



Navigating Cultures and Conflict: Representation of Muslims in *Terrorist* and *Brick Lane*

Ali Kareem Naser Almahanah¹; Alireza Anushiravani*²

¹ Ph.D. Candidate of English Literature, Shiraz University, International Campus, Shiraz, Iran

² Professor of English and Comparative Literature, Shiraz University, Shiraz, Iran

E-mail: alikareemnaser66@gmail.com, anushir@shirazu.ac.ir*

Corresponding Author: Alireza Anushiravani

<http://dx.doi.org/10.18415/ijmmu.v11i9.6330>

Abstract

This paper investigates the delineation of cultures and conflict in John Updike's *Terrorist* and Monica Ali's *Brick Lane*. Both novels probe into the lives of Muslim characters in Western nations, supplying a lens into the intricacies of cultural identity, integration, and the strains that rise from social and personal conflicts. *Terrorist* chronicles the narrative of Ahmad Ashmawy Mulloy, an adolescent enrolled in a high school in New Jersey, as he grapples with his devout beliefs and the repercussions of extremist ideologies. *Brick Lane* focuses on Nazneen, a Bangladeshi immigrant living in London, as she navigates her planned marriage, cultural norms, and personal aspirations. This research offers a comprehensive analysis of how each novel portrays the immigrant experience, the challenges of preserving cultural identity in the midst of external influences, and the influence of socio-political contexts on individual lives. This research seeks to provide insight into the complex depiction of cultural conflicts and the exploration of personal identity among Muslim characters via the analysis of their journeys and the narrative methods utilized by the authors.

Keywords: *Brick Lane; Terrorist; Representation; Muslims; Cultural Conflict; Identity*

Introduction

The term "representation" describes how ideas about different people and their actions are constructed via associating language and visuals with certain cultural practices and social strata. This process has the power to affect and create differences among various social groups. Representation refers to the act of using one object to symbolize or stand for another. An emphasis on representation is beneficial for comprehending the connections between the environment and society, since it has the ability to generate and disseminate certain interpretations within a cultural framework. Culture encompasses interconnected concepts that facilitate the sharing of values, meanings, and behaviors among individuals in the world, enabling communication and comprehension of the present reality. When social

and environmental processes get entangled with cultural processes like representation and discourse, we say that there are cultural entanglements. Cultural relativists contend that it is impossible to gain a universal understanding of human behavior by comparing it to cultural representations, such as images or artifacts, the significance of which might vary depending on context. Thus, it is not possible to categorize civilizations as superior or inferior to one another, as cultural significance is inherently subjective and relative. An instance of representation within a cultural framework may be observed when the term 'woman' is employed to symbolize nature, hence exerting influence on the formation and dissemination of significations, which can subsequently lead to disparities. Culture serves as a means of conveying both shared characteristics and distinctions across social groups, which may be discerned through cultural customs, such as variations in attire based on gender, “we are able to build up a shared culture of meanings and thus construct a social world which we inhabit together” (Hall, 1997, p.16)

A culture experiences continuous fluctuations and undergoes various forms of development throughout a duration of time. Hall posits that the exertion of authority and the transformation of disparities into inequities are accomplished through a phenomena referred to as hegemony, when a particular group endeavors to establish cultural superiority and adopts a position of dominance. However, it is essential to comprehend that hegemony is continuously pursued and negotiated, rather than being stable and uncontested. In this particular setting, the exercise of power is upheld by a prevailing people, as articulated by Hall, “hegemony is a form of power based on leadership by a group in many fields of activity at once, so that its ascendancy commands widespread consent and appears natural and inevitable” (Hall, 1997, p.78). According to Hall (1997), culture is a dynamic process and a collection of activities, is primarily focused on the creation and sharing of connotations. In 1980, Micheal Foucault introduced the concept of 'discourse' to describe a collection of representations that shape our thinking and influence our actions based on those thoughts. Thus, Hall proclaims, in this context:

Culture, it is argued, is not so much a set of *things*- novels and paintings or TV programmes and comics.. Primarily, culture is concerned with the production and the exchange of meanings - the 'giving and taking of meaning'- between the members of a society or group. To say that two people belong to the same culture is to say that they interpret and understand the world in roughly the same ways and can express themselves, their thoughts and feelings about the world in ways which will be understood by each other. Thus culture depends on its participants interpreting meaningfully what is happening around them, and 'making sense' of the world, in broadly similar ways (Hall, 2003, p. 8).

