place to read the two different worlds structured in the novel as a world of "McWorld," represented through postmodern New York, and the Other as a world of "Jihad," inscribed in the figure of the desert?

In her "Media Violence," Liliana Naydan highlights that a Catholic meaning of fundamentalism propagates from the novel. She claims that the echoes of fundamentalist perspective prove themselves in the novel even though the text contains no terrorist other than Elster (101). She says that the unnamed man's experience in front of *24 Hour Psycho* reminds of the ways in which fundamentalists comprehend existence and see revelation in all history around them (101). The man's experience is considered fundamentalist because he shows as a literalist who believes in foundations as primary to his existence (101).

Differently from Naydan's view which illustrates fundamentalism in the characters' thought, I claim that the idea of the desert also propagates fundamentalist thought. In its dreariness, radical position in the past, regressive, supreme denial of the economic logic of the market, in its resistance to "instrumental logic" (Zizek, *The Ticklish Subject* 222), and in its other forms of prohibitions, how does not the desert stand as a metaphor of the radical Other? One can see the desert as set against the Western liberal subject who, like Nietzsche's Last Man, is concerned only with the pursuit of private pleasures and ideals of happiness; a pure survivalism without any sense of historical engagement. Following this, the disappearance of Jessie can be read as a possible outcome of her kidnapping by a terrorist agent who sees women as the uttermost subject of sin in existence.

Interestingly, yet, it has to be remembered that the rationale of Orientalist fundamentalism, as critics argue, is deciphered only when the meaning of fundamentalist action is abstracted from the religious faith that sustains and inspires it (Roxane 24). To complete reading the metaphor of the fundamentalist desert in the novel is to consider, hence, the spiritual paradigm projected in the desert. As Finley proves, Elster understands nature in relation to spirituality: "Think of it. We pass completely out of being. Stones. Unless stones have being. Unless there's some profound mystical shift that places being in a stone" (92). From what Elster states, it can be noticed that though he is not a true religious believer i.e. secular, he is consciously aware of the presence of the Divine in the desert. His days are started by "raising his arms sunward, petitioning gods" (28). Elster himself utterly describes his contemplation of the desert with Elster as "a religious observance" (108). As the desert is proved to bear religious connotations, one is tempted to describe Elster' and Finley' exile in the desert as that of the Israelites wandering for forty years in the Sinai desert, or that of the forty days spent by Jesus in the desert, according the Bible. The latter description would not be ridiculous especially after knowing that Elster's sleeping pills are around "forty pills compacted and dripping spit," a possible number of days presumed to be spent in the desert (106). This perception of the desert as spiritual is set against the image of secular West, which is physical and materialistic.

So far, I have argued that the figure of the desert, as projected by DeLillo, compresses metaphysical ideas that have proved to transcend Orientalist and neo-Orientalist representations. Four concepts have been elaborated in these lenses: the concept of the unknown, silence, temporality, and eternity. Through these, Elster and Finley have been identified within the gaze of the Western eye, by which they reproduce the colonialist mechanism of perceiving the desert, as Said suggests, the object of a "spectacle" (*Orientalism* 158). The novel, as such, lays down a tone of an inevitable clash between two opposed

civilizations: the one representing modernity, rationalism, and other positive associations, while the Other stands for backwardness, irrationality, hatred, and other negative associations.

However, in order to highlight DeLillo's discourse on terrorism in the novel, one has to study "terror" as part of the landscape of the desert. As "War on Terror" is reliant on constructing the binary logic of the West *vs.* the terrorist East in contemporary Orientalist discourse, it remains necessary to investigate "terror" and its implications on DeLillo's Orientalist representation.

III.   5. The Desert as a Source of Terror

While the desert has served as a peaceful place of sitting and thinking in the beginning of the novel, "clairvoyant," "unravels and reveals," it has progressively turned a threatening territory (109). As Elster states, it became articulating an obscure sort of terror: "there is nothing of the usual terror" (56). Romantic Orientalists also seem to perceive the desert as pervasive with a mysterious terror. Chateaubriand, for instance, remarks that:

> When one travels in Judea, at first a great ennui grips the heart; but when, passing from one solitary place to another, space stretches out without limits before you, slowly the ennui dissipates, and one feels a secret terror, which, far from depressing the soul, gives it courage and elevates one's native genius…the desert still seems struck dumb with terror, and one would say that it has still not been able to break the silence since it heard the voice of the eternal. (qtd. in Said, *Orientalism* 173)

Chateaubriand's sense of terror is related to the power of the divine in the desert, and thus, it is positively grasped in his perception. However, DeLillo's perception of desert terror in *Point Omega* is quite different. The statement "there is nothing of the usual terror" directly or indirectly indicates the binary opposition between Western and Eastern terror. A powerful

War on Terror discourse is resulted through this logic of differentiation between Eastern and Western terrors, as it will be elucidated below.

Be that as it may, the perception of the desert as a source of terror is manifested in the disappearance of Jessie, the point at which the protagonists' physical and moral disintegration has begun. Subsequent to this event, Finley states: "But now it (the desert) made him feel enclosed and I understood this, hemmed in, pressed tight. We stood outside and felt the desert bearing in. Sterile thunder seemed to hung over the hills, stormlight washing toward us. A hundred childhood, he said obscurely. Meaning what, the thunder may be, a soft evocative rumble sounding down the years" (109). From this passage, it is absolutely evident that there exists an immoral phenomenon in the desert. The thunder, a gothic element, makes the spirit of the desert appear desolate and unconventional, after it was enlightening for Elster. After Jessie's disappearance and probable murder, the desert shows to be a monstrous being. It became a place of enclosure, a place of death: "could someone be dead there?" (116). In psychoanalytic terms, the desert becomes eclipsed with the irrationality of the unconscious and is metamorphosed into an uncontrollable neurotic entity. At some point, Elster sees the house, in which he dwelled during his stay in the desert, as a haunted phenomenon, and sometimes, it comes to his mind that he sees Jessie:

> He began to see things out of the corner of his eyes. He'd walk into a room and catch a glimpse of something, a color, a movement. When he turned his head, nothing. It happened once or twice a day. I told him it was physiological, same eye every time, routine sort of dysfunction, minor, happens to people of a certain age. He turned and looked. Someone there but then she wasn't. (108)

This related vision to Jessie's ghost is a metaphor for a menacing desert that threatens the inside order of the house. When reading about Jessie, above, we are faced with the problem of her real nature. First, we may read Elster's hallucination, as a fabricatin of his post-traumatic

mind. Second, in a way combining the material and the immaterial, we are tempted to regard Jessie as a ghost, an entity who does exist in the fictional world but who is paranormal in nature. It seems that the terrors of the desert, which manifest in darkness during the night, silence, loneliness and invading emptiness, seem to gather to divide the Self of Elster, especially after his dear daughter has disappeared.

The fictionalized desert as such is a spatial metaphor of power, which eventually symbolizes the power of the hostility reserved for the enemies of the Orient. For Elster, who contributed in conceptualizing and applying "overarching ideas and principles to things like troop deployment and counter-insurgency," the desert betrays his desire to fortify his ego and nourish his soul (23-24). The crisis occurring in the space of the desert might suggest the crisis in the government politics of war on Iraq. Elster's invocation of the rumble sounding in the meaning of "a hundred childhood" is significant for it may be understood as a rhetorical implication of the terrific consequences of military interventions in Iraq (109). The thunder may have spoken in Elster's mind, like it has actually spoken in Eliot's *The Waste Land*, to reproduce prophetic or godly judgment on Western immorality. Conscious of the evil of his work besides strategy war-planners against Iraqi insurgents, Elster may understand the thunder as a resisting voice against the "fantasists in the Pentagon" who are implicated in the killing of Iraqi children in the war (23).

The terror perceived in the desert is identified in scenes of catastrophes, a feature that can be paralleled with the nature of terrorist acts. This sort of terror is identified in "destruction in all its varied manifestations—plain murder and assassination, nuclear explosion, toxic pollution, etc" (Aaron 69). These images of destruction are recognized in the disappearance of Jessie and the presence of the Impact Area, the place of nuclear testing. One can presume that Jessie's loss has nothing to do with assassination and pure physical terror. But this assumption can be soon destabilized especially with the image of the knife found "in

a deep ravine not far from an expanse of land called the Impact Area" (114). It is impressive that the knife is visualized in the beginning of the novel while the assassination of the woman in the film *Psycho*. Though the function of the knife found in the desert is not directly referred to assassination, it remains highly possible to serve killing while Elster's plot is paralleled to the film *Psycho*. To "confirm" this image as a scene of assassination, the murdered woman in the "hyperreality" of the film is also looked for thoroughly (Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation* 5).

