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## **“HEY, COME ON, WE’RE ALL AMERICANS HERE”: THE REPRESENTATION OF MUSLIM-AMERICAN IDENTITY IN JOHN UPDIKE’S *TERRORIST***

### **Abstract**

In his ‘post-9/11 novel’ *Terrorist* (2006) John Updike portrays Ahmad, an American high school boy struggling to come to terms with his hyphenated Arab-Irish-American identity in a multi-ethnic US American environment. Trying to redefine his place as a citizen in a ‘western’ culture, the stereotypical ascriptions of ‘Arab’ and ‘Muslim’ influence the protagonist’s self-perception and his identity formation as he “fits the racial profile of white anxiety” (Davis 2001: 48). Updike’s representation of a young Muslim-American in post-9/11 New Jersey employs all sorts of clichés and has been heavily criticized by reviewers for the stereotypical and hollow depiction of his young protagonist. In this paper, Updike’s fictional interpretation of Islamist terrorism as a literary response to 9/11 and the “Clash of Civilizations” is investigated.

**Key words:** identity, Americanism, Islam, terrorism

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## Introduction

In his twenty-second novel *Terrorist* (2006)<sup>1</sup> John Updike portrays an American high school boy who grows up in New Prospect, New Jersey, converts himself to Islam at age eleven and a few years later nearly sacrifices his life for the jihad by planning to detonate a suicide bomb in Lincoln Tunnel, connecting New Jersey and Manhattan.

When almost at the end of the novel Ahmad's Jewish high school guidance counselor Jack Levy manages to enter the bomb truck and tries to prevent Ahmad from pressing the detonation button, Jack says, "Hey, come on, we're all Americans here. That's the idea, didn't they tell you that at Central High? Irish-Americans, African-Americans, Jewish-Americans; there are even Arab-Americans" (Updike 2006: 301).

Despite the obvious irony of this statement, Levy is touching upon one of the key issues of the novel: the different cultural backgrounds of the people surrounding Ahmad who himself embodies both East and West and tries to come to terms with his hybridity. Focusing on Ahmad (Ashmawy) Mulloy and the way he relates to his multi-cultural environment, this paper attempts an analysis of the fictional representation of Muslim-American identity for which John Updike has been heavily criticized.

*Terrorist* appeared five years after September 11, 2001<sup>2</sup> and references the tragic WTC attacks like more than one hundred other American novels that have come out since 9/11 (cf. Däwes 2010: 495).<sup>3</sup> The title itself not only points to the protagonist's destiny but also refers to a problem of increasing importance: Ever since 9/11, people perceived as *Muslim* or *Arab* run an even higher risk of being associated with terrorism, as Mike Davis points out: "The real burden of the new urban fear – the part that is not hallucinatory or hyperbolized – is borne by those who fit the racial problem of white anxiety: Arab and Muslim Americans [...] For those caught squarely in the middle of this paranoid *gestalt* [...] there is the threat of violence" (Davis 2001: 48).

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<sup>1</sup> Henceforth quoted directly in the text with page numbers.

<sup>2</sup> The German translation appeared exactly on September 11, 2006.

<sup>3</sup> In her article "Close Neighbors to the Unimaginable": Literary Projections of Terrorists' Perspectives (Martin Amis, John Updike, Don DeLillo)" Däwes focuses on novels that are written, as the title already indicates, from the terrorists' perspective – an approach that only a few "9/11 novels" have taken so far.

Although most American Muslims are not Arab, and most Americans of Arab descent are not Muslim, but Christian, as Paul M. Barrett explains in his excellent portrait of American Islam (Barrett 2007: 6), 'Arab' and 'Muslim' are very often equated, and the idea that Arabs are terrorists and Muslims fundamentalists has already been elaborated on by Edward Said (1978/2001 and 1998). These stereotypes persisted already before 9/11 (for a detailed analysis, see Susan Akram 2002), yet, they were reinforced after the WTC attacks; in the six weeks after 9/11, civil rights groups estimated more than six murders and "one thousand serious assaults committed against people perceived as 'Arab' or 'Muslim'" (Davis 2001: 48), and a 2006 Gallup poll has shown that four in ten Americans admitted feeling prejudices against Muslims (ibid.). Four in ten "would require Muslims to carry special identification cards and undergo more intensive security checks at airports" (ibid.). It is thus no wonder that many US citizens of Arab descent doubt whether they count as "real" Americans (ibid.) – a feeling that has been reinforced by political measures such as the US PATRIOT Act<sup>4</sup> of 2001 and other examples of US "anti terrorist" legislation (cf. Akram 2002: 69f.).

