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1. Introduction: “Radical Islamic Terrorism” between the Media

- ¹ In mid-July 2016, just three and a half months short of the U.S. presidential election, CNN aired a report on the psychology of politically motivated terror. “Fear,” the report cited a well-known psychiatrist, “is the primary psychological weapon underlying acts of terrorism” (LaMotte). When persistently exposed to a perceived or real threat, the human mind becomes smitten by fear, focused on the subjective menace to our physical integrity. “Your body on constant fear,” the report concluded, “is not a pretty sight” (LaMotte). The immediate background of the CNN story was another terrorist attack that had taken place just one day earlier, this time in the French city of Nice—where a nineteen-ton cargo truck deliberately plowed through crowds of people, killing 86 and injuring 458. The Nice incident was widely perceived as one in a long series of attacks that illustrated the threat of what came to be known as “radical Islamic terrorism” (Trump, “Radical Islamic Terrorism”). In this political rhetoric, fueled during the 2016 elections, the fear of *political extremism* became conjoined with a fear of *Islam* (the religion being blamed in the mainstream media as the driving force behind global terrorism). During this decisive period of global backlash to progressive agendas, the future U.S. president Donald Trump used the catchphrase “radical Islamic terrorism” repeatedly in political speeches, statements, and tweets, thus stoking an already prevalent discourse of religiously motivated fear; Trump employed the phrase effectively in a statement after the shooting at the Orlando nightclub “Pulse” in June 2016, but also in his inaugural address on January 20, 2017 as well as at many other occasions (Beauchamp).¹

- 2 The award-winning journalist and scholar Lawrence Pintak has argued that the slogan “Islam hates us” played a crucial role in the 2016 U.S. presidential campaign (1). “Those three words helped propel Donald Trump to the White House. They provoked jeers from his supporters, fear within the American Muslim body politic and anger across the Muslim world” (Pintak 1).² Trump’s attacks were part and parcel of an orchestrated set of rhetorical invectives against American Muslims, often disguised as attempts at national self-defense. Ted Cruz’s proclamation, “Radical Islam is on the rise,” in August of 2015 fits into this pattern of fearmongering as well as Ben Carson’s statement that “Global jihadists” were “an existential threat to our nation” (qtd. in Pintak 12). While this type of Islamophobic rhetoric in the United States can be traced back to the country’s historical beginnings – in particular, the Algerine hostage crisis in the 1790s and the ensuing anti-Islamic sentiment that gripped the imagination of the early republic (see Brandt; Pintak 3-7)³—it gained momentum after the terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001. In the aftermath of 9/11, Islamophobia became one of the motors of public discourse in the U.S., initiating not only debates on the role of ‘the Other,’ but also contributing to a culture of self-fashioning in which the American nation was positioned in opposition to Islam. Defined as “a complex, much-contested and highly emotive issue” (Allen, “Islamophobia” 376), the fear of Islam was instrumental in tailoring a specter that seemed suitable for usage in a series of different media, from cinema and television to newspapers, books, and internet blogs. Catering to a powerful set of apprehensions and worries, the discourse of Islamophobia has since grown dramatically in proportions, transforming into what can be called *fear of an Islamic planet* (to adapt Michael Warner’s famous phrase *Fear of a Queer Planet* from his 1993 anthology).
- 3 In this essay, I would like to examine the striking power of Islamophobic imagery that reaches across various media, including television, cinema, literature, and the Internet. I will argue that through the dynamic cross-references between these media the rhetoric of Islamophobia can become particularly forceful and unsettling. For this process, I shall use the term *intermedial exchange* to indicate the degree of interdependency between medial discourses.⁴ Images distributed on television may refer back to existing cinematic snapshots and, at the same time, inspire perceptions and representations in literature and on the Internet. According to Irina Rajewsky, intermedial phenomena “take place *between* media. ‘Intermedial’ therefore designates those configurations which have to do with a crossing of borders between media” (46).⁵ I have chosen three novels from the post-9/11 era—Khaled Hosseini’s *The Kite Runner* (2003), John Updike’s *Terrorist* (2006), and Mohsin Hamid’s *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* (2007)—to pinpoint the mechanisms of intermedial exchange that are at work here. All three works employ sophisticated strategies of border crossing that connect various media to establish a conversation on modern-day Islam and its cultural representations.
- 4 In particular, I would like to discuss how the intermedial connection between the discourses of “Islamophobia” and “terrorism” operates. The term “terrorism” was coined as early as the late eighteenth century, connoting the “unlawful use of violence and intimidation, especially against civilians, in the pursuit of political aims” (“Terrorism”). Likewise, the concept of “Islamophobia” is grounded in the realm of fear. First used in 1923, “Islamophobia” indicates a strong fear of the Islamic religion or of Muslims, often regarding either of them as the geopolitical source of terrorist