Critics have built different perceptions on the mysterious disappearance of Jessie. Faeze Yegane, in his study on *Point Omega* from a Baudrillardian perspective, argues that the characters' inability to assert the exact application of the knife is a feature of "hyperreality" (173). Others hold that *Point Omega* encompasses "postmodern ontological indeterminacy" since "the reader is not given evidence to uncover what has happened to Jessie or what has caused her disappearance, only strongly suggestive clues and forking paths" (Paul Eve 6). Differently from these arguments that relate to postmodern conditions, I argue the impossibility to figure out the reality of Jessie's disappearance as part of terror itself. The idea is that the less clearly we see terror in the desert, the more it reverberates potently. Therefore, the unclear evidence of the Impact Area is also part of terror. This reinforces that DeLillo seems to perceive terror as a pervasive phenomenon in the cultural geology of the Orient itself.

Kumar Pavan, in his study on Orientalism(s) after 9/11, identifies two sorts of terrorisms in neo-Orientalism: "old" terrorism and "new" terrorism. He says that old terrorism is featured by a "violent but unlawful form of political resistance;" new terrorism is a referent to an unconventional, non-political and even irrational violence directed to Western civilians (233). The desert terror enters in the latter category of terrorism, especially as it is predominated by irrational violence. Jeff Goodwin argues that the "irrationality" of violence

is motivated by the terrorists' perception that civilian populations in the west are "complicit" with their state policies against them (2034). This might explain that the possible "terrorist" act has targeted Jessie because her father is conservative to the values of the U.S. political implications against Iraq. This act of resistance is reinforced by the previously cited voice of nature: "A hundred childhood," which might echo the assassinated children in the course of War on Iraq.

The power of terror attains its climax in the desert because it is comprehended in its archetypal sense, being ahistorical, eternal, and reaching the highest point of consciousness. One can link here the depth of terror articulated in the desert to the invisible "omega point," especially as Elster grieves over his daughter's disappearance: "the omega point has narrowed, here and now, to the point of a knife as it enters a body" (124). Comparing the omega point to a knife is noteworthy here. The power of the desert terror resonates potently for Elster that he perceives the omega point as a knife, a symbol that would be perhaps the ultimate symbol of terror in everyday life. One has to underscore the theoretical meaning informing the omega point in its original concept by Pierre Teilhard de Chardin so as to perceive the degree to which Elster is internally terrorized.

For Teilhard, Man's consciousness is a crucial element in the evolution process of all matter in the universe (21). Reflective consciousness, individual or collective, constitutes what he calls "zones of psychic spontaneity" (203), which constitutes the "noosphere," a term from the Greek "nous," meaning mind or intellect (14). The noosphere continues the evolutionary processes; it is what Elster refers to when he says, "We're the mind and heart matter has become" (64). In Elster's account, "Consciousness accumulates. It begins to reflect upon itself" (91). For him, "human thought is alive, it circulates" (65). It is "the sphere of collective human thought, this is approaching the final term, the last flare" (65). In Teilhard's theory, also, things become more and more complex, drawn on to their ultimate end in the

"Omega Point" (57). The latter is the state of maximal consciousness and complexity to which the universe develops. The "Omega Point" is Teilhard's name for this last flare, a final transformation beyond the human as we now know it; in Elster's terms, "a leap out of our biology" (57; 66).

After exploring Teilhard's theory of evolution, it now fits to reflect on Elster's perception of the omega point as "the point of a knife as it enters a body" (124). The Omega point may be millions of years away, as Elster declares before Jessie disappears: "we're the last billionth of a second in the evolution of matter" (64). However, after her disappearance in the desert, terror is transcended outside our reach, in the maximal complexity of universal consciousness itself. Elster's perception of the meaning of the whole universe turns to a desperate ending. Finley confirms: "all the man's grand themes funneled down to local grief, one body, out there somewhere, or not" (124). Scott Dill, on this regard, emphasizes that the omega point in its negative sense, as perceived by Elster, is DeLillo's conception of contemporary world culture. For him, "what Jim here calls 'funneling down' is what DeLillo's novels have been doing since *Underworld*—paring down the narrative structure of the contemporary novel to the most basic forms of cultural meaning" (92).

DeLillo's description of the suspended death in the crime scene of Leigh, "where lurid death was being scratched out in microseconds," is also informed by Teilhard's point omega, which translates as the end of evolution itself (113). This image of a "deathless death of eternity," to borrow from Dill, is what epitomizes Absolute terror manifesting in a Western society (86). DeLillo calls this omega point as a "hellish death" when he describes the slow death of Leigh: "A moment lost at normal speed, four rings spinning slowly over the fallen figure of Janet Leigh, a stray poem above the hellish death" (15). The ennui expressed in the omega point reflects more particularly Elster's view of terror embedded in today's global culture. The critic Peter Boxal notes that DeLillo's "fascination with life at the end"

incorporates "the endedness which marks the very conception of a globalized world" (4). This view is convincing because Teilhard's theory of evolution is phenomenological, i.e. universal, refusing any division between the Orientalist binary logic of East and West. *Point Omega* is therefore built on the ontological view of terror that reaches global destruction, though it does not plainly state it in the story. The theory of the end in *Point Omega* resides in the idea that death is always near but never resolved. For this reason, DeLillo refuses to provide what its title supposedly assures, the resolution one expects in an ending. The reader is left with incomprehensible issues regarding both plot and theme. It is not even evident whether Jessie's murder has actually happened.

III.   6. The West, Too, as a Source of Terror

Terror has been argued as a concept typically located in the cultural geology of the desert. However, for DeLillo, the territory of the Other is not the only space of terror. One of the observations that should not be overlooked up to now is DeLillo's association of the culture of the Self with terror. As proceeded with his earlier novels, DeLillo represents postmodern American society as immersed with the reality of images and movies. For DeLillo, the terror haunting postmodern Western consciousness is embodied in its very "simulation" of movies and T.V reality (Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation* 5). This fact is visualized in the beginning of the novel when the unanimous character stands for continuous hours watching the film *Psycho* in slow motion. The man barely notices the passage of time and the destruction of his subject. His fascination with the slowed crime scene and with "what is happening in the smallest registers of motion" is what claims him to live in a meaningless culture approaching the end of its history (7). In describing the exhibited movie, DeLillo states: "the original movie had been slowed to a running time of twenty-four hours. What he was watching seemed pure film, pure time. The broad horror of the old gothic movie was subsumed in time. How long would he have to stand here, how many weeks or months, before

the film's time scheme absorbed his own, or this already begun to happen?" (7-8). This passage proves that DeLillo understands media as source of terror and relatively thinks that contemporary Western culture is infiltrated with death and disaster. The disembodiment of Western identity is perhaps clearly shown through setting a unanimous character who becomes eventually exhausted: "the fatigue he felt was on his legs, hours and hours standing, the weight of the body standing" (15). This depiction maintains the modern West losing its sense of selfhood and coming-up into decay. The described fatigue of the man standing perhaps embodies the exhaustion of the whole Western society obsessed with T.V. reality and visual culture. In this sense, DeLillo believes, as said from the voice of Ester, that Western identity "want(s) to be the dead matter," which perishes with the superficial rush of modern time (64). This concept of domestic terror is accurately described by Elster, as he explains to Jessie:

> It's all embedded, the hours and minutes, words and numbers everywhere, he said, train stations, bus routes, taxi meters, surveillance cameras. It's all about time, dimwit time, inferior time, people checking watches and other devices, other reminders. This is time draining out of our lives. Cities were built to measure time, to remove time from nature. There's an endless counting down, he said. When you strip away all the surfaces, when you see into it, what's left is terror. (56-57)

After identifying the terrors situated in the West, it is relevant to stop and ponder on both terrors: American domestic terror, which Elster denounces through his displacement, and Oriental terror, which manifests in the menacing identity of the desert. In the novel, Western terror is mediated with media, the element that permits the West not to confront terror directly. While physical murder may be detected in the absurd desert, it is exhibited for continuous hours on the screen in the case of the global consumerist West. The famous crime

scene of Hitchcock's *Psycho* that the man is fascinated to watch attentively in the beginning of the novel indicates that Western culture is mesmerized to experience mental violence. This means that the territory of contemporary Western civilization is also a space of terror that one's identity is contingently and discursively constructed in it. Jessie, in her indifference to world phenomena, best illustrates this fact. She, who was sent by her mother after she has gotten to know a man in New York, is uninterested in cultural production as her individualistic identity is unconsciously immersed in the terror of media.