Research Methodology

The methodology is based on postcolonialism. In fact, the methodology of this paper derives from the representation of the colonized by the colonizer. In other words, the main focus of this paper is to reveal how the colonized is represented by the colonizer. Albert Memmi, describing the condition of the occupied, states that “the most serious blow suffered by the colonized is being removed from history” (p.91). Thus, writing in postcolonial spectrum is the arduous and intricate process of challenging and rectifying the history created by Europeans. It involves engaging in discourse and making essential corrections. The institutionalization of contemporary historical writing coincides with the emergence of postmodernism, which raises problems about the concept of history. Contemporary history prompts us to consider the consequences of postmodernism in connection with the postcolonial context.

Cultural and postcolonial studies can be seen as fulfilling the aspirations of comparative literature, which, in actuality, never achieved its desired goals due to a purposeful and persistent adherence to Eurocentric ideals, canons, cultures, and languages. In this context, comparative literature is the examination of literature and other cultural manifestations across language and cultural frontiers. Typically, it emphasizes the examination and comparison of works and writers in two distinct languages; however, it may also examine literatures written in the same language if they are associated with two

national or cultural groupings. It can also address the relationship between literature and other creative forms of expression or, more broadly, the connection between literature and other intellectual pursuits (Pegenaute, 2022). “Comparatists are supposed to be fluent in a number of foreign languages, and be familiar with two or more literary traditions and literary theory” (Pegenaute, 2022, p. 1).

Edward Said's *Orientalism* (1978) seeks to illustrate how the representation of Europe's 'others' has been ingrained as a means of cultural dominance from at least the 18th century. Orientalism encompasses several academic disciplines, institutions, research approaches, and cognitive frameworks that Europeans employed throughout numerous centuries to gain information about the 'Orient'. This phenomenon reached its peak with the emergence and establishment of nineteenth-century empire (Mambrol, 2022, para. 5)

Said's fascination with this method of understanding Europe's other cultures lies in its ability to successfully illustrate the connection between knowledge and power. It not only comprehends Orientals, but also exerts control over them by actively shaping their identity. The term 'Oriental' illustrates the process by which it both designates and standardizes, implying a wide range of understanding and intellectual dominance over the topic being spoken. After Said's critique, Orientalism has been recognized as a paradigm that demonstrates how Europe's approaches to comprehending the conquered world were also used to assert control over it (Ashcroft & Ahluwalia, 2002, p. 23).

Orientalism, as defined by Said, essentially entails the process of categorizing and situating non-European civilizations in relation to Europe. However, Orientalism primarily concentrated on Europe itself, including a range of interrelated subjects. The debates centered around topics related to national distinctiveness, as well as the origins of different ethnic and linguistic groups. As a result, thorough and detailed studies of Oriental languages, histories, and civilizations were carried out with the assumption that European culture was dominant and significant. The discourse was so intense that the myth, opinion, rumor, and prejudice propagated by influential intellectuals quickly gained widespread acceptance as truth. *Orientalism* is a consciously political work of art. The purpose of *Orientalism* is not to extensively investigate many subjects or offer a full explanation of its historical or cultural origins. Instead, it aims to inverse the perspective of the discussion and examine it from the standpoint of an "Oriental" individual—to “inventory the traces upon...the Oriental subject, of the culture whose domination has been so powerful a fact in the life of all Orientals” (Said 1978, p. 25). The claim made by Said to be an 'Oriental' reflects the recurring contradiction that is evident in his work. However, his time spent residing in the United States, where the concept of the 'East' is associated with peril and menace, is what contributes to the cosmopolitan nature of Orientalism.

Said asserts that his purpose was to incite, which in turn stimulated “a new kind of dealing with the Orient” (Said, 1978, p. 28). Actually, if the whole "Orient" vs. "Occident" dichotomy vanished, “we shall have advanced a little in the process of what Welsh Marxist cultural critic Raymond Williams has called the “unlearning” of “the inherent dominative mode” (Said, 1978, p. 28). Academic arguments are unlikely to lead to any change, despite the fact that it is a tool for correction that aims to facilitate it. Instead of doing away with anything, postcolonial discourse just substitutes one problem with another, while simultaneously problematizing a facet of the reaction to previous Western hegemonic discourse paradigms. As Parry (1987) proclaims, “The labour of producing a counter-discourse displacing imperialism’s dominative system of knowledge rests with those engaged in developing a critique from outside its cultural hegemony” (p. 55).