attacks. As sociological studies have shown, the existence of Islamophobia in a given country does not stand in correlation with the presence of Muslims in that territory, but is nourished through a complex interplay of various media in cultural life (cf. Sayyid and Vakil 319). Far from being rational or logical, Islamophobia is marked by emotions, figuring as “an affective part of social stigma towards Islam and Muslims, namely fear” (Kunst, Sam, and Ulleberg 226).⁶

- 5 In other words, Islamophobia must be seen as a cultural phenomenon, crafted, disseminated, and circulated through medial practices such as television reports, films, literary texts, and the Internet. The specter of Islam is systematically constructed, as Edward Said has convincingly shown in his study on the religion’s medial representation in the Western hemisphere, through a “sheer variety of newspapers, magazines, and radio and television programs... to say nothing of books and pamphlets” (*Covering Islam* 49). Thus conceived, Islamophobia is a systemic component of what Lawrence Pintak calls a “feeding frenzy”—a kind of cultural slugfest that “the media—particularly cable TV” contribute to (13). While media coverage often feeds into—and augments—cultural anxieties, it also engages in the aesthetic illusion that there was any *measurable information value* regarding the realities of Islam. “The curious thing about these [Islamophobic] statements,” Said observes, “is that they are assertions made about Islam, not on the basis of evidence internal to Islam, but rather on the basis of a logic deliberately outside Islam” (*Orientalism* 280). Accordingly, most acts of “covering Islam” in the media constitute “a one-sided activity that obscures what ‘we’ do, and highlights instead what Muslims and Arabs by their very flawed nature are” (Said, *Covering Islam* xxii).
- 6 The rhetoric of “‘us’ vs. ‘them’” lies at the heart of a number of popular TV shows such as *Homeland* (which I will discuss later in this essay), thus contributing to a representation of Islam that seems entrenched in a highly dualistic ideological frame of mind. “Either you are with us, or you are with the terrorists,” one critic summarizes *Homeland*’s implicit message (Zaheer). While purporting to talk about the social reality in crisis-ridden countries such as Afghanistan, Iraq, and Pakistan, such shows primarily reflect the sensitivities of the Western viewer, conjuring up a fictional dichotomy between the “Islamic Other” and the “Western Self.” The rhetoric of Islamophobia, Said concludes, is “more fear and less knowledge about Islam” (*Covering Islam* 43). In other words, we are taught to buy into the logic of Islamophobia through a complex power/knowledge network of social and cultural interactions that involve psychological processes on the part of audiences as well as elements of manipulation and often clear distortion on the part of the addressers in the media. A recent documentation project consequently defines Islamophobia as “a contrived fear... fomented by the existing Eurocentric and Orientalist global power structure” (“Defining Islamophobia”).⁷

2. Fifty Shades of Green: Fabricated Images of a Malevolent Islam

- 7 In the following, I will elaborate on a few textual examples that represent this “Orientalist global power structure.” The phenomenon of a “palpable Islamic threat” that connects representations in various media, such as television, literature, and public speech, can be traced back to Cassius Clay’s conversion to Islam in 1964 and the emergence of the Black Panthers in the late 1960s, with Malcolm X being an especially

striking figure of militant protest.⁸ These diffuse images of a violent Islam have haunted the American public imaginary ever since. Often, the initial sparks capable of setting off a myriad of fears regarding Islam are carefully disguised in everyday practice and encapsulated in visions of “America First” and the ‘values’ of American Christianity. Notably, Trump’s election manifesto *Crippled America / Great Again* (2015/2016) ominously refers to “bad people... coming probably—probably—from the Middle East” (19-20)—a statement that invokes Trump’s famous allegation, made in a television interview in May 2016, that “Islam hates us” (qtd. in Schleifer; cf. Burke; Pintak 1-2).