In contrast to the repressed violence of the West, which Zizek conceives as "ideological," the violence of the external enemy is represented as explicit and physical (*Violence* 10). The terror in the desert is represented as a fundamentalist terrorist agent, which displays much like what Paul Berman uses to define Islamism as "*jahili* barbarism" (103). The terror expressed in the unexpected disappearance of Jessie is far from abstract mental terror. It proves that the underlying premise of the politics of the desert does not seek to give choice to its enemy, but passes directly to a "revolutionary Event" (Zizek, *Welcome to the Desert of the Real* 8). Although there is no reference to Islamic fundamentalism in the story, the terror manifested in the desert is a sudden, unknown, and pragmatic, like the bombarding of the West performed by fundamentalist Muslim terrorists in America and in Paris recently. The sudden affirmative act of the disappearance of Jessie holds in itself the extent to which Oriental terror is unethical and radical. Elster and Finley could not identify the source of the terror in the desert. It is in this radical invisibility that makes desert terror more powerful and omnipresent. It is significant, yet, to think of the reason for which desert terror appears more violent. Is it because the East is fascinated with terror? Or, is it the West which lacks a perception of real Terror?

While reflecting on these questions, one is tempted to investigate on the meaning of the "Real" when it comes to Western perception. This investigation actually presents an

elementary feature in conceiving the difference between today's West, determined by the reality of TV and movies, and the Third World, determined by its closeness to nature. The theories of Slavoj Zizek, which he absorbs from Lacan, regarding "the Real" in its relation to 9/11 terrorist attacks would fit to feed the ensuing discussion.

III.   7. "Welcome to the Desert of the Real" Terror

The title presented above is inspired from Slavoj Zizek's work *Welcome to the Desert of the Real* (2002)[45], in which he develops Alain Badious's claim that contemporary Western culture is characterized by "la passion du réel"—"the passion for the Real" (5). Zizek's understanding of the Real is truly Lacanian, belonging to the triad of the Imaginary and the Symbolic. In psychoanalytic theory, there is a sharp distinction between what Lacan terms "the Real" and "reality." For Lacan, as for Zizek, the Real is the authentic truth that lays beyond our sensory perception and material order in everyday reality i.e. it takes part of the order of the metaphysical and the sublime (Zizek, *Event* 122). As defined by Heyerson, it is

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[45] The title of Zizek's book, *Welcome to the Desert of the Real*, comes from an expression said by the character Morpheus in the 1999 film *The Matrix*. Both Zizek's title and the quote delivered in *The Matrix* are inspired from Jean Baudrillard's *Simulacra and Simulation*. Part of the phrase is found in the following excerpt:

> If once we were able to view the Borges fable in which the cartographers of the Empire draw up a map so detailed that it ends up covering the territory exactly…this fable has now come full circle for us, and possesses nothing but the discrete charm of second-order simulacrum….It is the real, and not the map, whose vestiges persist here and there in the deserts that are no longer those of the Empire, but ours. The desert of the real itself. (5)

"an ontological absolute, a true thing-in-itself" (79). In other words, it can be said that the Real is very similar to Hegel's Infinite or Absolute and to what Plato has termed Idea(l) or Archetype, a thing which explains why Lacan states that "gods belong to the Real" (qtd. in Zizek 122). Typically, yet, the Real is simply opposed to the realm of the image, beyond the other realms of the Symbolic and the Imaginary (Lacan, *Ecrit* 85). Unlike the Symbolic order, which is understood in relation to oppositions between presence and absence, "there is no absence in the Real" (*Seminar* 313). As Lacan puts it, the Real "is always in its place: it carries it glued to its heel, ignorant of what might exile it from there" (*Ecrit* 25).

What remains is "reality," which refers to everyday life mediated with social and linguistic signs i.e. the Symbolic order. The latter lacks the sense of wholeness because it consists of translations, or so to speak, of representations of the metaphysicality of the Real which, for Lacan, is difficult to confront. Because we are subjects only in the symbolic order, we can only experience the Real as ruptures and glitches in that order.

For postmodernists, the world simulated by computers and T.V. is as fake as what lies concretely behind the screen (Baudrillard, *Simulacra* 78; Zizek, *Welcome* 12). Because the globalized, digitized West is obsessed with screen culture, including T.V., movies, and video games, it remains overwhelmed only with representations of the Real, and hence, lacks the authentic meaning of things. In DeLillo's terms, "the speed of the Internet summons us all to live permanently in the future, in the utopian glow of cyber-capital" (33). In fact, technology produces a feeling of living in "an artificially constructed universe," which creates an "irresistible urge to 'return to the Real', and regain firm ground in some 'real reality'" (Zizek, *Welcome to the Desert of the Real* 10).

The Lacanian Real results in anxiety and trauma because it is unmediated and no symbolic entity represents it in its pure essence. The Real is thus "the essential object which is not an object any longer, but this something faced with which all words cease and all

categories fail, the object of anxiety par excellence" (*Seminar* 164). For Lacan, it is the missed encounter with the Real which presents itself in the form of trauma (*Seminar* 11).Therefore, a possible way to confront the Real is through witnessing terror. In Zizek's terms, "the Real in its extreme violence (i)s the price to be paid for peeling the deceptive layers of reality" (6). This might happen when one witnesses nature suddenly breaking its patterns, producing a catastrophic tsunami or, when a terrorist holds a gun in front of one's head. Zizek exemplifies the postmodern passion for the "effect of the Real" with the phenomenon of "cutters," individuals, generally women, who desire cutting themselves with razors and hurt themselves (10). For Zizek, this phenomenon represents a desperate strategy to return to the Real of the physical body (10). This exactly resembles the famous act of smacking oneself, or someone else, in order to make sure he/ she is perfectly conscious. In this sense, Zizek understands that cutting is an attempt to regain a hold on reality and "ground the ego firmly in bodily reality, against the unbearable anxiety of perceiving oneself as nonexistent" (10).

Before applying this ontological theory of the Real on the novel, it remains to link it to the Orientalist binary logic of East *vs*. West, or Occident *vs*. Orient in order to theorize DeLillo's neo-Orientalist claim in the novel. As Orientalists believe, and as we all know, the West, which is overwhelmed with T.V. and visual reality, perceives the Other as most close to nature. It is perceived inferior because it is seen medieval, lacking what America has achieved in technology. Viewing this supposedly oppositional frame from the glass of the Lacanian Real, it proves that the fundamental difference between the two opposites lies in the experience of reality. Because the West has attained "the highest gloss of modernity," it becomes more approached to artificial reality, while the East, though decadent, ignoring the domain of high technology, and presumably anti-capitalist, affirms its existence as most

authentic because it perceives the effects of the Real in nature (Randall 25). Perhaps, this explains why Orientalists sometimes view the East as wise.

Nietzsche's peace with Islam is most exemplary when understood in this lens. In his letter directed to a friend, Koselitz, in 1881, Nietzsche says "Ask my old comrade Gegsdorff whether he'd like to go with me to Tunisia for one or two years … I want to live for a while amongst Muslims, in the places moreover where their faith is at its most devout; this way my eye and judgment for all things European will be sharpened" (qtd. in Almond 8). It can be understood that Nietzsche's fascination with North Africa is based on his desire to experience the most conservative environment Islam has to offer. It is in the radical environment that Nietzsche wishes to perceive the reality of his home culture. Almond argues that Nietzsche's favorable disposition toward Islam is rooted in "the fact that it is less 'modern'" (9). It is in this perspective of the Orient as a radical entity that the Western subject endeavors to experience the Real sense of things among the territories of the Other. Nietzsche seems to build an oppositional stance against Europe so that "its overall rupture in an alien context might facilitate a radically new knowledge" (Almond 9).

In order to elaborate more on this, it is noteworthy that Nietzsche understands North African non-modernity not only in its lack of technological advancement; yet, he sees it as the category of the Real itself, because it transgresses the order of the Symbolic by experiencing real terror in everyday life. As Almond explains,

> The fact that Islam traditionally occupied the peculiar place of historical opposition to both European Christianity *and* modernity means that Nietzsche's positive remarks concerning Islam usually fall into four related categories: Islam's 'unenlightened' condition vis-à-vis women and social equality, its perceived 'manliness,' its non-judgementalism and its affirmative character. (Almond 10)

Hence, the theory that the above discussion has arrived at conceives the Western passion for the Real as a passion for encountering the space of the Other. This logic explains why the (post)modern Self returns to the Orient and Islam—because it represents a territory of the Real. The West can perceive the world and the real state of its being through displacing into the space of the Other—the desert. It is as if the Other is a kind of mirror in which the immoral, "unreal" West might finally glimpse the true condition of its unreality.

DeLillo underlines that reality and meaning are vanished in contemporary Western culture overwhelmed by computers and T.V., a culture that has become in a way "unreal." In the novel, all characters are archetypal examples of this postmodern Western character obsessively connected with the reality of camera and movies. DeLillo thinks that existence in New York "does'not make sense" because of the "too many goddamn echoes" of reality extracted from news, T.V., cell phones and crowded streets (26).

