

**Constructing Terror: Docile Bodies in  
*Terrorist and Reluctant Fundamentalist***

*By*

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### **Abstract**

This study is informed by Michel Foucault's 'docile body' concept which demonstrates how some people practice power over others to make them more obedient, productive and punctual. Edward Said's 'constructing terror' and 'demonizing the Other' concepts explain how the West wields such strategies to manufacture Western citizens' consent to launch endless wars in the Middle East, and parts of Asia and Africa. The dilemma of terrorism has been created to clarify the traditional conflict between the Westerners and the Easterners, especially Muslim countries. After 9/11 attacks, the Westerners have engaged in fatal wars and launched several media campaigns to convince their peoples that they are defending the human rights and the western democratic principles. The US has adopted terror tactics and practical strategies to fight Muslims around the world. Media is wielded to accentuate the danger of Islam upon Western democracy and civilization. Mass media usually fabricates stories for demonizing Muslims; Muslims are seen as "devils", "barbarians", "bombers" and so forth. These stereotypes are repeated daily on social media. In this regard, some critics consider this hate speech which leads to a normal result which is constructing terror among citizens to accept the irrational security procedures. As regards manufacturing terrorism, many Americans stand against these security procedures which undermine the basic democratic principles. According to Foucault, neoliberal countries aggravate fear to make their citizens support their governments' decisions.

Keywords:

*Terrorism, 9/11 attacks, demonizing Muslims, docile body, Foucault, Said.*

## مستخلص

تهدف هذه الورقة البحثية إلى مناقشة مفهوم "الجسد الطيع" لميشيل فوكو والذي يوضح كيف يمارس بعض الأشخاص السلطة على الآخرين لجعلهم أكثر إنتاجية وانضباطاً. لقد نشأت معضلة الإرهاب لتوضيح الصراع التقليدي بين الغرب والشرق. بعد هجمات الحادي عشر من سبتمبر، خاض الغربيون حروباً قاتلة وشنوا حملات اعلامية عديدة لإقناع شعوبهم بأنهم يدافعون عن حقوق الإنسان والمبادئ الديمقراطية الغربية. بالإضافة الى ذلك تبنت أمريكا استراتيجيات حديثة لمحاربة المسلمين في جميع أنحاء العالم باستخدام وسائل التواصل الاجتماعي لإظهار خطر الإسلام على الديمقراطية والحضارة الغربية. وكما يوضح إدوارد سعيد فعادة ما تختلق وسائل الإعلام الغربية قصصاً لإضفاء الطابع الشيطاني على المسلمين؛ يُنظر إلى المسلمين على أنهم "شياطين" و"برابرة" و"مفجرين" وما إلى ذلك. تتكرر هذه الصور النمطية يومياً في وسائل التواصل الاجتماعي. وفي هذا الصدد، يرى بعض النقاد أن خطاب الكراهية هذا يؤدي إلى نتيجة طبيعية ألا وهي بناء الرعب بين المواطنين لقبول الإجراءات الأمنية غير العقلانية. ولولا فكرة الإرهاب، لوقف الأمريكيون بالتأكيد ضد هذه الإجراءات الأمنية التي تهمش المبادئ الديمقراطية الأساسية. وفقاً لفوكو، يتعين على الدول النيوليبرالية زيادة الخوف لجعل مواطنيها يدعمون قرارات الحكومات.