Against this backdrop, John Updike decided to broach the issue of anti-Islamist attitudes in the US, but chose a new and rather unexpected vantage point: that of a fundamentalist Muslim would-be terrorist. Updike explains his decision in an interview with Charles McGrath in *The New York Times*:

When Mr. Updike switched the protagonist's religion to Islam, he explained, it was because he "thought he had something to say from the standpoint of a terrorist." He went on: "I think I felt I could understand the animosity and hatred which an Islamic believer would have for our system. Nobody's trying to see it from that point of view. I guess I have stuck my neck out here

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<sup>4</sup> **U**niting and **S**trengthening **A**merica by **P**roviding **A**ppropriate **T**ools **R**equired to **I**ntercept and **O**bstruct **T**errorism Act of 2001 (US PATRIOT Act) (United States, 107th Congress). The contrived acronym reinforces the message of the Act by linking patriotism to the War on Terror, shifting the meaning of the word "patriot" from "one who loves his or her country and supports its authority and interests" (Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary 2009 – "patriot") to "nationalist" or even "chauvinist" in the sense of "one who shows excessive favoritism towards his or her country" (Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary 2009 – "nationalist").

in a number of ways, but that's what writers are for, maybe."  
(McGrath 2006: 1)

The terrorist's perspective Updike employs is not only a thought-provoking contribution to literary representations of 9/11 but also provides „the 'hijacked' imagination with counter-narratives and perform[s] a range of psychological, political, and cultural functions which complement and diversify the cultural memory of 9/11“ (Däwes 2010: 497 f.). Updike's contribution may be unconventional, but it is at the same time absolutely relevant as he portrays Islamist terrorism as inherent in American society – and not as something coming from outside as its diametrically opposed *Other*. Updike appropriates the terrorist's perspective in order to show that Ahmad is simply a human being, a victim even, that many readers will be able to relate to (cf. Däwes: 508). Däwes continues to argue that „the fictional adoption of the terrorist's perspective can be read as a metonymic means of self-exploration“ (Däwes: 502) – demanding a different way of dealing with religious and ethnic diversity in the United States of America.

Ahmad is the son of a Catholic Irish-American mother and an Egyptian father who grows up in New Prospect, New Jersey, the fictional version of Patterson where the terrorists around Mohammed Atta had stayed for some time before September 11, 2001. Ahmad tries to come to terms with his Irish – Arab – American hybridity and is surrounded by various *hyphenated Americans* that serve as identification figures for the teenager: His Irish-American mother, his atheist-Jewish high school guidance counselor Jacob/Jack Levy, his African-American Christian short-term girlfriend Joryleen, his Arab-American boss Charlie Chehab, a CIA undercover agent, and the Yemeni imam Shaik Rashid. But *Terrorist* is not only about an American Muslim's trajectory and his difficulties to come to terms with the American way of life. It is also about the search for identity in a multi-ethnic society. The protagonist's identity crisis leads to a desperate search for structure and stability, and he finally encounters directions and guidance in Islamic fundamentalism. In *Terrorist*, however, Updike writes not so much about Islamic fundamentalism as an external threat but as a phenomenon related to the religious development of the United States more generally, as Walter Grünzweig has pointed out (Grünzweig 2006: 1). Fundamentalism in this case is not seen as something religious but rather related to the feeling of “belonging” in a post-modern world. Thus, the novel is actually not so much about the accurate depiction of Muslim-American identity but about what makes a young man radical in 21<sup>st</sup> century America. I agree with

Grünzweig who concedes that for this reason, the dominant perspective is that of Ahmad who condemns the social, cultural and ideological deficits of US American, respectively „Western“ life (cf. Grünzweig 2006: 1).