For Finley, the filmmaker who wants to record the reality of War on Iraq, images and movies are the authentic reality that should be trusted by the Americans. For him, a one-take film involving "just a man and a wall" would be an ideal accomplishment that deserves to pursuit Elster in a far place (49). The movie, as such, recording Elster's experience for two years in the Pentagon, would be the desert in itself, celebrating and demonstrating the true horror of the enclosed West from the Outside World. The Pentagon becomes an embodiment of the desert of the Real in its true sense, the sense of an absolute emptiness from real reality i.e. from the real terror that exists in Iraq. In this sense, it is relevant to grasp Jack Shaheen's word "reel" in his documentary "Reel Bad Arabs" which addresses the way Hollywood movies misrepresent the Arab world, as ironic. "Reel bad Arabs" can be read as "Real bad Arabs," since T.V. images and movies as made by filmmakers like Fineley are perceived as the reality in itself.

New York is a postindustrial society too intrinsically connected to technologically mediated spaces. As DeLillo emphasizes throughout the book, movies are the ideal sources of reality. In recounting the unnamed man's experience of watching the slow film *Psycho*, Finley says, "it felt real, the pace was paradoxically real, bodies moving musically, barely moving, twelve-tone, things barely happening, cause and effect so drastically drawn apart that it seemed real to him, the way all things in the physical world that we don't understand are said to be real" (18). Although the movie is absorbed from real lived reality, it is considered "Real" in the movie for the man. This passage demonstrates that the man physically feels and experiences the events as if he were in the movie. Yet, the slowest the movie is, the more real it becomes: "the original movie was fiction. This was real" (17).

Most important to our concern is the terror encountered through these movies. The man who watches the slow movie is actually thrilled by the shower scene, in which Janet Leigh, the woman in the film, experiences "a hellish death" (15). The Lacanian Real, as a form of traumatism and anxiety, is applicable in the case of the shower scene. The man's watching of the slowed down crime scene, which was a brief scene in the original movie, can be interpreted as a temptation to recognize the scene outside language and symbolization. Lacan's definition of the Real as "the essential object which isn't an object any longer" is convincingly suitable in the context of the character's meditation of the prolonged scene in "broken motion, without suspense or dread or urgent pulsing screech-owl sound" (*Seminar* 164; 15). The desire to eliminate motion, sound, and feelings from the crime scene can be understood as a desire to encounter Lacan's "essential object which isn't an object any longer" (*Seminar* 164). It has been maintained previously in the analysis, following Teilhard's theory of the End, that the point of destruction and Absolute terror dramatized in the novel is the omega point itself, the point of the end of evolution, the image of "endedness" prolonged.

The Real is thus no longer simply situated in the permanent brutal death of Leigh in the prolonged scene, but is also located in the omega point.

It is possible to argue, then, that the character's meditation of the crime scene absolutely illustrates the Western ambition to return to the Real. It reflects the Western desire to confront the borders of the Real order that, according to theory, involves extreme violence. This passion for the Real is projected in the making of these "hyperreal" spaces, spaces of terror: "still others look at salvaged videotapes of caged men being subjected to severe physical pain" (42). It is in the process of this aim—of watching terror—that the characters are willing to define their existence in true reality. The man's strong passion for watching the crime scene in slow motion for long hours, as opposed to everyday reality, would directly suggest that he is thrilled to transgress the "unreality" of his culture. The "passion for the Real" is epitomized in the character compelled to experience the crime scene as a nightmarish apparition, as he watches it again and again.

The man watching *24 Hour Psycho* wants "complete emersion" with the terror of the film. He wants "to bath in the tempo, in the near static rhythm of the image… He want(s) the film to move even more slowly, requiring deeper involvement of eye and mind, always that, the thing he sees tunneling into the blood, into dense sensation, sharing consciousness with him" (146). In psychoanalytic terms, the character's desire to watch the repeated scene of extreme terror is a demonstration of his ultimate perverse fantasy for the Real. The man reaches the ultimate passion for the Real and, yet, he "traverses the fantasy" of the passion for the Real (Lacan, *The Four Fundamental Concepts* 273). In Lacanian terms, the uncanny satisfaction he gets from the extreme terror of the movie is "jouissance" at its purest (*The Seminar* 183). The man, in this sense, approaches the real sense of terror, at a point when the movie becomes embedded in time: "What he was watching seemed pure film, pure time" (7). That is, what the man, in his perception, watches is pure terror, the Real, so to speak.

Nevertheless, the West is consciously aware of its far distance from outside reality. It is conscious of a "life-beyond, a world beyond," "the thing that's not the movie," as Elster claims (21). It is significant to go a step backward at this level and evoke Zizek's description of the West during the terrorist attacks. In the conference held on the 25th of November 2015—that is, twelve days after the Paris attacks and subsequent to the question of Syrian refugees to Europe—Zizek described the Paris attacks targeting cafeterias, restaurants, and rock concerts as a kind of violent shaking of the Western civilization that is merged with unreality ("Europe is Kaput"). He refers to philosopher Peter Sloterdijk's vision that the West is aware of its existence in an isolated cupola, in which it sees the outside but don't see the wall. The idea is that the West knows about the horrors going on out there in the Third World, but they see another reality through T.V. screens. Syrian refugees, who sympathized with Paris, as Zizek states in the conference, replied that the horror Paris lived for one night and which the West perceived as Real actually takes part of the Third World's everyday life. If the separation between the outside, happening in the Other space, and the inside, happening in the West is declared transparent by Zizek, it is actually blind for DeLillo. This is metaphorically pronounced in Finley's gray wall, the background of his films: "I have the wall, I know the wall, it's in a loft in Brookly, big messy industrial loft. I have access pretty much any time day or night. Wall is mostly pale gray, some cracks, some strains, but these are not distractions, they're not self-conscious design elements. The wall is right, I think about it, dream about it, I open my eyes and see it, I close my eyes it's there" (34). Finely explains that the blindness of the wall is what defines his society isolation from the Real which remains outside America.

Elster, though a transcendentalist, realizes that military war is abstract, like sending an army into a place on a map is abstract. In constituting a fake reality of war on Iraq, the Pentagon tries to create "new realities overnight, careful sets of words that resemble

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advertising slogans in memorability and repeatedly" (34). Here, Elster plainly declares how the reality of war on Iraq is rendered artificial and loses its essence through T.V. screens and media. Fictionalizing War also lies in falsehood, as Elster confesses, "lying is necessary. The state has to lie. There is no lie in a war or in preparation for war that can't be defended" (34).

Elster contributes in theorizing war and hence contributes in building Zizek's cupola to constitute unreality. His mission is to "give them (strategy planners) words and meanings" and present new ways of thinking and perceiving the war. Far from its sense of violence, war became conceptualized in "haiku," a war in three lines linked to transient things (37). In this way, Elster embellishes the real terror of war and contributes in creating a faked reality. He gives the American leaders this poetic image and realizes that war is something abstract for the military. It is "acronyms, projections, contingencies, methodologies" (33).

Nonetheless, Elster wants to encounter the territory of the Other in order to view himself and the Western world authentically. His desire to return to the Real is demonstrated in his clear assertion to Finley that America needs an actual war. He insists that "a great power has to act" (38). This "great power" is what perhaps would awaken America from its dream-like culture (38). One is tempted to claim that the novel's neo-Orientalist vision resides in this very idea of the "passion for the Real." The American tendency to encounter the Real in the desert is imperialist. For Elster, the world of the Real would be this war placed in that space of the Other. Elster's declaration of War on Terror is a conscious desire to create an empire that "need(s) to retake the future," which suggests that his ultimate ambition of the Pentagon's spokesmen is to dominate the world and mark the West as its superpower (38). Reflecting on the theoretical background of War on Terror articulated in the novel proves postmodernism as its systematic approach, facilitating the propaganda of a necessary New World Order. This way of reading Elster as a conservative thinker, who proves to be what Almond calls a "postmodern sophist," and who is overtly mesmerized with the reality of his

home culture, and who primarily has not anything to say against them, is found in his eventual experience of the desert (156).

Elster, Finley, and Jessie, who are extremely attached to the dream-like reality of New York, best represent the Western irresistible urge to "return to the Real." Michiko Kakutani, in his description of these three characters in *The New York Times*, well illustrates their situation: "All these central characters in the novel…are alienated, oddly detached people. They are individuals dwelling in a limbo state, searching for something that might give order or meaning to their lives or simply shell-shocked by the randomness and menace of modern life" ("Make War"). In the desert, Elster confronts the real sense of things. The more he meditates in landscape, the more he sees reality: "the less there was to see, the harder he looked, the more he saw" (11). Far from being a technological universe, the desert is "nothing but distances, not vistas or sweeping sightlines but only distances" (22). All the elements of the desert are perceived continuous and harmoniously coherent because they represent a closer effect of the Real. Though being part of the Symbolic order, the desert in its landscape, heat, silence, time, and eternity reflects the "layers of reality" that take part of the same eternal entity—the Real.