Discussion

Islam's association with terrorism has been portrayed as a distinguishing characteristic that contributes to the perceived passivity of Muslims. Therefore, in order to emphasize the religious distinctions between Islam and Christianity, which are opposing and distinct "entities". Therefore,

Hermione dutifully informs the Secretary that the attackers despise enlightenment, “Like cockroaches, Like bats. The light shone in darkness” (Updike, 2006, p. 48). The novelist used passages from the *Bible* to highlight the affection of 'Christian' Americans towards light. Simultaneously, he also references a line from the *Quran* to illustrate what he perceives as proof of Muslims being instructed to despise this situation, “[t]he unbelievers love this fleeting life too well” (Updike, 2006, p. 48). Updike employed a misconstrued line from the *Quran* to support his belief that Muslims have a strong aversion to life and a fondness for death. In contrast, he has used a biblical passage to illustrate how Christians strive for a life filled with illumination and positivity. By contrasting the two faiths and the practices of its adherents, this comparison highlights the fundamental differences between Islam and Christianity. Christianity and Islam are fundamentally differentiated, exhibiting striking disparities akin to darkness and light, animosity and affection, and vitality and mortality. This has led to the perception of Islam as an imperfect faith.

The flawed mentality of certain Muslims is characterized by a disposition to despise life and exhibit a readiness to sacrifice oneself for their religious beliefs. The most prevalent theme in the novel *Terrorist* is the portrayal of Muslims as detesting earthly existence and instead, pursuing the hereafter fervently due to the impact of their religious beliefs. Similarly, Ahmad and Joryleen debate over, “the human spirit asks for self-denial. It longs to say ‘No’ to the physical world,” and she retorts, “[y]ou scare me when you talk like that. It sounds like you hate life” (Updike 2006, p. 72). Thence, Ahmad's "self-denial" refers to a negative human characteristic where individuals prioritize assisting others at the cost of their own well-being. Ahmad's erratic and untrustworthy conduct, where he preaches about self-denial but simultaneously commits acts of adultery, strengthens Updike's depiction of the flawed and weak Muslim whose essential values and convictions are damaged. Extremism is commonly regarded as an exclusive method associated with Islam, used to expediently attain Heaven (p. 240), and to “God’s warm welcome” (p. 248) slurs Islam for its vicious propensities. As a result, as the Muslim individual becomes extremely different and distinct from the Christian American self, meaning they become defective, the maximum level of hostility towards the latter will naturally occur. The story highlights the Muslims' flawed and untrustworthy traits, exemplified by Ahmad's religious superiority complex. This complex hinders his ability to recognize the commonalities that exist among all human beings. Ahmad's perception of all non-Muslims as 'infidels' is primarily influenced by a single differentiating factor. The individual's error, driven by his religious beliefs, becomes evident in his social exchanges when he classifies his mother, who follows Christianity, and Levy, who practices Judaism, as “infidel animals” (Updike, 2006, p. 94) for they “are not on the Straight Path” (Updike, 2006. p. 3). Updike has used Ahmad's faith to create a contrast between "us" and "them," which serves to portray Ahmad as an arrogant bigot with flaws. Furthermore, Ahmad's conduct is indicative of his incapacity to assimilate into American culture, despite being born and raised in the United States without any experience living overseas.

Updike believes that the main factor that sets Ahmad apart from other Americans and creates a significant gap between them is his religious affiliation, Islam. As seen in Ahmad, Islam has a powerful yet subdued effect on its adherents, transforming them into docile individuals. In this context, Ahmad fails to effectively harness his skills due to his lack of a strategic approach. The divine being associated with him, like an imperceptible twin, represents a deity that promotes surrender rather than initiative. The Merciful and Compassionate has not provided a clear path to a profession. It seems that in his deep and blissful state of devotion to Allah, his future has been severely limited or cut off.