In *Terrorist*, one could argue, Updike employs an entirely essentialist approach to cultural identity, including clichéd and stereotypical presentations of Arabs and Muslims that correspond to what Edward Said most prominently has observed on a more general level regarding the treatment of Islam in the US: “So far as the United States seems to be concerned, it is only a slight overstatement to say that Moslems and Arabs are essentially seen as either oil suppliers or potential terrorists” (Said 1998: 1). Whereas critics such as Birgit Däwes (2010: 509), Rana Sweis (2006: 1), or James Wood (2006: 2) provide ample evidence that Said’s assumptions are correct, I find Yvonne Zipp’s argument equally pervasive: in *Terrorist*, she argues, also African-American, Irish-American, or Jewish-American characters are presented in an essentialist way:

American Muslims probably won’t be lining up to shake Updike’s hand: All the Muslim characters, with one exception, are employed in the terrorism business, and Ahmad’s imam is portrayed as a sneering zealot. But frankly, none of the characters in *Terrorist* exactly defy stereotype. There are two African-American teens: They work as a pimp and a hooker. Guidance counselor Jack Levy, the lone Jewish character, is both cheap and guilt-ridden. You get the idea. (Zipp 2006: 1)

Charles Demers is even more critical in his analysis: „The characters that inhabit Ahmad’s world are uniformly caricatures: secular Jews are over-thinking and libidinous; African-American men are violent pimps with ridiculous names (specifically, in this case, *Tylenol Jones*); women are either pathetic spinsters, obese and sexless food-obsessed cartoons, intellectually inconsequential sluts or sex workers” (Demers 2006: 2). Although Demers and Zipp are right in stating that Updike’s descriptions are almost caricatures, I argue that he uses overstatement and essentialism deliberately. What Updike, I believe, is concerned with in *Terrorist* is a renegotiation of Americanness for all of his characters and a search for or re-affirmation of some common ground beyond ethnic and religious borders. The characters in the book actually “humanize” each other (cf. Grünzweig 2006: 2), and the story of Ahmad is not the story of Mohammed Atta, but of a Muslim-American teenager, maybe the more radical 21<sup>st</sup>

century version of “H. al-din Caulfield” as has been ironically argued by Demers (2006: 1). Although Updike’s intentions are again subverted by the ambivalences the text reveals, Updike writes in the tradition of a utopian discourse of American identity in spite of ethnic and religious differences; Ahmad needs to negotiate his American identity amidst his different role models, and the main question Updike asks throughout the novel seems to reverberate St. Jean de Crèvecoeur’s question “What, then, is the American, this new man?” (Crèvecoeur 1782/1986: 69): By presenting various models of Americanness in the novel, Updike indirectly offers a concept of identification for Ahmad that is not essentialist, but recognizes the discursive constructedness of identity in the post-modern world.

Ahmad Ashmawy Mulloy is the son of a lapsed Catholic Irish American, would-be bohemian mother, Teresa, and an Egyptian exchange student, Omar Ashmawy, who abandoned the family when Ahmad was only three years old. In search for his identity, the confused adolescent Ahmad is looking for a father figure in Islam: “He thought he might find in this religion a trace of the handsome father who had receded at the moment his memories were beginning” (Updike 2006: 99). He eventually finds two *ersatz* fathers - Sheik Rashid, the sly, fundamentalist Yemeni imam, who teaches Ahmad Arabic and the Qu’ran, and a Lebanese-American young man, Charlie Chehab, who is actually a CIA agent. Yet, the imam does not accept Ahmad as one of his kin. Ahmad does not even speak Arabic, and his *otherness* is too apparent: “To him, Ahmad is American. No amount of zeal and Qur’an studies can change his mother’s race or his father’s absence. [...] Sheikh Rashid – a man slight and slim as a dagger, with a dangerous slyness about him, [...], does not offer himself as a father; there is in his regard of Ahmad something fraternal and sardonic, a splinter of hostility” (Updike 2006: 145). Although the pupil tries very hard to learn the language, he will never make up for the fact that it is not his mother tongue. With his Irish-American mother, English is his first language. Sheikh Rashid comments on Ahmad’s reading from the Koran: “Good. I mean, good enough. We must work harder, of course, on your accent” (Updike 2006: 108). Sheikh Rashid and Charlie, the undercover agent, keep working on Ahmad and lead him onto the *straight path* - and into a terrorist plot – also promising a new identity: “The mosque took him as a child of eleven; it let him be born again” (Updike 2006: 99).