In the desert, Finley no longer uses the cell phone and "almost never touche(s) (his) laptop" (82). For him, these electronic devices are meaningless because they are in a place "overwhelmed by landscape" (82). Jessie's intention to read science fiction also becomes insignificant for her because it does not match with the reality she faces in the desert. Experiencing the elements of nature, for them, would be a way to return to the Real of their body. In the novel, DeLillo explains why Elster retreats to the desert: "The sun was burning down. This is what he wanted, to feel the *deep heat beating into his body*, *feel the body itself*, *reclaim the body from what he called the nausea of News and Traffic*" (22 emphasis mine). Feeling the sun burn would not be paralleled to a normal bronzage, which guarantees the

inclusion of Elster' subject in the Symbolic order. Rather, the case of Elster is the opposite, namely the assertion of reality itself. Far from being suicidal, far from indicating a desire for self-annihilation, the desert would be, for him, a way to gain a kind of normality, "to ground the ego firmly in bodily reality," as Zizek states (Welcome to the Desert of the Real 10). Elster's case represents the case of the postmodern American society at large, being distant from the true sense of reality.

The house sheltering Elster and the other characters in the desert is perceived as also Real because it is not mediated with the technologies of the modern West (22). Underfurnished, empty, situated in "nothing but distances," the house helps the characters approach a more authentic reality. In his description of the house, Finley states that it "was a sad hybrid. There was a corrugated metal roof above a clapboard exterior with an unfinished stonework path out front and a tacked-on deck jutting from one side. This is where we sat through his hushed hour, a torchlit ski, the closeness of hills barely visible at high white noon" (23). In this passage, it is understood that the house is pre-modern and is far from what America fantasizes about. Being old, sad, and desolate, the house make the characters feel being in a real order.

Therefore, for the characters, the desert represents a purer and a more honest way to understand oneself and one's culture. What they find in the far distances of the desert and its slow time is an affirmation of their existence in the Real. In other words, this informs Elster that the East is not just geographically outside America, but also chronologically. As Almond states, it is an idea, "one which belongs outside history, hovering immutably in an almost Platonic way" (11). However, the fact that Elster's opposition to Western modernity and to the abstract war he conceptualized in the Pentagon led him to react positively to the desert, a landscape attributed to the Middle East. This leaves us with an interesting question: Do we interpret this as an anti-colonialist gesture against American and Eurocentric politics? The

answer to this question proves quickly since what Elster encounters is not just the Real in its positive sense, but the Real Terror.

The old cultivated assumption that the Orient as a fantastic place of illusion and enchantment, as will be demonstrated, lends a problem for Elster, as it will prove to be the Real Terror. His resistance to be stupefied by the complexities of "News and Traffic" finally confirms that the material reality he experienced in New York is a virtual one and the true terror resides in the Eastern cultural as well as natural landscape (23). The harshness of the violence propagated through the disappearance of Jessie is perceived as a sign of authenticity for Elster who conceived an abstract war. The Real terror is expressed in the omega point that Elster associates to a knife entering his body. This demonstrates that the Western passion for the Real, as illustrated through the man's watching of the crime scene, is actually fake when compared to the Terror found in the desert. The popularization of war on Iraq in the West, disseminated through "careful sets of words that resemble advertising slogans in memorability and repeatability" has proved to remain within the realm of unreality simulated by the screens. In an essay entitled "Distance," Raymond Williams offers a critique of British Television's coverage. The reporting, he claims, has had a dangerously sanitized abstractness, because of the "culture of distance" (49). Television, which comes from the Greek "afar," is professionally understood, managed and interpreted in a such a way as to distance the reality of war from the view (36-38). The same holds in the discourse of *Point Omega*. In a review of the novel, a critic ultimately describes Elster as "a pompous intellectual who shamelessly justifies sending thousands of young soldiers off to die in an unnecessary war with abstract, philosophical arguments, but who suddenly comes to know the meaning of death and loss firsthand when his beloved daughter abruptly disappears" (Kakutani).

Finley, at some point, says that he bites "the skin off the edge of his thumbnail, always the right thumb" in order to know he exists in reality (47). However, the pain of the thumbnail

never attains the gravity of desert terror. What is interesting to mention, at this point, is that the pain generated from the West, through screens and T.V., does not sound powerful in the novel. The pain resulting from the severe confrontation of the hellish death of Janet Leigh in the movie is never articulated by DeLillo. The only instance in which pain is expressed is by Elster when he encounters desert terror. Is this not a further proof of how DeLillo draws the difference between "Us" and "Them"? Doesn't this difference mean that the real terror happens "there," not here (in the West)? This means that the concept of terror is actually "Orientalized," exclusively conceptualized as accompanied by an incident or a "theatrical spectacle" in the East (Zizek, *Welcome to the Desert of the Real* 9). DeLillo's surprising sentimental defense and his indictment of global terrorism and his canny interpretation of the U.S. role in global terrorism is based on this sense of terror accompanied by fatalism. Elster's final retreat from the desert cannot be apprehended outside his severe ambition to contribute into the War on Terror.

In confronting desert terror, Elster reminds of Zizek's joke of "bakku-shan," a Japanese expression that means "a girl who looks as though she might be pretty when seen from behind, but isn't when seen from the front" (*Event* 122). One of the lessons that the novel presents about the Other, and which bears imperialist attitudes, is rooted in the proper sense of the Real: though it seems authentic and utopian, it nevertheless bears a destructive aspect. In experiencing Terror in the desert, Elster experience otherness itself, i.e. not only the idealized Other but the tragic Other that was kept out of sight.

III.   8. Concluding Thoughts

Two judgments regarding DeLillo's position in *Point Omega* will be here finally summarized as a conclusion. Said's description of Orientalist theory as a "political vision of reality whose structure promotes difference" fits to be read in accordance with DeLillo's

vision of reality in the novel (*Orientalism* 43). Relying on this theoretical framework used throughout the chapter, one may state two interrelated estimations.

First, DeLillo's definition of the American Self has a rhetoric, a set of hegemonic assertions that contributes in the ideological construction of Western superiority and Eastern backwardness. Among these assertions is his particular conception of reality as encountered by the postmodern individual. One of DeLillo's significant depictions of American lifestyle is that, though American culture is characterized by the loss of selfhood and the preference for the virtual at the expense of the real (or more plainly, an endless preoccupation with images and T.V. reality on the part of the Western subject), it is nevertheless conceived as a superior cultural paradigm when put besides the despotism and the barbarism portrayed in the desert. As DeLillo identifies the difference between Western domestic terror and Eastern Terror, he does not leave a third space to draw a critical judgment on both of these terrors. Despite the fact that both places (the familiar West and the unfamiliar East) present sources of terror, Elster's final judgment is a severe critique of the evil coming from an alien culture. It is possible therefore to describe DeLillo's conception of domestic terror as sentimental, being conceived as less substantial than an alien terror. In portraying the terror of the desert, manifested in its ambiguity, the figure of the knife, the presence of a nuclear zone, and the loss of Jessie, the novel ultimately manages to reinforce the very neo-Orientalist presupposition it appears to subvert. Elster's position, as a defense intellectual and author of a controversial scholarly article on the word "rendition"—a word that has become a euphemism of war on terror—becomes clear at the end of the novel, as he becomes convinced of the evil of the desert. DeLillo's very conscious delight to lessen his critique of modernity in favor of the terror of the Other is important to underline as a plain war on terror discourse. At the end of the novel, after depicting the terror of a distant culture, DeLillo reorients us to the "usual terror" that Elster previously sought to escape: "He returns his attention to the screen, where

everything is so intensely what it is. He watches what is happening and wants it to happen more slowly" (147). This means that New York remains a place of security and home in the character's mind. It is clear that DeLillo, given his dismantling of postmodern liberal culture, finds a moral resource to accomplish such a "subjective" judgment. Therefore, one can detect in *Point Omega*, as a post-9/11 terrorist novel, a dynamic process of orientalizing the essence of terror. Although a dangerous fear is centered in the Self, a phobia is being projected mostly on the part of the outsider, which for theoreticians, is a less dangerous terror in comparison to the ideological terror of the Self (Zizek "What Does it mean to be a Great Thinker Today?"). Isn't this a fictional articulation of Bush's subjective formula "You are with us or you are with the terrorist"? In this respect, where does DeLillo's sense of judgment reside if he is not implicating War on Terror?