According to Updike, Ahmad's complete surrender to God has resulted in a state of purposeless inaction that has nearly led him to a dangerous outcome, as demonstrated by his involvement in a terrorist act. Ahmad's acquiescence exhibits a robotic-like obedience, hindering him from attaining a genuine future and instead leading to a truncated one. Moreover, the docile influence of Islam hinders Ahmad from making any constructive endeavor that may bring him and his community advantages. According to Kalmar (2012, p. 5), Islam, in the eyes of Updike, is a cognitive ability that shapes Muslims into intolerant extremists or terrorists.

Updike distinguishes Muslims from non-Muslims by depicting their disdain and lack of regard for the beliefs and rituals of others. This portrayal positions Muslims as an intolerant group that is unable to peacefully coexist with others who do not share their faith. Therefore, when attending church to listen to Joryleen, a fellow student, singing in choir, Ahmad observes the environment with disdain. According to Ahmad and Shaikh Rashid, the practice of Christianity in churches is characterized by rhythmic chanting that is deceptive and illusory. They perceive it as resembling pagan rituals conducted in a location adorned with pin-ups; “black unbelievers at worship of their non-God, their three-headed idol” (Updike, 2006, p. 62). It is meant to be a demonstration of Ahmad and Shaikh Rashid's intrinsic religious intolerance and contempt that they mock Christians in churches. By setting Ahmad and his tutor inside a larger framework of religious intolerance, Updike frames Ahmad's story as a polemic against Islam, arguing that it is inherently incompatible with other religions. In spite of America's religious diversity, the story shows that Christianity and Judaism can live side by side peacefully.

The story perpetuates the inconsistencies and instability of Islam as a faith that advocates for the coexistence of several religions. As if he had built a wall around himself, Ahmad refuses to engage with anybody at school. One of his classmates, Joryleen, told him, “[you] should learn to smile more” (Updike, 2006, p. 8). Hence, the religion of Islam acts as the alienating element that hinders Ahmad from assimilating with fellow pupils and forming conventional connections. Religions like Judaism and Christianity are separate from Islam. Even though Islam has many negative features, Updike claims that Islam is still the driving force in Ahmad's life. Therefore, Islam is both a set of religious beliefs and a way of life, and Ahmad's deeds are a prime example of the latter. By assuming Ahmad's identity, Updike draws attention to Ahmad's views on Muslim inferiority and American superiority. So, Ahmad starts with his mom when he brings them to see school counselor Jack Levy, “I am the product of a white American mother and an Egyptian exchange student” (Updike, 2006, p. 8). The apparent contradiction between Ahmad's sense of superiority derived from his white American mother and his arrogance as a Muslim, along with his contempt for non-Muslim Americans, serves to illustrate two aspects of Ahmad's flawed and defective self-perception, of which his flawed views are the primary impact. Ahmad appears, on the one hand, to have admitted that American (white) supremacy is all-encompassing. Contrarily, his contemptuous attitude toward his white “infidel” mother is shaped by his conviction in Islam's excellence. While bringing attention to the shortcomings and religious obligations of Muslims, Updike presents Ahmad in a contradictory light.

Jacob Levy, the novel's Jewish protagonist, is a prime example of this. Throughout the novel, we see Levy and Ahmad's lives intertwined, but we also see how their religions impact them in different ways. While Levy does consider himself a Jew, he does not take much delight in being a strict follower of the old covenant. In the New World, his grandpa had given up on religion altogether. The untrustworthy prophecies of an invisible god were replaced in this new world with the fundamental requirements of existence, including food, housing, and shelter (Updike, 2006, pp. 23-24)

Ahmad is portrayed as being unable to update and transform his old beliefs and adapt to the multicultural modernity of America. In addition, Levy has relinquished, “untrustworthy promises of an unseen God” long ago through his grandfathers (Updike, 2006, p. 24). In the realm of orientalism, Islam is shown as a faith that refuses to evolve and adapt to the contemporary world (Said, 1978, p. 76). Similarly, People from the East are stereotyped as being static and incapable of developing personally or socially. In his writings, Updike stresses the obvious contrasts between the religions of Islam and Judaism, as well as between Muslims and Jews. Christian and Jewish adherents have long accepted more liberal and progressive understandings of their faiths, he claims, whereas Muslims remain obstructed by their religious convictions.