- 8 In particular, I will demonstrate how interwoven these statements and notions are on the level of intermedial exchange. The infamous scenes of Muslims allegedly celebrating the terror attacks of 9/11 in the streets of Palestine are a good case in point. First aired on CNN and other news stations a few hours after the attacks on September 11, 2001, images of sadistically joyful Muslims have since become an eerie presence in Western culture. The specter of this image is still so powerful in the U.S. cultural imaginary that it no longer requires any proof or verification. What’s more, the image can be freely transferred to connected scenarios and events, using the original motif as a legitimizing point of reference. When asked in November of 2015 at a campaign rally in Birmingham, Alabama, whether he would support the surveillance of mosques in the U.S., presidential candidate Donald Trump gave the following answer: “Hey, I watched when the World Trade Center came tumbling down. And I watched in Jersey City, New Jersey, where thousands and thousands of people were cheering as that building was coming down. Thousands of people were cheering. So something’s going on” (qtd. in Haberman). Although easily exposed as an empty claim, Trump’s reference to the “thousands and thousands of people... cheering as the building was coming down” assumes an eerie, three-dimensional reality in the recipients’ imagination. We can visualize the situation so easily because we have seen it on television (no matter what the actual context of these images might have been or how authentic the footage really was).
- 9 In a central passage from Mohsin Hamid’s thriller *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* (2007), similar imagery of sadistic *schadenfreude* is intimated. The protagonist, Changez, a Pakistani man who has worked in the United States for some time, recollects his own feelings when watching the events of 9/11 on television. “I stared as one—and then the other—of the twin towers of New York’s World Trade Center collapsed. And then I *smiled*. Yes, despicable as it may sound, my initial reaction was to be remarkably pleased” (82-83). The book’s implicit connection between the two scenes, one from television, one from the book, is indicative of the overall aesthetics of *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*. The Cheshire-Cat-like grin on the character’s face in Hamid’s novel seems to reflect the elatedly malevolent grimaces of the dancing Muslims celebrating 9/11 in the aforementioned video. At the same time, audiences are reminded of other stereotypical images of Muslims they have seen on television and in films. Notably, in the Disney movie *Aladdin* (1992), the hero’s homeland is described as utterly barbaric. Aladdin himself and a couple of allied Arab characters speak fluent American English, while the other oriental characters are endowed with ridiculously exaggerated accents, thus being connoted as evil. The original opening song referred to the Middle East as a place where “they cut off your ear if they don’t like your face” (Ward, “From *Aladdin* to *Lost Ark*”).