A second judgment that can be stated here is related to DeLillo's rhetorics of the space of the desert. DeLillo's depiction of the desert, as both a geographical and a cultural entity, plays a central role in the Orientalist imaging of otherness. The novel's construction of an aggressive and threatening marginalized place has been finally proved to construct the Oriental Other in physiological, cultural, and political terms. One feature of DeLillo's Orientalism is his conception of the existential meaning of the desert, both its spatiality and temporality, which he ultimately reduces to an act of terror. All of these categories of space and time have functioned as political instruments that carry an Orientalist insight towards the East as inherently barbaric. As a result, what we comprehend in DeLillo's treatment of the desert is an account of a cold war between the American Self and the Oriental Other, as he declares through the voice of Elster: "they become paralyzed by the systems at their disposals. Their war is abstract" (35). Therefore, DeLillo's conception of the unknown desert modeled in his narrative can be claimed to carry imperialist attitudes towards desert cultures. As one scholar states it in his essay "The Grammar of Terrorism" (2006), "the recognition of the

Enemy is a political (even '*ultrapolitical*' to borrow a term coined by Jacques Rancier) act by definition, which does not seem to leave much room for imagery or public narratives" (Makarychev 61). Therefore, the very recognition of the enmity of the desert declared in DeLillo's narrative can be also claimed to carry imperialist echoes.

The relationship between American postmodernity and the far desert in the novel corresponds to Said's concept of the Self and the Other: the familiar (America, the West, "us") and the strange (desert cultures, the East, "them"). What is interesting about DeLillo' story is its tendency to preserve this Orientalist binary logic by keeping the image of the desert far and alien. DeLillo's exclusive concern with surface (i.e. with landscape) demonstrates his aim not to understand the Other from within, but to build an image, a stereotype of the Other as inherently a terrorist. His conceiving of the idea of the desert, as shown in the above analysis, is mainly based on an abstract, metaphysical scope, because the story does not revolve around actual events taking place in the desert nor does it involve characters who originally take part of its culture. Therefore, the image of the Other that one can deduce from DeLillo's narrative of the desert remains not clear, shapeless, but clearly reported as the real terror. In this way, DeLillo succeeds to build an ontological meaning of Otherness itself.

General Conclusion

Studying the representation of the Islamic Other in Western discourse has involved an examination of the West. To consider the state of the Islamic Middle Eastern world in today's cultural and political conditions has required considering the anxieties, fragmentations, and the desires of the gazer, not the gazed upon. This does not mean that the Other is a "blank page" upon which Orientalists project whatever image of themselves. However, almost every Orientalist discourse, as exemplified by the three texts, use the Orientalist dualism of the moderate *vs*. the fanatic, the modern *vs*. the archaic, the civilized *vs*. the uncivilized, the lover of the West *vs*. the hater. Apart from this recurrent Orientalist stereotyping, the true image of a Muslim in today's society is perhaps a mixture of both of these oppositions: someone who watches Hollywood movies, but also hates the dominance of foreign economy over his country, someone who drinks Coca Cola and reads Western novels, but also despises the US foreign policies in the Middle East. The actual image of such a Muslim is possible to represent through a mixture of the good and the bad.

What the representation of the Islamic Other might be able to show, after this study has been conducted, concerns the future. It is interesting to distinguish the extent to which Islam has involved in Western discourse about the future. While in the medieval period, Islam has always been a reference to locate Europe in terms of time, the West at present is "the now," to which Muslim countries have to come up to date. This means that Islam is always combined to the future of the West. For example, nothing has provoked a compromise about the future of Europe and the United States than the possible citizenship of millions of Muslim refugees coming from Syria, Iraq, and Afghanistan. This example shows that Islam belongs to the future of the West in form of such Muslim refugees who, by 2115, will have been living in the West for a century.

It is, of course, never possible to be sure that this study has attained the truth. One can only perceive part of the truth which has promulgated from theoretical views, fiction, and narrative meditation. Orientalist representations of the Arab Islamic world in today's American literature can be hardly contained within the limits of this study. Therefore, I have focused on three selected contemporary American novels and attempted to show how the Oriental Other has become a central preoccupation in the last two decades. *Plowing the Dark*, *Terrorist*, and *Point Omega* have been used to explore the dialectics of East and West, Islam and Western modernity, from an Orientalist perspective. The discussion concerning these dialectics has proved to be unstable and complex, especially after words such as "postmodern," "globalization," "capitalism," and "secularism" have intervened. I have tried to situate Orientalism within the context of these categories of modernity in order to highlight their coherence in relation to contemporary discourse on the Oriental Other. In this respect, the thesis has adopted a theoretical framework informed by both Orientalism and postmodern theories. From the writers we have drawn on in this study, four tentative final points can be drawn.

First, despite their criticism of the West, Powers, Updike, and DeLillo have shown a subjective practice of constructing otherness from an Orientalist perspective. Powers's dramatization of the prisoner Martin during the Hostage Crisis has resulted in structuring the image of Islamic terror. His novel has visualized the tragic consequence of a world under Muslim leadership. Updike's *Terrorist* has also demonstrated the horror of Islam. His portrayal of the psychology of Ahmad and his eventual involvement in a terrorist act has shown the inadequacy of the Islamic faith. In DeLillo's novel, the image of the Orient as a source of terror is cast through writing the desert. Through dramatizing Elster's exile in the desert, DeLillo has gradually delivered the cruelty of desert cultures. All in all, none of the authors has established a complete sympathetic bond with the Other.

However, the order of the novels by some way implies the degree of the authors' sympathy. In comparison to the other novels, Powers's *Plowing the Dark* might be classified as the most sympathetic novel to the Orient and the Middle East. Addie's eventual disgust with the politics of the Cavern, and her creation of the virtual Hagia Sophia as her dwelling place by the end of novel reverberates Powers's reversal of the Orientalist binary logic. Martin's virtual reunion with Addie in Hagia Sophia, which symbolizes the bridge between the boundaries of East and West, shows a convincing sympathy with Islam and the Middle East. Culminating the end of the story at "the Room of Holy Wisdom" indicates Powers's wise approach of setting himself outside the logocentric trap of supporting one single entity. However, with regard to *Terrorist*, though Updike criticizes the secularism of his home-culture and tends to understand the culture of the Other, he defines the Islamic Orient as the total Other by the end of the novel. Worse, in DeLillo's novel, though the desert has been a source not of knowledge but of self-knowledge for the Westerner, it has been nevertheless set as the target of colonial attitudes. By dramatizing an unknown desert, DeLillo finally builds a parable of Orientalist domination of the East.

Second, the intersection between Orientalism and postmodern theories has served a powerful function in investigating (neo)Orientalist representations. Said's theory has been enriched by giving three cases through which Orientalism is re-produced by postmodern writers who have been particularly interested in political subjects on Islam and the Middle East. It has been demonstrated that the Orientalism of writers such as Powers, Updike, and DeLillo can be fully understood only in terms of the cultural context in which it is produced. As Western postmodern society is saturated with late-capitalist phenomena (such as consumerism, cyberspace technology, materialism, excessive media, and secularism), the discussion has arrived at the idea that modern Western culture, as shaped by late-capitalist ideals, bears ideologies of cultural differentiation that aims to reconstruct and dominate the

Orient. The examination of the (neo)Orientalist aspects in the three novels has shown that the contemporary American novelist reflects Orientalist binary oppositions that show the peripherality of the Islamic Other as part of postmodernism itself. These postmodern authors have conceptualized the essence of what is to be a postmodern American by setting it against Islam, building on the idea that Islam is contradictory to the ideals of American culture whose main faith is now in late-capitalist ideals. For example, Powers's *Plowing the Dark* has demonstrated that Islamic rationalism contradicts with postmodern values embodied in cyber-space technology and that has served to represent American superiority *versus* Oriental inferiority. Said has demonstrated that high technology is an essential tool of globalism and a form of modern imperialism and power (*Culture and Imperialism* 106, 108, 131). This claim has been illustrated in the context of the virtual reality of the Cavern in Powers's novel. It has been demonstrated that cyberspace technology is a hegemonic enterprise that aims to dominate the cultural Other.

Through the analysis of Updike's *Terrorist,* it has been observed that though America has structured its identity through immigration and cultural diversity, it paradoxically rejects Islam in the name of the secular politics of capitalism. It has been proved that in postmodern culture, secularism is in crisis, for it is unauthentically neutral with regard to religions. Using Zizek's theory of ideology, it has been detected that Updike represents American postmodernity as manipulated by a godlessness culture which subverts religious existence, a state that contradicts the very definition of secularism. It has been demonstrated, also, that Orientalism manifests as an ideology that penetrates even the social and the private realms of American capitalist society.

Yet, in DeLillo's novel, it has been demonstrated that media, as an essential part of postmodern culture, plays an important role in constructing geopolitical territories and distancing the West from the reality of war. By focusing on Elster as a secret planner of war

on Iraq and his personal encounter with a distant desert, the chapter on DeLillo has proved the West to be located in what Peter Sloterdijk has described as an "isolated cupola" that veils the West from the real sense of experience, like violence and death. Using Lacan's psychic divisions of the Symbolic, the Imaginary, and the Real, it has been argued that Western postmodern culture is extremely attached to a dream-like reality that necessitates a traumatic experience which DeLillo illustrates in the terror of the cultural Other.