This study is informed by the concepts ‘demonizing the other’ ‘constructing terror’ and ‘docile body’ to clarify the stereotype of terrorism stigmatizing Muslims and Arabs. Said’s concepts ‘demonizing the other and constructing terror’ reflect the tactics that the Western mass media has adopted to pave the way to distort the image of Islam and Muslims. According to Edward Said, “Those sectors have the power and the will to propagate that particular image of Islam, and this image therefore becomes more prevalent, more present, than all others” (*CI*, 123). Said’s criticism is directed to the Western irrationality which has encouraged several Western thinkers, politicians, decision makers, journalists, and even professors to fabricate misleading stories about Muslims. These stories have become the mainstream, to the extent Muslims and even moderate Westerners who have different stories about Islam and Muslims are rejected and marginalized. As a result, Muslims are always seen and depicted as “possible terrorists”, “bombers”, “fundamentalists”, and so forth. In addition, Said has focused on the idea of constructing terror and connected it to different internal and external political affairs. Said and Foucault have discussed the governments’ urgent need to construct terror among their citizens. Thus, Islam and Muslims are considered the focal point of any stories of terror in the United States in particular, especially after 9/11 attacks. Consequently, Muslims are treated badly wherever they go in the United States because they are seen as a source of danger. Thus, the American security institutions assure that hate crimes against Muslims have incredibly increased recently. Furthermore, the concept ‘docile body’ is employed to reflect the strategy which modern governments and individuals especially those who practice power over the others. This strategy is based on the idea of transforming the person’s performance into a machine-like one to increase their productivity, efficiency, and docility. Foucault asserts that “a body is docile that may be subjected, used, transformed, and improved” (*DP*, 136). In this sense, Foucault maintains that those in positions of authority over the individuals they target are manipulated, turning them into emotionless machines.

***Terrorist and The Reluctant Fundamentalist:***  
**Demonizing the Other and Constructing Terror**

In Updike’s novel *Terrorist*, it is noteworthy that Charlie and Shaikh Rashid are struggling to justify 9/11 attacks on the United States when thousands of people killed. Americans are perceived as unclean and godless by Shaikh Rashid who hates Christians and Jews. He always describes them as disbelievers and devils who should be killed. Shaikh Rashid is the person who teaches the protagonist, Ahmad, about Islam. As a result, Ahmad has adopted the same ideology since he has been indoctrinated that true Muslims should fight disbelievers. Charlie has commented that “Those people worked in finance, furthering the interests of the American empire, the empire that sustains Israel and inflicts death every day on Palestinians and Chechnyans, Afghans and Iraqis. In war, pity has to be put on hold” (*T*, 158). Charlie defends the attacks, considering them an important way to approach Allah and a reaction to what Israel does against Palestinians in the occupied land because Israel is supported by the Americans and the West.

Charlie’s justifications have encouraged Ahmad to adopt radicalized ideas that are based on what he has learnt from Shaikh Rashid and Charlie. Surely the

ideas of killing, terrifying and demonizing the other are not acceptable for several millions of Muslims around the world because Islam calls for peace and construction not war and destruction. Charlie and Rashid's ideas have paved the way to create new terrorists like Ahmad who is ready to kill several innocent people after accepting to drive a truck loaded with four tons of explosives to bomb it at the Lincoln Tower.

The American government has helped to punish Muslims by declaring the so-called 'war on terror' campaign to reinforce "Acts motivated by hate ranged from vandalism and arson to verbal taunting, employment discrimination, and hassling at airports, to assault and murder" (CS, 68). The protagonist in Hamid's novel *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*, Changez, has been shocked when he is at the airport, explaining "I was escorted by armed guards into a room where I was made to strip down to my boxer shorts -- I had, rather embarrassingly, chosen to wear a pink pair patterned with teddy bears" (RF, 64). Muslims have faced severe collective punishment both verbally and physically. Political leaders have used language which has portrayed Muslims "as a threat to national security" (IR, 94). Herman Cain, who was the presidential candidate at that time, said "there is a greater dangerous part of the Muslim faith than there is in any of these other religions" (IR, 95). Said explains "much of what one reads and sees in the media about Islam represents the aggression as coming from Islam because that is what "Islam" is" (CI, 16). The West have fabricated several stories about Muslims in the media, movies, and books to persuade the Westerners that their governments are fighting 'monsters' and 'bombers' "Much of the discourse in the war on terror includes information that is either fabricated altogether or at least greatly exaggerated, prompting criticism from those striving to determine the truth" (CS, 10). This speech is mostly exaggerated and reveals hidden agendas to manipulate the Westerners politically, economically, and religiously.