- 10 For their documentary *Reel Bad Arabs: How Hollywood Vilifies a People*, based on the eponymous book by Jack Shaheen, the directors Jeremy Earp and Sut Jhally have sifted thousands of films and TV shows representing people from the Middle East. According to the filmmakers, Muslim characters are frequently portrayed as single-minded killing machines fighting the “American way of life.” *Reel Bad Arabs* shows that Hollywood is literally obsessed with what the directors call “the three B’s”: *belly dancers*, *billionaire sheiks*, and *bombers*. I would like to add a fourth “B” to this list that functions as a subtype of the ‘bomber’ stereotype: *bearded terrorists*—a concept that has resurfaced in post-9/11 cultural representations of Islam. The archetype of the “Bearded Terrorist” in the Western cultural imaginary is the America-hating militant extremist—an image vaguely modeled after infamous terrorist Osama bin Laden who orchestrated the 9/11 attacks.⁹ The Bearded Terrorist personifies the hyperbolic image of the Orient as a dangerous place of ubiquitous extremist Islamic violence (and, as such, almost devoid of elements of lived experience); as an entirely constructed and artificial figure, this ghost-like creature exemplifies the Orientalist imaginary with its rejection of realistic representation. “[T]he hyperbole,” Said writes, “is... unique to Orientalism. Life itself—politics, literature, energy, activity, growth—is an intrusion upon this (to a Westerner) unimaginable Oriental totality” (*Orientalism* 279).¹⁰
- 11 The popular series *Homeland* (2011–2020), aired on the premium television network Showtime, extensively uses the hyperbole of the Bearded Terrorist. Chided as “the most Islamophobic show on TV” (Zaheer), *Homeland* features cliché characters such as the high-ranking Taliban official Haissam Haqqani, a veteran of the Soviet-Afghan War and fanatic member of Pakistan’s intelligence agency.¹¹ Sporting a beard and assuming the characteristic demeanor associated with the Taliban, *Homeland*’s Haissam Haqqani is marked as the archetypal terrorist character. Notably, the show seems to give “little importance... to getting basic details about the Islamic world right” (Zaheer).¹² Instead, *Homeland* encapsulates countless stereotypes connected to Muslims as “a hidden danger to Americans” (Zaheer).¹³ The show’s Islamophobic agenda is furthered by the suggestion that close physical contact with the region of the Middle East suffices to “infect” a character with the virus of Islamic terrorism. The figure of Marine Sergeant Nicholas Brody (played by Damian Lewis) is a good case in point. When he returns to the United States as a celebrated hero after eight years of captivity in Syrian-held Damascus, Brody is now a terrorist and devoted disciple of al-Qaeda leader Abu Nazir (played by Iranian-American actor Navid Negahban). Based on a successful Israeli TV series (*Hatufim*), *Homeland* takes its cues from a variety of fictional and non-fictional sources, among them the popular Fox series *24* (also developed by *Homeland*’s Howard Gordon and Alex Gansa) and actual terrorist organizations such as the Haqqani network.¹⁴
- 12 To what extent the Orientalist imagery is a product of intermedial exchange becomes evident when one considers the world of spoofs and parodies. Nowhere is the quintessence of stereotypes better expressed (and perhaps debunked) than in the realm of caricatures. Probably the best-known example of such hyperbolic representation is the figure of “Achmed the Dead Terrorist,” a puppet invented in 2007 by stand-up comedian and ventriloquist Jeff Dunham.¹⁵ Achmed the Dead Terrorist, notably one of Dunham’s most successful comedic acts, represents the skeleton corpse of a bungling suicide bomber. Equipped with a comically large turban, bushy eyebrows, and a thick dark beard, Achmed the Dead Terrorist both mimics and critically deflects

Islamophobic notions of the stereotypical terrorist. While Achmed's grotesque appearance is an effigy of visual stereotypes concerning Muslims (as presented in mainstream newspapers and magazines), his thick accent reveals the character's roots in cinematic imagery. One of many YouTube clips of the act was uploaded in January 2015 and received almost 28 million clicks by January 2020 ("Meet Achmed the Dead Terrorist"). The fact that Dunham's sketch became a viral internet sensation (and later a special show for Netflix) shows how deeply interwoven images of Islamic terror are throughout the media, connecting footage from real-life historic events (such as 9/11), films and television series as well as books and internet pictures. Through the puppet's presence on TV, the Internet, streaming platforms as well as live shows, the persona of Achmed the Dead Terrorist has become a vivid example of the interconnectedness of medial forms of representation. With his thick black beard, Achmed provides comic relief (by ridiculing the monstrous and making it comprehensible). At the same time, however, the Achmed dummy is a reminder of the uncanny (albeit somehow tamed) presence of the Bearded-Terrorist specter.