Third, a new insight on postmodern writings on Islam and the Middle East is highlighted when these works are viewed in relation to Said's theory. It has been argued throughout this project that a contemporary technique of writing otherness consists in an apparent demystification of the classical Orientalist methods of conceiving otherness. The most obvious point which can be derived from the analysis of the three novels, is the novelists' common tendency to use the unfamiliar Other in the critique of the familiar, the reference to foreign values in the evaluation and re-presentation of Western postmodern culture. For example, in *Plowing the Dark*, Powers, through highlighting the image of Byzantium, seems to present a critique of the modern spiritless West, while stressing the presence of spirituality and moral values in the Other. His approving remarks on the dignity and honesty of the East, and his critique of the hypocrisies and the double standards of the post-industrial West, has given a clearer vision of the identity of the American self. In contrast to previous Orientalist writers, Powers's resort to Byzantium and Oriental culture as a mean of obtaining some kind of critical distance from his own culture proves to be a new gesture in contemporary Orientalist discourse. However, Powers ultimately disapproves his vision about the necessity to think like an Oriental or the millennium-old stability of Islam. His representation of the Islamic state of Iran, and his imaging of Islamic hatred towards the non-Muslims, eventually underlines the peripherality of Islam.

In similar way, Updike's critique on Western materialist ideology has ultimately resulted, to a certain extent, to a convincing sympathy with the Islamic (br)other. His critique of the hedonic and immoral culture of the West leads him to admire Ahmad's religious values. However, his Orientalist conception of extreme fundamentalism as related to Islam is proved to be cynical, serving him to demonstrate a kind of support to Western spiritless culture. Updike's Orientalist strategy has been detected to reside in the paradoxical admiration of Western culture which he criticizes on the other hand.

In *Point Omega*, DeLillo appears to condemn the U.S. politics of the war on Iraq and criticize the culture of the West obsessed with media and T.V. reality. The true sense of reality finds no place in DeLillo's insight on American modernity. While locating cultural finitude in the West, DeLillo locates its opposite in the culture of the alien desert. His attempt to contextualize the ways postmodern American society incorporates the elements of terror into its cultural system has argued that the West, while creating its enemy in the alien Other, loses its ability to situate itself. Elster's journey to the desert has illustrated a symbolic estrangement from the meaninglessness of the modern West. Reading the desert as a metaphor of the Orient, the study has arrived at an estimation of DeLillo's discourse on war on terror promulgated from Elster's encounter with the terror of the desert. DeLillo's insight on the idea of terror has proved to be essentialized and ethnocentric. Rather than condemning both sources of terror (domestic terror manifesting in media and Middle Eastern terror manifesting in the terror of the desert), DeLillo finally "orientalizes" his epistemology of terror, making it more despotic and barbaric. A major conclusion may reside in the way Orientalist discourse in the contemporary era became more rationalized by philosophical thought. The challenge of reading DeLillo's abstract perspective put on the idea of the desert suggests a bridging of the gap between cultural representation and the existential meaning of otherness.

The evaluation of the three novels has finally demonstrated that they fit Said's model based on the binary opposition between the East and the West, the colonized and the colonizer, the inferior and the superior. In the study of the three postmodern texts, the image of the Oriental Muslim is represented as an Other, marginalized, and presumed as fundamentalist and a source of terror. It has been shown that Orientalists are interested in the Other only as far as their representation contributes to their identity as superior to the Oriental. The Orientalisms of Powers, Updike, and DeLillo are ethnocentric and sometimes racist, but these qualities are implicit, unlike most of the works about which Said speaks. What has linked the three authors in this thesis, apart from the fact that their writing bears Orientalist echoes, is that they stand in a position of castigating postmodern ideals by invoking its absence in the Orient. What the present study has illustrated in relation to the postmodern era is, on the one hand, a remarkable shift in the Western presentation of its Other, being apparently admirable to the West, and most important on the other, is a continuation and a clarification of the essence of Huntington's famous rhetoric of "the clash of civilizations."

Finally, the representation of Islam in these postmodern texts has said more about postmodernity than it did about the Islamic Other. This is not simply to say that Islam has been used in the critique of modernity. What the representation of Islam has also underlined is the secular premise of postmodernity. Be it shown within Powers's or Updike's text, it is striking how Islam is particularly used on the social and political rather than on the ontological level. If these writers have any interest in Islam, it is purely anthropological, a cultural manifestation, an object of representation primarily bearing material significance. The status of Islam, as a transcendental religion, a belief-system, is forgotten by these authors in their attempt to consider the Other of Western postmodernity in their own struggle against it.

This problem of the secular premise of postmodernity cannot be neglected, especially without reference to the political tendency to dissolve the boundaries between the Self and the Other. As the present study has observed, what globalization has produced is clearly a creation not of a harmonized world, but of a multi-polar world. It has created a sense of insecurity and homelessness on both parts of the Self and the Other. This cultural division is felt deeply in Muslim countries, where the effects of modernization have created a sense of distrust towards the modern world, and in the West in particular, where the effects of modernization have been translated into terrorist attacks. In short, a liberal view of the Self has only led to a sense of alienation from other cultures, as the Trump administration has unquestionably sustained it by expulsing millions of Muslims from the American territory, and the sharp decision of Madame Marine Le Pen to expulse immigrants from the French territory, if she becomes a President.

It has been distinguished that American Orientalist texts use terrorist assaults on the U.S. that are linked to Islam and Muslims in order to represent the violent nature of Islam as a religion. In this way, representation has created a kind of objective image in the cultural world view to evoke certain sentimentalism. What the Orientalism of the three authors have demonstrated in relation to the political events of the hostage crisis, 9/11 events, and war on Iraq, is not an updating of Orientalist theory, but a revisiting of the past terms of struggle between Occident and Orient that Said has talked about. I think that the hostage crisis as well as September, 11 may not simply represent traumatic events in American history; they may also represent an instance where truth seems to coincide with the never ending clash between the two cultures stressed throughout by Orientalists. What such events represent, in relation to the present study, is creating a problem between an absolute self and an absolute Other. The invasion of Iraq in 2003 may also be an instance that resumes Said's account on American economic and political role in the Middle East. If imperialism is underlined as a product of

Orientalism stressed by the doctrine of Western superiority and power, War on Iraq makes a great claim on exemplifying neo-Orientalism nowadays.

One of the studies that needs to be conducted, apart from this one, is the study of the way Arab writers mirror the West in the now cultural and political conditions. How would studies of the representation of Muslims by non-Muslims differ from their representation of Muslims i.e. Muslim representations of Christians and Christianity in texts by Turkish or Arabic literature? This inquiry is relevant to be investigated in addition to the conclusions drawn from Western texts written in different political atmospheres in the contemporary period.

One should not only condemn the negative characterization of Islam expressed by Orientalists in this thesis, for it is also consistent to regard at the state of Islam and Muslims in the contemporary era. Reflecting on the actual reality of the Islamic world is also important in this conclusion. It is impossible to forget the chaotic situation occurring in the Muslim world: Political instability (undemocracy, ISIS, al-Qaida…etc), moral regression (intolerance to other cultures, marginalization of women and homosexuals), societal fragmentation (unstable family relations, insignificance of holy matrimony, materialism, murder, thievishness…) and so on. It has to be underlined that the Orientalist stereotypes, as illustrated in Said's book (immoral, intolerant, uncivilized East), is also part of the identity Muslims project themselves. Therefore, the problem of perceptions which the present study has elaborated is not purely a problem of false assumptions, albeit a very persistent attitude towards Islam and the Middle East.

However, so far as Islam is concerned, it is worthy to underline the fact that the Arabo-Islamic people and their cultures have become increasingly secular in the modern age. Like Europe, which has started to lose its strong relationship with God in eighteenth and nineteenth century industrialization, North Africa and the Middle East have also lost faith

with globalization and the exports of capitalism such as McDonald's, MTV, and technology. I, as an Algerian citizen, can identify that few Muslims read the Qur'an, attend the Friday prayer in the mosque, let alone daily prayers. Loss of ethics can also be identified, as manifested in bribery, materialism, sexuality, and witchcraft. These traits are examples of anti-Islamic principles. Therefore, it is essential here to highlight that in today's Orientalist discourse, Islam is being a victim of misrepresentation. It is important to recognize that the use of Islam is other than religious, typically connoting geography and culture.

In this frame, it has become easy for non-Muslims to associate the crisis of authority in the Muslim world throughout the ages to Islam as the only possible justification for barbarism, mass murder, civil war, terrorism, and fascism. In this way, Islam is taken to make large claims about itself: being a non-peaceful religion that encourages non-democracy and totalitarianism. Also literally understood as "surrender to God," Islam is simplistically interpreted as a religion of submission. Many current discourses on Islam overlook Christianity, Judaism, and even Buddhism to subscribe to the same spiritual tradition as the Islamic. However, light is shed only on Islam to be incriminated for wars created by the human. Many Muslim voices do condemn in the name of their religion the terrorist events happening in the West, the fatal civil war happening in Syria, the persecution of homosexuals, the Rushdie Fatwa, and so on. Unfortunately these voices do not make the big headlines on media.

