Terrorism as an Anti-Thesis in Selected Contemporary American Novels

By

Amin Ata Zaki

Supervisor

Dr. Susanne Ramadan

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the degree of Master of Arts in English Literature and Criticism in the Department of English Language and Literature,

Yarmouk University, Irbid, Jordan

December 2012
Terrorism as an Anti-Thesis in Selected Contemporary American Novels

By

Amin Ata Zaki

Thesis Examination Committee:

Dr. Susanne Ramadan ...........................................................(Chairperson)
Prof. Fadia Suyousie .........................................................(Member)
Dr. Thaer Al-Kadi ..............................................................(Member)

December 2012
Dedication

To my family…

To all my friends…
Acknowledgements

I am particularly indebted to my supervisor and teacher, Dr. Susanne Ramadan, for her gentle support and meticulous comments that helped me complete my thesis. Undeniably, she has been a source of continuous insight and unforgettable charisma.

My gratitude also goes to my teacher Prof. Fadia Suyoufie for her invaluable feedback and great support, and also many thanks to Dr. Thaer Al-Kadi for his constructive criticism and valuable feedback.
# Table of Contents

Dedication..................................................................................................................III

Acknowledgements............................................................................................... IV

Table of Contents.....................................................................................................V

Abstract (English).....................................................................................................VI

Introduction to Religious, Communist, and Environmental Types of Terrorism:.................................................................................................................1

Chapter 1: Terrorism and the Decay of the Public Sphere in DeLillo's Mao II..................................................................................................................24

Chapter 2: Terrorism and the Clash of Civilizations in Updike's Terrorist .........................................................................................................................55

Chapter 3: Environmental Terrorism and Project Identity in Hansen's Wet Desert..............................................................................................................80

Conclusion..............................................................................................................110

Endnotes...............................................................................................................116

Works Cited..........................................................................................................118

Abstract (Arabic)................................................................................................126
Abstract

This thesis explores the idea of terrorism as represented in three contemporary American novels. Communist, religious, and environmental models of terrorism are given to account for the never-ending struggle between the strong nation-states and the marginalized groups that use terrorism as a way of resistance. Different methodologies that include cultural, civilizational, and psychoanalytical theories are used to describe the nature of terrorism in the selected novels. Don DeLillo's *Mao II* (1992) is used along with Jurgen Habermas's theory of the public sphere to account for the Maoist terrorism. John Updike's *Terrorist* (2007) is also applied to account for religious terrorism through Samuel Huntington's *The Clash of Civilizations*. Gary Hansen's *Wet Desert* (2007) was finally used to approach the environmental terrorism by applying Manuel Castells' *The Power of Identity*. The study finds that there is an inextricable relationship between the selected kinds of terrorism that manifest in the terrorists' struggle to undermine the power of their strong adversaries by creating an anti-thesis to reduce the hegemony of the provided theses. Terrorism is finally shown to be the result of various factors that shape the terrorists' identities.

**Key Words:** Terrorism, religion, environmentalism, Maoism, DeLillo, Updike, Hansen.
Introduction to Religious, Communist, and Environmental Types of Terrorism

Terrorism has become important nowadays with all the theories and controversies surrounding it. The significance of terrorism has come to the surface after the September 11th attacks on the United States of America, but the idea of terrorism dates back to ancient times. The Mesopotamians, for example, used terrorism to gain power. Gerard Chaliand argues in *The History of Terrorism: From Antiquity to Al Qaeda* that "[t]he first Mesopotamian empire, that of Sargon of Akkad, was founded on terror" (vii). After killing the previous king of Mesopotamia, king Sargon invaded the Sumerian states, killing many innocent people to eliminate any attempts of rebellion against his rule. Many scholars have explored the concept of terrorism, but their opinions vary because some of them mark certain violent actions as terrorism, while others disagree. To explain, some critics may consider king Sargon's conquests as terrorist attacks, while others may think of it as part of a legitimate war.

The word 'terrorism' itself is taken from the Latin "[t]errere [which] means 'to make tremble'" (Chaliand vii). The idea of terrorism has always been connected to fear because the main target of terrorism is to strike fear as it is the case in king Argon's killing of civilians, but the current concept of terrorism is ambiguous, since scholars differ in their
definitions of the notion of terrorism. On the one hand, Gerard Chaliand defines the terrorist acts as "certain kinds of violent actions carried out by individuals and groups rather than by states, and with events that take place in peacetime rather than as part of a conventional war" (16). Also in *A New Understanding of Terrorism*, Meredith Patten and Amanda Twilliger use the Federal Bureau of Investigation's description of terrorism which defines the terrorist act as "a violent act or an act dangerous to human life, in violation of the criminal laws of the United States or of any state, to intimidate or coerce a government, the civilian population, or any segment thereof" (23). Obviously, both definitions avoid any reference to the acts of violence and genocide committed in traditional wars as acts of terrorism. On the other hand, Michael Fellman includes the aggressive acts that are part of any war in his understanding of terrorism; he defines terrorism in *In the Name of God and Country: Reconsidering Terrorism in American History* as "the more primal form of warfare, the means of social domination to which states as well as non-state actors frequently revert" (2). Clearly, the problem with the definition lies in some critics' use of war as part of terrorism, which extends the idea of terrorism to include all the nation-states participating in any wars.