- 13 The ambiguous Pakistani protagonist Changez in Hamid's *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* also sports a beard, as we learn in the book's opening paragraph. "Excuse me, sir, but may I be of assistance?" the character asks us—and the American visitor—in the novel's first passage. "Do not be frightened by my beard; I am a lover of America" (Hamid 1). The narrator's charm offensive is later exposed as a farce; Changez *has*, in his own words, actually tried to "stop America" (Hamid 191), although it remains unclear whether his attempts have materialized in terrorist actions or remained in the vague realm of verbal and political interaction.¹⁶ Not only does the novel conjure up the figure of the Bearded Terrorist that viewers are familiar with from news television, it also reactivates similarly uncanny images from the realm of cinema. Changez's reference to the horror film *Sleepy Hollow* (Hamid 194), in which a headless horseman pursues the inhabitants of a New England small town, creates an eerie connection between the character's own religious belief and the violent act of beheading (exploited in grisly media clips by the terror organization Islamic State).¹⁷ "One cannot but join in the terror of poor Ichabod Crane, alone on his horse" (Hamid 194), the protagonist-narrator beguilingly tells his listener, thus putting the "American"—and the reader of the novel—in the uncomfortable position of being confronted with a brutal assassin. If only to exceed the already increasing suspense, the passage then culminates in isolating "that moment when he [Ichabod Crane] first perceives the presence of the Headless Horseman" (Hamid 194). Here, the novel conjoins the experience of the film character Ichabod Crane and the literary character of the "American," showcasing that both seem to be in a similar situation. This intertextual reference to the world of films ties in with the novel's decisively *cinematic* aesthetic that employs dramatic monologue and autodiegetic narration in a way highly reminiscent of *film noir*'s voice-over technique. This intermedial strategy becomes especially effective at the beginning of chapter 11 when the first-person narrator draws on established images from *film noir* to convey the mood on the streets of Lahore where he and the unnamed "American" are caught in their sinister conversation:

It is odd how the character of a public space changes when it is empty; the abandoned amusement park, the shuttered opera house, the vacant hotel: in films these often feature as backdrops for events intended to frighten. So it is with this market: now that our fellow visitors have dwindled in number to a sporadic and scattered few, it has taken on a rather more ominous edge. (Hamid 176)

- 14 Here, the novel invokes the classical setting of a *film noir*, with its gloomy, menacing scenario, subtly foreshadowing a possibly fatal outcome of events. These intermedial references form an aesthetic pattern throughout the plot of *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*, in the course of which the narrator repeatedly employs images from the realm of cinema to illustrate his viewpoint. When Changez thinks of his first visit to New York City's Upper East Side, which immediately feels like home to him, he informs the reader: "I realized later that I owed my sense of familiarity to the many films that had used it as a setting" (Hamid 56). In another passage, the narrator-protagonist compares the city of Manila—counter-intuitively to his expectations to find something similar to Lahore or Karachi—to "a poorer version of the 1950s America depicted in such films as *Grease*" (Hamid 73).¹⁸
- 15 The novel employs such familiar cinematic hints to visualize Changez's Muslim perspective through the eyes of the Western reader, while also emphasizing his Middle Eastern background. Along this narrative strategy, the novel continuously oscillates between empathy (letting the reader partly adopt the narrator's point of view) and othering (encouraging the reader to despise the narrator's inhuman comments). By casting Islamism "as both the product of and a rebellion against American-led globalization" (Hartnell, "Moving" 341), the novel opens up a dissenting perspective—that of the 'reluctant fundamentalist' who turns against America after a long history of disappointment. Yet, at the same time, it employs a narrative pattern deeply embedded into the mainstream rhetoric of anti-Islamism, invoking the image of the unreliable and potentially threatening Muslim invader who plots against America. While citing these very same stereotypes—"that we Pakistanis are all potential terrorists" (Hamid 209)—towards its dramatic finale, the novel still leaves readers with precisely these images and possibilities.
- 16 Throughout its plot structure, *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* self-consciously reminds us of the power of Islamophobic prejudice; nevertheless, it refrains (in contrast to the film adaptation), by way of its open ending, from fully exposing these assumptions as myths. The book is organized through the narrative framework of a Western perspective that associates its Middle Eastern protagonist with the formulaic "terrorist" who revels in the drama of 9/11 and appears in the shapes of stereotypical characters such as the Headless Horseman and the *film noir* gangster. The novel's Islamic hero Changez, one critic observes, is "made accessible only by being, in fact, Western" (Chan 829). What's more, Changez figures, in Stephen Chan's words, as a "derivative" of the author:
- Hamid's hero/narrator/sole-spokesman-on-behalf-of-other-characters is, like Hamid, a Princeton graduate, a business and financial consultant, and from Pakistan. The entire book, while slowly unveiling the hero's Islamic revulsion with things Western, is a litany of how practised, nuanced, polished and at ease are the hero's Western manners and affectations ... He has no discernible Pakistani or Islamic equivalent habits. (829)
- 17 Changez's lack of a recognizable Pakistani or Islamic background is perpetuated in the novel's composition through a set of intermedial patterns that demarcate the character as a creature of Western films, newspapers, and other literary texts.¹⁹
- 18 Along these lines, John Updike's novel *Terrorist* (2006) also intersects various images from television, cinema, and public discourse to create a scenario in which radical Islam has become an imminent threat. The main character is an American-born Muslim