The novel highlights the flaws of Islam, particularly its inability to align with scientific knowledge due to Ahmad's narrow-minded comprehension. Ahmad perceives his professors as being remunerated to impart ideals that he considers to be devoid of religious beliefs like “physics, chemistry

and biology” (Updike 2006, p. 4). He scolds these professors for viewing measurement as the be-all and end-all of reality evaluation” (Updike, 2006, p. 4). The fact that Ahmad believes all knowledge apart from Islamic theology is false and spiritually meaningless is evidence of his unshakeable conviction in Islam. The fact that Updike portrays Muslims as scientifically ignorant and foolish only serves to emphasize the problems with Islam. Islam is depicted in this story as a faith that rejects scientific evidence in favor of unverified insights. Without a doubt, Islam stands apart from other faiths and occupies a shabby, inferior sphere (Alosman, et al., 2018, p. 7).

Thus, the depiction of Islamic 'imperfection' in *Terrorism* highlights the genuine hindrance to the progress and prosperity of Muslims, which stems from a misguided perspective on what truly matters. Ahmad defends his decision to abandon the academic path when Levy questions him about it, restating Shaikh Rashid's advice, “the college track exposed me [Ahmad] to corrupting influences—bad philosophy and bad literature. Western culture is Godless” (Updike, 2006, p. 38). A defective “oriental despot... who takes everything from his subjects and gives them nothing” is reflected in Shaikh Rashid. It is stated on page fifteen by Kalmar (2012). According to Shaikh Rashid, Ahmad might be led astray from Islam if he is exposed to intellectual thought, which could weaken his firm convictions. The way Updike depicts Ahmad's commitment to Islam adds to the criticisms of Islam and damages its image even further. Levy goes on to say that Ahmad would be better off in the long run if he continues his studies beyond high school. But Ahmad is worried about the growth of the educational system, “might weaken his faith. Doubts he had held off in high school might become irresistible in college” (p. 216). Based on Ahmad's story, Updike concludes that Islam has a negative effect on Muslims.

Monica Ali's novel *Brick Lane* (2003) delves into the intricate aspects of identity, displacement, hybridity, assimilation, integration, separation, marginalization, and alienation. The film does this by narrating the fictitious tale of Bengali immigrants in London who come into a markedly distinct culture. The story illustrates the influence of these variables on the cultural identity of the protagonists. The protagonists' conflicted emotions reflect a sense of uncertainty that blurs the boundaries between their current location and their nation of origin.

This state of liminality undermines the conventional comprehension of authenticity and marginality. The novel examines the convergence of social, political, and cultural domains with geographical areas, so challenging the notion of cultural identity. The novel explores the impact of cultural identification on the movement and social structure of immigrants in the host nation, resulting in the formation of a minority group within the prevailing culture. Simultaneously, it showcases a fusion of several ethnicities and cultures, leading to an unrestricted exchange of ideas and cultural manifestations. The individuals' contemplation of their culture results in a geographical depiction that questions the conventional depictions of national territory and identity.

The novel depicts the formation of social clubs and associations within the Bengali community, for example, the Bengal Tigers focus on addressing the difficulties of Bengalis, both in their own communities and in the country they have migrated to (Ali, 2003, p. 241). The shift occurs from a homogeneous nation-state to a heterogeneous society including several nationalities and cultures, resulting in a diversified and inclusive environment that encourages the development of a new social and personal cultural identity. *Brick Lane* portrays the migration of a Bangladeshi family from Bangladesh, a former British colony, to settle in London. The narrative primarily focuses on the time span ranging from the 1980s to the early 2000s. Nazneen experiences the negative consequences of being exposed to two different cultural settings in London, can have a negative effect on her social, emotional, and physical well-being. Nazneen's life is a narrative of exploring and achieving a deeper understanding of oneself: “When she had come [to England] she had learned first about loneliness, then about privacy, and finally she learned a new kind of community” (Ali, 2003, p.182).

Nazneen's quest for knowledge and understanding has resulted in a profound mystical enlightenment and the cultivation of her self-reliance. She finds herself residing in a state of neither fully belonging to her original Bengali culture nor fully assimilating into the Western culture, but rather in a state of being in-between. In the context of Homi Bhabha's theories, she is not only endeavoring to establish a blended identity, but rather aiming to forge an entirely novel one by amalgamating two divergent cultures. The concept of hybridity allows for the emergence of a new cultural identity that is distinct from both the dominant culture (the Colonizer) and the original culture (the Other).