Another problem with the definitions of terrorism lies in the assumption that the terrorists are mere evil and anarchist people. In *Jihad vs. McWorld*, Benjamin Barber addresses this problem by stating: "In his
address to Congress, President Bush was speaking to the world at large when he said. 'You are with us or you are with the terrorists.' Americans… appreciate the impulse to divide the world into good and evil" (20-21). Such an inclination to highlight the boundary between black and white is not only an American tendency; it is rather an archetypal drive in the heart of everyman since the dawn of humanity because "[r]igid boundaries instill competition and keep people and issues apart" (Bruhn 206). In order to understand the problem behind defining terrorism while having such a primal urge, the reader needs to be aware of Plato's theory of forms as discussed in The Republic, and the theory of relativism as the counter-argument to Plato's theory.

In The Republic, Plato attempts at locating the origin of all the things and emotions on Earth. Plato assumes that all objects and concepts that humans know are "only a kind of imitation and shadowy image[s] of a previous affection of the soul" (57). Hence, the earthly objects are mere imitations of the original concepts in the ideal realm that Plato calls "ideas or forms" (238). For example, an earthly table is a mere copy of the idea of 'tableness'. The same principle applies to the earthly good and evil, as Plato considers them reflections of the absolute forms of Good and Evil. Applying Plato's theory to terrorism is apparently simple; the terrorists and their actions are basically distant from the pure form of Good because they supposedly commit 'evil' against other people.
Still, many philosophers disagree with Plato regarding the theory of Forms like the relativists. In *A Companion to Relativism*, Steven Hales defines relativism as "a form of conflict resolution. You and I dispute about whether the wind is hot or cold" (1). Relativism denies the existence of any forms against which actions may be measured, and some philosophical paradoxes prove relativism to be more realistic than the Platonic forms. To give an example, a suicide bomber would be considered by the victims and their families to be an evil person. The measuring mechanism that the victims and their families would base their judgment on is the Platonic Form of Evil because, supposedly, a person who kills other people is evil. Such an interpretation is not good enough for the theorists of relativism because it lacks the terrorists' point of view regarding their actions. The same suicide bomber would be considered a hero by the people who share his/her ideals, as they would measure his action to the Form of Good rather than the Form of Evil because, for them, such a person is a fighter in the name of resistance. In *Harry's Game*, Gerald Seymour summarizes this cultural paradox by stating that "[o]ne man's terrorist is another man's freedom fighter" (61).

Hence, providing an absolute definition of terrorism is a very difficult task, since the concept may or may not include the traditional wars, not to mention that the concept of a 'terrorist' is different from one culture to another. Still, a broad and tentative definition would be useful in
understanding an act of terrorism. Chaliland's definition of terrorism in this regard seems to be the closest description of today's terrorism. Thus, I argue that terrorism in the modern sense, and as used in this thesis, is the use of violence in peacetime, usually through guerrilla warfare, to further the agendas of any movement or group whatsoever. An extensive definition excludes wars and personal perspectives from terrorism. A traditional war, then, is not to be considered as an act of terrorism. Furthermore, the definition avoids the personal points of view regarding terrorism, since it considers the agenda-related violence as a terrorist act, aside from the adjacency of the violent act to the pure Forms of Good or Evil.

According to Chaliland, the Sicarii represent "one of the first manifestations of organized terrorism" in the recorded history. The Sicarii, a Jewish extreme group used terrorism to further their religious agendas (55). Due to the long history of terrorism with its multiple forms, I will use next a simple triangle of terrorism that only includes examples from religious, communist, and environmentalist acts of terrorism.

The history of religious terrorism is quite extensive. Chaliland assumes that "the most notorious instances of contemporary [and ancient] terrorism have a religious dimension" (viii). Most, if not all religions, have used terrorism at one point of their history by the extremists who usually misinterpret their religion's principles.
The prevalence of atheism, especially in the 19th and the early 20th centuries, reduced religion's power over people, which made Friedrich Nietzsche in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* proclaim the shocking proposition that "God is dead" (5) as a moving force in the hearts of many people. The Nietzschean metaphorical death of God necessarily reduced religious terrorism, paving the way for other kinds of terrorism like the communist terrorism, which "predominated in the 1970s and 1980s" (Chaliland 6). Secularism partially affected the Islamic world in the 20th century, since most of the resistance and terrorist movements were nationalistic, rather than religious. The 1980s witnessed a re-establishment of faith in God amongst the Muslims, which gave way to religious terrorism to come to the surface. "[T]he early phase of Palestinian terrorism," to give an example, "was essentially political and secular, only drifting into religiosity in the 1980s, following the Iranian revolution" (Chaliland 6).

The concept of 'holy war' is important to the religious terrorists, since it is the alleged means to reach the eternal bliss that God assumingly promises those who kill in His name. In *Investigating Religious Terrorism and Ritualistic Crimes*, Dawn Perlmutter analyzes the religious terrorist's mind; she assumes that, for the religious terrorists, "salvation cannot be achieved until there is an apocalyptic holy war between the forces of good and evil" (373). All the extremists in the Abrahamic religions believe in this story, and such a mentality is probably the main