#### ***Terrorist and The Reluctant Fundamentalist: 'Docile Bodies'***

The concept 'docile body' is very crucial since it is employed to analyze the two protagonists, Ahmad and Changez, who are manipulated by other people. For instance, Ahmad is brainwashed by Shaikh Rashid, the Imam of the mosque, who practices power manipulating and brainwashing Ahmad. Shaikh Rashid is responsible for teaching Ahmad about Islam. Consequently, Shaikh Rashid has exploited Ahmad's lack of knowledge and experience to mislead him by encouraging him to commit a terror act. Ahmad has become docile and brainwashed to the extent he has accepted to implement the heinous act which may lead to kill hundreds of innocents by bombing a truck loaded by four tons of explosives in one of the busiest tunnels in the United States. The people who practices power know for sure the weak points inside the targeted persons. These weak points can be noticed and observed the whole time. Both Ahmad and Changez have weak points which are noticed by their mentors. For instance, Changez has come from a poor country, Pakistan, where Pakistanis suffer from several economic dilemmas. Therefore, this economic deterioration has led Changez to search for a scholarship to be well-educated for the sake of getting a good job with a good salary to help himself and his family in Pakistan. This lack has pushed Jim, the person who has interviewed Changez, to appreciate this point in Changez's book. Therefore, Changez is seen as a suitable candidate for the new job since his passion to raise his social status dominates his state of

mind. Ahmad's weakness has also surfaced as a result of his early decision to study Islam. It seems that an eleven-year-old boy requires guidance from trustworthy individuals. Ahmad has been taught that Islam is against the modern sciences like biology, chemistry, and physics. Thus, he has made a decision not to continue studying these “godless courses”, rejecting to join a college.

Ahmad's weakness to differentiate between good and misleading interpretations has enabled Shaikh Rashid to manipulate Ahmad spiritually and mentally. The targeted persons should be prepared well to be obedient by demonstrating that they are observed and watched the whole time. Ahmad and Changez have believed that they are controlled by the people who practice power over them. Thus, they are prevented from thinking rationally. Changez is conditioned to repress his emotions. He believes that discussing his complaints would prevent him from completing his duties as intended, assuring “my personal efficacy continued to grow as I immersed myself in my project at the cable company, hoping, in this way, to leave behind the many worries that preyed upon me when I was free to ruminate” (RF, 68). This quotation demonstrates Changez's ability to overcome the obstacles posed by racism that he suffers from in the United States and his country, which is threatened to be invaded by the Indian troops who are supported by the United States where he works for its progress and prosperity.

In conclusion, Muslims and Islam are depicted as terrorists by the West as a collective punishment. The Oklahoma bombing bears witness to this Islamophobia. Stigmatizing Islam and Muslims depends on Western fabricated stories of possible terror acts committed by Muslim terrorists to destabilize the safety and security of their homelands. Most of these accusations are prejudiced and irrational, aiming at increasing the Western public fear. This implements hidden agendas serving certain presidential candidates, bankers, media owners, arms manufacturers, multi-national conglomerates and so forth.

#### Key to Abbreviations

*Abnormal* (2003)

CI: *Covering Islam: How the Media and the Experts Determine How We See the Rest of the World* (1997)

CS: *Critical Issues in Crime and Society* (2006)

*Decoding Al-Qaeda's Strategy: The Deep Battle Against America* (2013)

IR: *Islamophobia and Racism in America* (2017)

*IMPERIAL HUBRIS: Why the West Is Losing the War on Terror* (2004)

*Orientalism* (1978)

*Of Other Spaces: Utopias and Heterotopias* (1984)

*Sayyid Qutb and the Origins of Radical Islamism* (2013)

*Society Must Be Defended* (1997)

*The Foucault Reader: An Introduction to Foucault's Thought* (1991)

RE: *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* (2007)

T: *Terrorist* (2006)

*Technologies of THE Self* (1988)

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