Hence, Nazneen's new identity is not bestowed upon her, but rather it is shaped and dependent on certain circumstances. Considering that Bhabha's perspectives are rooted in the power dynamics that existed between dominant and submissive countries/powers throughout the colonial era, it is feasible to examine the connections between characters in postcolonial literature using a comparable approach. *Brick Lane* provides a representation of the interaction between the colonizer and the colonized as described in Bhabha's *The Location of Culture* (1994). The primary emphasis of the work does not lie in accentuating the pervasive impact of the British colonizers on the Bengali populace. Instead, it aims to construct a compromise that respects the abilities of both sides without diminishing them. The novel's use of many locales provides an ideal backdrop for Nazneen to cultivate a refined and adaptable character, enabling her to effectively navigate her past and present cultural environments. In contrast to her spouse, Nazneen comprehends the significance of collaboration, incorporation, and amalgamation. Building upon Kim's previous argument on assimilation and engagement, assimilation enables Nazneen to proclaim her identity and autonomy, while appointment serves as a driving force for her to actively seek mutual understanding and peace, even in the presence of competing and contradictory elements.

Thus, "it is unlikely hybridity and identity development would occur without authentic engagement" (Sterrett, 2015, p. 657). Ali acknowledges the significance of the third space experience in her protagonist's life as a catalyst for both personal development and cultural enlightenment. Through her interactions with the stories of fellow individuals in her community, Nazneen enters a transitional and ambiguous state when she becomes aware of an alternative perspective on the world and her own sense of self. According to Bhabha's theory, this area allows for the emergence and acquisition of new cultural values and norms, "a place where we construct our identities in relation to varied and often contradictory systems of meaning" (Bhabha, 1994, p.38). Hybridity involves both surpassing limits by forming a fresh identity and generating novel domains by exploring new cultural knowledge. In the contact zone, a new third space has emerged where many ideas coexist harmoniously without significant fragmentation or clear boundaries (Bhabha, 1994, p. 39). Throughout the story, we observe Nazneen transitioning between two distinct civilizations, establishing a fresh realm that does not pertain exclusively to either of the two societies. At first, Nazneen lives a restricted and stagnant life. Nazneen has a poor proficiency in English, and the husband will not help her in improving her abilities, "where's the need anyway?" (Ali, 2003, p.37), he informs her. Currently, the television serves as Nazneen's sole means of observing the external world. The primary lesson she acquires from this experience is the aspiration to achieve independence and synchronization with her environment, similar to the ice-skater she observes on the television. This ice-skater possesses the ability to move with freedom, while maintaining control over her graceful physique (Ali, 2003, p.41).

Nazneen finds it difficult to differentiate her personal life from the surrounding surroundings. In order to effectively engage with and adapt to the new society, she must possess a comprehensive understanding of her surroundings. She is conflicted between choosing a location to settle down and her own house, which represents the private and personal places. Nazneen earns a livelihood via sewing and it allows her to break free from the limitations of her family environment. She is establishing an authentic identity for herself. Nazneen, a resident of a rural area in Bangladesh for 18 years, went to London in search of a Bengali community to reside with. She encounters oppression inside a conventional patriarchal culture while being shown at first as a regular Muslim lady. She had little choice but to comply with her husband's expectations as her father arranged their marriage. Nevertheless, she steadily

becomes conscious of her own self and chooses to split from Chanu, create her own business, and build her own distinct personality. The presence of several identities in the diasporic experience portrayed in *Brick Lane* results in the emergence of cultural hybridity.

Brick Lane celebrates the peaceful cohabitation and integration of several ethnic populations. The depiction of cultural identity in this context facilitates the acknowledgment of several identities within British culture. Simultaneously, it recognizes the restricted outlook of any standpoint that fails to consider the impact of power dynamics, especially in a culture like Britain's, which exemplifies liberal and democratic values. The story paints a picture of British cultural identity as complex and dynamic. A distinct cultural identity characterized by multiculturalism and multilocationality is fostered by the hybrid environment in which Nazneen, Razia, and Mrs. Azad live. The concept of a "third space" enables people to congregate in different geographical and national contexts, blending their home and host cultures' ideals. As Mrs. Azad so movingly puts it: "When I'm in Bangladesh I put on a sari and cover my head and all that. But here I go out to work. I work with white girls and I'm just one of them" (Ali, 2003, p. 114).