Ahmad is a handsome young man, he is very correct, intelligent and at the same time intolerant, always wearing stiffened crisp white shirts

that remind him of his good-looking and neat Egyptian father of whom he remembers not much more than a sweet smell, "perhaps aftershave lotion, though with a hint of some spice in it, perhaps a Middle Eastern dish he had just consumed" (Updike 2006: 36). This is what he tells his Jewish high school guidance counselor Jack Levy who asks him for an explanation of his double name: Jack Levy's folder holding the student's records is labeled "Mulloy (Ashmawy) Ahmad" (Updike 2006: 34). Levy asks Ahmad: "Uh, Mr.--? How do you like to be called? Mulloy or – he looks again at the cover of his folder – 'Ashmawy?'" (Updike 2006: 36) Ahmad has a very clear explanation at hand for Levy: "My mother attached her name to me, on my Social Security and driver's license, and her apartment is where I can be reached. But when I'm out of school and independent, I will become Ahmad Ashmawy" (Updike 2006: 37).

Unable to negotiate a "third space" (Bhabha 1994: 37; Rutherford 1990: 211) for himself from which a new identity formation can take place and "which enables other positions that can emerge" (Rutherford 1990: 211), his way of dealing with the situation is simply shutting out one of his halves, and as a fatherless boy in search of his identity he chooses to trace his Egyptian roots. In his everyday life, the official name 'Mulloy' will be the one that grants Ahmad a European-American background and makes him a bit less suspicious for the Bureau of Homeland Security. Ahmad, however, clearly opts for his Muslim identity. In order to establish a stable self, and also to come to terms with the loss of his father, he has to expel everything that might threaten his rather porous ego boundaries. These are constantly at risk – as the "devils", as Ahmad calls the non-believers, are threatening him and, as he says, "want to take away my God" (Updike 2006: 3).

Ahmad's point of view is contrasted with several outward perspectives, most importantly that of Jacob/Jack Levy, the Jew. Levy recognizes Ahmad's intellectual abilities and shows interest in his pupil's activities. The talented boy seems to be failing to live up to his potential when he reveals to Levy that he is planning a career as a truck driver - "a declaration that will surely be accompanied, in the inevitable movie based on *Terrorist*, by a swelling of ominous music," as Shainin ironically puts it (Shainin 2006: 1). Ahmad in fact earns his truck driver's license and at the end of the novel drives a suicide bomb truck into Lincoln Tunnel. It takes a lot of twists in the plot line to make Ahmad's guidance counselor Jack Levy (who is, after all, the brother-in-law of a secretary working in the Department of Homeland Security) stand at a crossroads on a Sunday morning, climbing into the truck

at a red traffic light on the New Jersey Turnpike. The novel comes to a climax when towards the end Ahmad and Jack are sitting in the bomb truck, heading for the Lincoln Tunnel, the detonation target. The doubting Jew and the determined Muslim begin discussing their religious convictions, the red detonation button metaphorically sitting between them. When Ahmad is told that his friend Charlie had in reality been a CIA agent and has been murdered, he starts accepting another role model right there in the car: "There had been a father who vanished before his memory could take a picture of him, and then Charlie had been friendly and shown him the roads, and now this tired Jew in clothes as if he dressed in the dark has taken their place, the empty space beside him." (Updike 2006: 290) This *empty space beside him* means more than just the passenger seat in the truck, and Charlie's 'showing him the roads' clearly alludes to his initiation. When a moment later Jack and Ahmad find out that the note that had been attached to dead Charlie quotes a passage that could be a quotation from both the Torah and the Qur'an, their 'harmonization' becomes even more evident.

As if they still had a lot of time, they casually start discussing their lives. Like a father and son who are together in a car, they eventually run out of topics until Jack casually says, "Well, what else can we talk about? Giants Stadium. Did you catch the Jets game yesterday?" (Updike 2006: 294).

Ahmad inquires about Jack's faith and makes a remark that already hints at a deep-down-acceptance of his Jewish teacher:

"Before Israel, Muslims and Jews were brothers – they belonged to the margins of the Christian world, the comic others in their funny clothes, entertainment for the Christians secure in their wealth, in their paper-white skins. Even with the oil, they despised us, cheating the Saudi princes of their people's birthright." Mr. Levy heaves another sigh: "That's some 'us' you've worked up, Ahmad." (Updike 2006: 295)

This *us* creates a bond between them – Jews and Muslims are suddenly seen as brothers by Ahmad, seen as the *Other* of Christianity and thus reinforcing the tie between the two men. When Ahmad warns Jack to get out of the truck, Jack replies "We're in this together, son" (Updike 2006: 296). This statement of Jack's could be read as nothing but a colloquialism, but there is some kind of bond in the air that Ahmad already feels but at this stage still negates; otherwise he would not be as quick to answer, "I'm not your son" (Updike 2006: 296).