teenager named Ahmad who lives in the fictional rust-belt town of New Prospect in the state of New Jersey and is recruited by a workmate to detonate a bomb-laden truck in the name of Allah. It turns out, as we learn towards the end of the novel, that Ahmad is actually “a victim... —a fall guy” (Updike 309). Through the focalizing lens of Jack Levy, a Jewish guidance counselor at Ahmad’s high school, we begin to understand that there has been a “sting operation” organized by the Department of Homeland Security to sacrifice Ahmad as a scapegoat. After the scheme has been exposed, Levy conjectures, the Department does not want “the details out in the media” (Updike 309). The novel’s reference to “the media” playing a key role in the staging of the scheme is no coincidence. Life in New Prospect is dominated not only by educational institutions like the Clifton Public Library (where Jack’s wife works as a librarian), but also by the world of films. The town changes in a major way when the Hollywood studio system collapses and “dazzling subversive visions” such as *Midnight Cowboy*, *Easy Rider*, and *A Clockwork Orange* are released (Updike 25). The choice of these films as reference points already foreshadows the later plotlines of subversion and juvenile delinquency, situating them in the context of the Hollywood dream factory.

- 19 How mediated images constantly shape the lives of American citizens becomes obvious in a key scene where the conniving Secretary of Homeland Security follows his vision of “robust screening” (Updike 44) by intentionally manipulating viewers through television. “Destruction,” the Secretary thinks loudly, “is so much easier than construction, and disruption than social order, that the upholders of a society must always lag behind those who would destroy it” (Updike 44). Sent out via television from the Secretary’s “cramped media facility sunk a hundred bombproof feet beneath Pennsylvania Avenue” (Updike 44), the Department’s biased messages are based on the mechanisms of a giant media machinery. The image Updike creates in this scene is that of the media (and especially television) as some massive subterranean power, expanding like a rhizome and connecting all points of social life. Reflected through the viewpoint of the “terrorist” Ahmad, this media bombardment is bound to trigger rage and disillusionment in those who feel wronged by the system. “What else do they give us, the media moguls?” a disenchanted Ahmad asks. Only a few sentences later, the character gives a sobering answer to this question: “The new powers..., the international corporations, want to wash your brains away, period. They want to turn you into machines for consuming—the chicken-coop society” (Updike 172). By having the character denounce “[a]ll this entertainment” (Updike 172–173) and “crap” (Updike 173), the novel creates the impression that its key theme—that of (Islamic) terrorism—is thoroughly embedded into a set-up of medial images. The path of medial discourse, *Terrorist* suggests, resembles the figural “Yellow Brick Road” from the MGM movie *The Wizard of Oz* (1939): behind all the fanciful imagery and colossal façade, there is no actual meaning or truth. When looking at the organizing principle that orchestrates this colossal medial war that fabricates concepts such as “terrorism,” we may come to conclude that there is nothing substantial there. After the red light in the media room of the Department of Homeland Security goes off and the Secretary, who has orchestrated the gigantic sham, is “off the air” (Updike 44), the magic seems no longer active. “He abruptly shrinks in size; now his words will be heard by only the handful of TV technicians and staffers around him” (Updike 44). The obvious analogy to the famous “exposure” scene towards the end of *The Wizard of Oz* pinpoints how cinematic and televisual images control our understanding of what “terrorism” actually is. The specter of terrorism, Updike’s book implies, is no more than a visual

sensation, designed within a communication bubble that interconnects politics (the Department of Homeland Security) and the media (television) through a network of power and knowledge.