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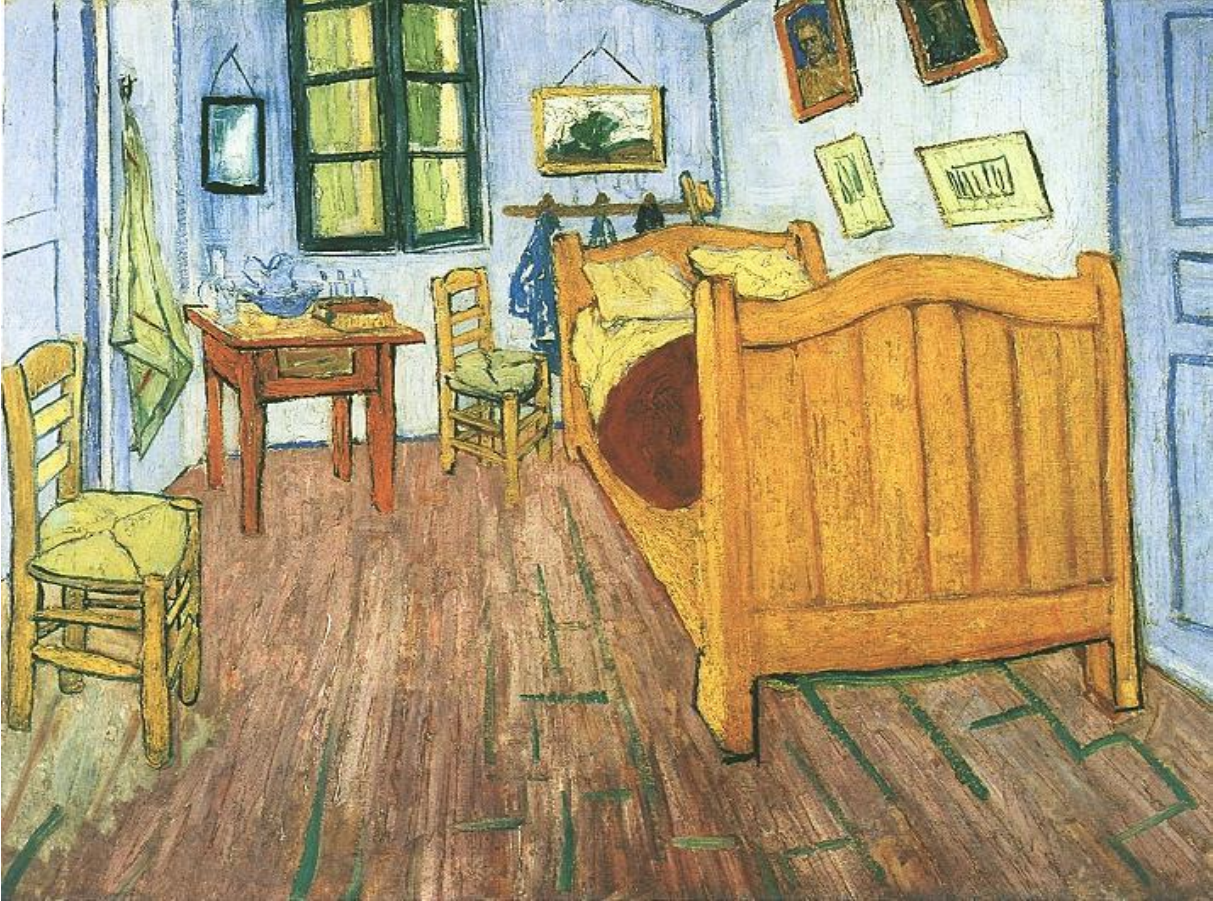
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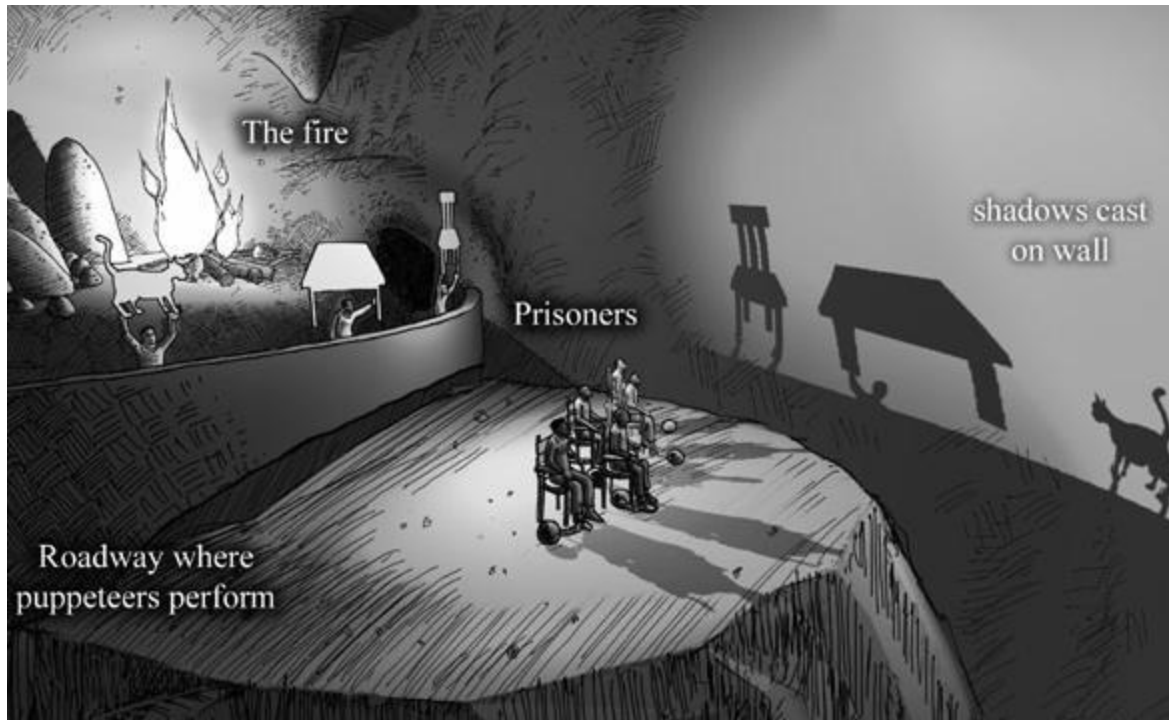

App. 1: Hagia Sophia, Istanbul.

App. 2: *The Dream* by Rousseau, Henri

App. 3: *Bedroom in Arles* by Van Gogh, Vincent.

App. 4: Plato's allegory of the Cave.

App.5: "Sailing to Byzantium," by Yeats, William Butler.

That is no country for old men. The young

In one another's arms, birds in the trees

– Those dying generations – at their song,

The salmon-falls, the mackerel-crowded seas,

Fish, flesh, or fowl, commend all summer long

Whatever is begotten, born, and dies.

Caught in that sensual music all neglect

Monuments of unageing intellect.

An aged man is but a paltry thing,

A tattered coat upon a stick, unless

Soul clap its hands and sing, and louder sing

For every tatter in its mortal dress,

Nor is there singing school but studying

Monuments of its own magnificence;

And therefore I have sailed the seas and come

To the holy city of Byzantium.

O sages standing in God's holy fire

As in the gold mosaic of a wall,

Come from the holy fire, perne in a gyre,

And be the singing-masters of my soul.

Consume my heart away; sick with desire

And fastened to a dying animal

It knows not what it is; and gather me

Into the artifice of eternity.

Once out of nature I shall never take

My bodily form from any natural thing,

But such a form as Grecian goldsmiths make

Of hammered gold and gold enamelling

To keep a drowsy Emperor awake;

Or set upon a golden bough to sing

To lords and ladies of Byzantium

Of what is past, or passing, or to come.

App. 6: "The Stare's Nest by my Window," by Yeats, William Buttler.

The bees build in the crevices

Of loosening masonry, and there

The mother birds bring grubs and flies.

My wall is loosening; honey-bees,

Come build in the empty house of the stare.

We are closed in, and the key is turned

On our uncertainty; somewhere

A man is killed, or a house burned.

Yet no clear fact to be discerned:

Come build in the empty house of the stare.

A barricade of stone or of wood;

Some fourteen days of civil war:

Last night they trundled down the road

That dead young soldier in his blood:

Come build in the empty house of the stare.

We had fed the heart on fantasies,

The heart's grown brutal from the fare,

More substance in our enmities

Than in our love; O honey-bees,

Come build in the empty house of the stare.