When Jack a little later agrees to read Sayyid Qutb, the radical Egyptian poet and political philosopher Ahmad tells him about, and even promises to assign Qutb’s texts as an optional reading for his high school students, their relationship deepens again. Ahmed’s rather dry statement “Sir, I regret to say that you will not live. In a few minutes I am going to see the face of God. My heart overflows with the expectation” (Updike 2006: 303) sounds rather artificial and not very convincing. It is hard to believe that Ahmad will really press the button. This uncertainty is reinforced by the parallel action: Like in a church episode earlier in the book, Updike again has a little black girl smile at Ahmad as a sort of *déjà-vu*; the girl and her baby brother are sitting in a car in front of the bomb truck, waving out through the rear window and trying to catch Ahmad’s attention. At first, he tries to ignore them, but he cannot help looking at the small children. Eventually, they get bored and fall asleep, just as the truck approaches the point in the tunnel that is marked for the detonation.

A moment later, after telling Ahmad about his own sad life and reassuring him that he could not care less if he died now, Jack tries to reach for the button, but Ahmad “seizes his hand in his own” (Updike 2006: 304). He keeps pressing Jack’s hand until Jack asks him to let go, not without almost fatherly admiring the strength Ahmad has acquired over the summer. This compliment leads Ahmad to proudly announce that he is now also no longer afraid of Tylenol. Ahmad then even talks about his love-life and confesses that he quite liked Joryleen. Finding yet another commonality with his teacher Levy, he asserts, “So not only you have romantic difficulties” (Updike 2006: 305). This again resembles a conversation between a father and his son.

When Levy starts talking about death, Ahmad is taken aback by the fact that his teacher is actually not afraid and even seems to be looking forward to dying. This leads Ahmad to contemplate the Qur’an:

In the fifty-sixth sura, the Prophet speaks of the moment when the soul of a dying man shall come up in his throat. That moment is here. The journey, the miraj. Buraq is ready, his shining white wings rustling, unfolding. Yet in the same sura, “The Event,” God asks, We created you: will you not credit us? Behold the semen you discharge; did you create it, or We? God does not want to destroy; it was He who made the world. (Updike 2006: 306)

Just before they pass the crucial bend, the weakest place of the tunnel structure where Ahmad is supposed to press the button, he has an epiphany:

The pattern of the wall tiles and of the exhaust-darkened tiles of the ceiling – countless receding repetitions of squares like giant graph paper rolled into a third dimension – explodes outward in Ahmad’s mind’s eye in the gigantic fiat of Creation, one concentric wave after another, each pushing the other farther and farther out from the initial point of nothingness, God having willed the great transition from non-being to being. This was the will of the Beneficent, the Merciful, ar-Rahman and ar-Rahim, the Living, the Patient, the Generous, the Perfect, the Light, the Guide. He does not want us to desecrate His creation by willing death. He wills life. (Updike 2006: 306)

This sudden illumination that happens in a place underneath the river where Ahmad “feels himself already under to be under water“ (Updike 2006: 298) could be interpreted as a purifying immersion into water that leads to a new life, a birth, a renaissance. The concentric waves could be read as symbolizing labor pains with the exhaust-dark tunnel resembling a womb. The same passage could, however, also be read as a description of an orgasm. Maybe it is a far-fetched argument that speaks for this interpretation that Levy adopts the role of a surrogate father, as he tells Ahmad shortly before this epiphanic experience that he has slept with Ahmad’s mother. However, the passage definitely has a climactic religious, but also a strong sexual connotation, and sets off Ahmad’s decision to live on. When he retrieves his hand from the detonation button and puts it back to the steering wheel, the little black children in the car in front of them start smiling again, and he even waves at them (cf. Updike 2006: 307).

The interpretation that a new life has begun for Ahmad is supported by the fact that Jack Levy now welcomes him: “Well done, my friend, welcome to the Big Apple“ (Updike 2006: 308). Ahmad accepts this and “lets himself be guided, taking the left turn. The path is straight. ‘You are driving like a pro,’ Mr. Levy tells him.“ (Updike 2006: 309). Ahmad together with Levy is on a new *straight path*, and it seems easy for him to follow it.