- 20 Khaled Hosseini's celebrated novel *The Kite Runner* (2003)—like *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* and *Terrorist*—builds up its images of Islamic terror through cinematic parameters. The book narrates the story of Amir, a rich Pashtun boy, and his friend Hassan, who spend their childhood in the still-undisturbed city of Kabul shortly before the Soviet-Afghan War. The two boys enjoy an innocent life; their favorite pastimes include kite flying and going to the cinema.²⁰ Throughout its epic story which stretches over almost thirty years, *The Kite Runner* emphasizes the close connection between literature and film. Not only is Amir's favorite bookstore symbolically located "near Cinema Park" (Hosseini 21), the novel also accentuates this interconnection on a meta level, suggesting an affinity between its own literariness and the experience of film watching. Thus, *The Kite Runner*'s key theme—that of kite flying—is intertwined in one of the many retrospective interior monologues. "Did you still fly kites and go to the cinema?" (Hosseini 223) a disillusioned Hassan wonders after not having seen his childhood friend in years. Stephen Chan has argued that *The Kite Runner* extensively cites and even mimics key aesthetic patterns of Hollywood cinema. While the novel's first part offers a look at life in Afghanistan through the lens of American film, "[t]he book's second part is all Hollywood. The blond European childhood acquaintance is now a blond Taliban commander. The scrawny hero is required to fight the blond Talib to the death, while the blond Talib's soldiers wait patiently outside the room where the duel occurs" (Chan 830).
- 21 While referring to the genre of American westerns only nominally in its first chapters (Hosseini 28), *The Kite Runner*, in its second half, strategically adopts the generic formula of the western, employing the genre's classic ingredients—adventure, conflict, and redemption. "As a cinematic vision," Stephen Chan maintains, "Hosseini's book just had to become an actual film. The kite-running, with the immense Afghan sky as a backdrop, could never have been resisted by any producer. But that's the book's great fault as well: it was Hollywood even before it was acquired by Hollywood" (832). Following the novel's own internal logic, Amir and Hassan's childhood fantasies of "cowboys and Indians" (Hosseini 27-28) are symbolically replaced in the second part by nightmarish encounters between the bloodthirsty Taliban and Afghan natives. The city of Kabul in the mid-1990s, *The Kite Runner* suggests, has turned into a real-life *Wild West*, where one would constantly run into danger of getting shot by a gunman. "If you went from the Shar-e-Nau section to Kerteh-Parwan to buy a carpet, you risked getting shot by a sniper or getting blown up by a rocket—if you got past all the checkpoints, that was" (Hosseini 215). In these passages, the novel employs various intermedial references to highlight the apparent difference between media coverage and experienced reality. A haunting scene, told by Amir's Afghan taxi driver Farid, recalls his first encounter with the Taliban: "I'd seen them on TV, on the Internet, on the cover of magazines and in newspapers. But here I was now, less than fifty feet from them, telling myself that the sudden taste in my mouth wasn't unadulterated, naked fear" (Hosseini 267).
- 22 Although the novel seems to draw a clear line between fiction and non-fiction, it still uses emotionally charged images that readers are well familiar with. While ostensibly emulating an authentic mode of storytelling linked to autobiographic writing, *The Kite*

Runner equally immerses itself in the genre of the thriller, emphasizing moments of fear and suspense that are effectively interconnected in a dramaturgy of quest, conflict, and final salvation. The various narratives of war and survival are dominated by the notion of “fear of the Taliban” (Hosseini 237). After terror and barbarism have pervaded the country, Hosseini’s Afghanistan has become a living hell, resembling the chaos and pandemonium of a horror film. “[T]he Afghanistan of our youth is long dead. Kindness is gone from the land and you cannot escape the killings ... In Kabul, fear is everywhere, in the streets, in the stadium, in the markets, it is a part of our lives here” (Hosseini 233). The novel thus presents a scenario of Taliban terror that matches the expectations of the viewers. *The Kite Runner*’s plot of friendship and self-discovery is consequently organized around these nightmarish visions. By endowing the events with signifiers that audiences are already familiar with from Orientalist tales of utter ruthlessness, the novel imbues its narrative composition with a sense of authenticity and realness.