Because of the melting pot of cultures in Britain, children and moms who were born there are feeling pushed to change and rethink who they are. An alternative to postcolonial ideas of hostility or diversity and many identities is proposed in the work, which presents a complex picture of British culture. On the contrary, it implies that a merging of identities might emerge from the meeting of divergent cultural traditions. According to Homi Bhabha, the third space and hybridity are the foundational concepts upon which the new social spaces and identities are built. Bhabha perceives hybridity as a productive power that questions the concept of culture as an unchanging thing, thereby weakening the notion of a homogeneous identity.

Conclusion

After examining John Updike's *Terrorist* and Monica Ali's *Brick Lane*, it is evident that both works provide complex and varied portrayals of the immigrant experience and the resulting cultural conflicts in contemporary society. John Updike's novel *Terrorist* explores the psychological condition of Ahmad Ashmawy Mulloy, a young American Muslim, as he confronts his identity and the external obstacles he encounters in a post-9/11 United States. The novel offers a perceptive viewpoint on the socio-political environment that shapes Ahmad's outlook, highlighting themes of alienation, extremism, and the search for self-identity.

Both novels emphasize the widespread influence of cultural and religious identity on the lives of individuals and the dynamics of communities. *Terrorist* illustrates the severe outcomes of cultural disintegration and ideological manipulation, whereas *Brick Lane* highlights the capacity for personal development, transformation, and the creation of a blended identity in the face of cultural struggle. The obstacles faced by the main characters and their personal growth highlight the larger social issues and emphasize the importance of empathy, understanding, and discussion in dealing with diverse cultural environments. Ultimately, both *Terrorist* and *Brick Lane* offer profound literary examinations of the immigrant experience, emphasizing the conflict between the preservation of one's culture and the need to adapt to a new environment. These writings invite readers to reflect on the intricate aspects of human nature that underlie social matters. They emphasize the importance of considering the individual stories that influence our shared perception of identity, belonging, and cohabitation in a world that is becoming more linked. Updike and Ali's unique viewpoints enhance the depth and understanding of discussions on culture and conflict.

References

- Ali, M. (2003). *Brick Lane*. Black Swan.
- Alosman, M. & Hashim, R. S. (2018). "Differentiation and Imperfectionality in John Updike's *Terrorist*". *3L the Southeast Asian Journal of English Language Studies*, 24 (2), 58–70. <https://doi.org/10.17576/3l-2018-2402-05>
- Ashcroft, B., & Ahluwalia, p. (2002). *Edward Said*. Routledge.
- Bhabha, H. K. (2012). *The location of culture*. W. Ross Macdonald School Resource Services Library.
- Foucault, M. (1980). *Power/Knowledge*, Brighton, Harvester.
- Hall, S. (2003). *Representation: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices*. SAGE Publications Ltd.
- Hall, S. (1997). 'The Work of Representation', in Hall, S. (ed.) *Representation: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices*. Sage, pp. 13–64.
- Kalmar, I. (2012). *Early Orientalism: Imagined Islam and the Notion of Sublime Power*. Routledge.
- Mambrol, N. (2020, November 14). *Postcolonial (Cultural) Studies: Literary Theory and Criticism*. <https://literariness.org/2020/11/14/postcolonial-cultural-studies/>
- Memmi, A. (1965). *The Colonizer and the Colonized*. Routledge.
- Parry, B. (1987). "Problems in Current Theories of Colonial Discourse". *Oxford Literary Review*, 9(1), 27–58. <https://doi.org/10.3366/olr.1987.002>
- Pegenaute, L. (2022). "Literatura comparada" @ ENTI (*Enciclopedia de traducción e interpretación*). AIETI. (1-30).DOI <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.6366248>
- Said, E. W. (1979). *Orientalism*. Pantheon Books.
- Sterrett, S.E. (2015). Interprofessional Learning as a Third Space: Rethinking Health Profession Students' Development and Identity through the Concepts of Homi Bhabha. *Humanities Research*, 4, 653-660.
- Updike, J. (2006). *Terrorist*. Penguin.
- Yousef, T. (2019). "Cultural Identity in Monica Ali's *Brick Lane*: A Bhabhian Perspective". *International Journal of Arabic-English Studies*, 19 (1), 54–86. <https://doi.org/10.33806/ijaes2000.19.1.4>

Copyrights

Copyright for this article is retained by the author(s), with first publication rights granted to the journal.

This is an open-access article distributed under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution license (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>).