The last sentence in the book, “*These devils, Ahmad thinks, have taken away my God*” (Updike 2006: 310) creates a circular structure as the book also starts with this sentence, only with a different tense. Yet, the ending

is open, and it is not at all clear what Ahmad is going to do next. Däwes argues that "this closure erases all subversive potential and leaves readers with the more prevalent taste of its generalizations. Instead of dialogically engaging with cultural difference, *Terrorist* leaves intact the boundaries between religious systems and ideologies, empathizing with the Other only to construct a clearer sense of Self, and eventually using this glance in the mirror to stabilize master narratives of the 'clash of civilizations' (Huntington)" (Däwes 2010: 508f.).

While Däwes reads the ending in a negative way, other critics argue on a more positive note that it "suggests that violence and terrorism can be avoided and that inter-cultural understanding is possible (Sweis 2006: 2)". Personally, I would agree with the latter interpretation: It is, after all, Jack Levy's sensitive way of dealing with Ahmad's personal problems that lead him to abandoning the idea of blowing up Lincoln Tunnel. Ahmad feels that Levy understands him and takes his Muslim identity seriously. It is a spirit of tolerance which suddenly allows for a new interpretation of the Qur'an on the part of Ahmad, which again triggers the epiphany that makes Ahmad see a *light at the end of the tunnel*.

What is just as important as Ahmad's epiphany is the fact that it is Jack Levy, the *Jew*, who leads Ahmad, the young *Muslim*, back to the 'Straight Path' - in a wider, humanistic sense. Both of them are actually Americans. Whether or not Updike's understanding and interpretation of Islam is adequate (and many critics such as Charles Demers (Demers 2006: 1) or Michiko Kakutani (Kakutani 2006: 1) have argued it is not) is less important than the power he ascribes to his protagonists' thoughts and reflections (cf. Grünzweig 2006: 2). The fact that *Terrorist* sold like „hot cakes“ has made it part of American literature and culture, and as such, the novel contributes to a discourse about Muslim American identity and is a political statement that can be read as a call for tolerance and responsibility. The post-modern struggles the book's characters find themselves in will perhaps never be solved, and the task of self-identification will probably never be brought to completion, a danger Zygmunt Bauman warns against in *Identity* (Bauman 2007: 98), where Stuart Hall describes the challenges as follows:

Since cultural diversity is, increasingly, the fate of the modern world, and ethnic absolutism a regressive feature of late-modernity, the greatest danger now arises from forms of national and cultural identity – new and old – which attempt to secure their identity by adopting closed versions of culture or community

and by refusal to engage... with the difficult problems that arise from trying to live with difference. (Hall 1993, quoted in Bauman 2007: 98)

These challenges have definitely been recognized by John Updike, and I agree with Walter Grünfweig who argues that *Terrorist* could be read as a modern version of Gotthold Ephraim Lessing's play *Nathan the Wise* (Grünfweig 2006: 2) with the parable of the three rings at its center: as an appeal for tolerance, friendship, and religious relativism.

However, adopting such an enlightened position and trying to live with difference, as Hall puts it, is certainly most difficult. There is still a long way to go to – and John Updike was, I am convinced, absolutely aware of the challenges multicultural America is facing when he has Jack Levy cynically say, "Hey come on, we're all Americans here. That's the idea, didn't they tell you that at Central High?" (Updike 2006: 301).

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„МА, ХАЈДЕ СВИ СМО МИ АМЕРИКАНЦИ“:  
ПРЕДСТАВЉАЊЕ МУСЛИМАНСКО-АМЕРИЧКОГ ИДЕНТИТЕТА  
У АПДАЈКОВОМ РОМАНУ *ТЕРОРИСТА*

#### Сажетак

У свом роману *Терориста* који је објављен после 11. септембра 2001. Џон Апдајк (John Updike) ствара лик Ахмеда, америчког средњошколца који покушава да прихвати свој хибридни идентитет Арапина, Ирца и Американца живећи у мултиетничком окружењу у Америци. Покушавајући да редефинише своје место грађанина у 'западњачкој' култури, стереотипне представе о 'Арапима' или 'Муслиманима' утичу на јунаково схватање себе и стварање представе о сопственом идентитету као да жели да се уклопи у „страх белаца у погледу сопствене расе“ (Дејвис 2001: 48). Апдајк представља младог муслиманског Американца у Њјудерсију у контексту расних предрасуда и клишеа и због тога је био жестоко критикован. Многи прикази Апдајковог романа замерају му површност и дводимензионалност профила јунака. У овом есеју разматра се проблем Апдајковог литерарног одговора на 11. септембар и размишљања о „сукобљеним визијама света“.

**Кључне речи:** идентитет, амерички идентитет, ислам, тероризам