3. Sleeping Horror: Invasion of the Bearded Terrorists

- 23 So far, I have argued that the visual composition of three novels by Hamid, Updike, and Hosseini matches the aesthetic strategy of “reformulating Islam” (Said, *Orientalism* 282). By invoking a specter of Islam that corresponds with the medial image of the ideologically deluded Muslim, the books say more about the dominant Western cultural imagination than about the real lives of American Muslims or the lives of Muslims in other parts of the world. Here, the motif of the “sleeper” is especially significant.²¹ A “sleeper,” in this imagery, is a Muslim citizen who has masked his “un-American” and Islamist mindset to conspire against the country. The figure of Changez in *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* is marked as such a “Muslim sleeper.” He lives in America to work for a corporation named “Underwood Samson” (Hamid 6), a thinly-veiled allusion to “Uncle Sam,” but concludes that “America had to be stopped in the interests... of the rest of humanity” (Hamid 190). “Changez”—the name already says it—is a shapeshifter, someone who *changes* his demeanor and perhaps even his personality. At first glance, he seems to be an ordinary man, but his underlying ferocity could break out any time. The name “Changez” is a reference to the Mongolian warrior Genghis Khan, whose troops invaded large parts of Eurasia in the twelfth century. Thus, Hamid’s character also evokes the image of hostile takeover.²² This becomes obvious in another intertextual reference to Joseph Conrad’s classic *Heart of Darkness* (1899)—and, by implication, to Coppola’s Vietnam epic *Apocalypse Now* (1979). In a crucial scene towards the finale of the novel, the character of Changez transforms once again, this time into the evil colonizer Kurtz (from Conrad’s book and Coppola’s movie) who awaits his fate in the shape of his nemesis Marlow. Since the time he was “warned by my comrades that America might react to my admittedly intemperate remarks,” Changez tells us (as protagonist and narrator), “I have felt rather like a Kurtz waiting for his Marlow” (Hamid 208). The impression generated in the end of the novel is that of a potential perpetrator who realizes that he must finally “meet [his] fate when it confronts [him]” (Hamid 208).²³
- 24 If Changez is characterized as an ambivalent sleeper, whose actual potential is only intimated but never fully revealed, Ahmad in Updike’s *Terrorist* seems to match the classic definition of the Muslim sleeper who poses a real and verifiable danger to

society. As foreshadowed already in its title, the novel sends out an unmistakable warning to readers that the main character is a presumptive “terrorist.” Unnoticed in his potential threat to the nation, Ahmad attends the community’s Central High School (Updike 3). Ahmad’s teacher is a fanatical imam named Sheik Rashid who bears an uncanny resemblance to Osama bin Laden, the founder of al-Qaeda and mastermind of the 9/11 attacks. When Ahmad sees him again at the end of the summer,²⁴ Rashid “seems unchanged... though in his beard perhaps a few more gray hairs have appeared, to match his dove-gray eyes” (Updike 232). The beard imagery is significant, since it points to the character’s duplicity and falsehood. “The imam presented half a face, the lower half being *hidden* by a trimmed beard flecked with gray ... Within his beard, his violet lip twitched” (Updike 76, my emphasis). When the imam finally shaves his beard, Ahmad emulates him again. The motive, however, is not a rejection of Islamic radicalism, but its concealment. “[B]earded Muslims, even teen-agers,” a voice-over (presumably that of Ahmad’s religious leaders) tells us, “alarmed the... customers” (Updike 275). As if to confirm the now-hidden threat, the ominous voice-over adds: “Mohammed Atta had shaved, and most of the other inspired martyrs” (Updike 275). The real-life Mohamed Atta,²⁵ one of the ringleaders of the 9/11 attacks, here figures as the prototype of the Muslim sleeper. A seemingly harmless and innocent student who lived in the United States undetected for almost 15 months, Atta had been recruited by Osama bin Laden and trained in an al-Qaeda terrorist camp in Afghanistan.

25 Updike’s Ahmad fits into the cliché of the fanatic Muslim sleeper who believes that all Americans are “[d]evils” that “*seek to take away my God*” (Updike 3). The novel is literally framed by the notion of Islamic terror slumbering in the heart of American society. Thus, the book ends as it begins, with the character Ahmad meditating over “[t]hese devils [who] have taken away my God” (Updike 310). As Michiko Kakutani observes in *The New York Times*, “Ahmad talks not like a teenager who was born and grew up in New Jersey, but like an Islamic terrorist in a bad action-adventure movie” (“John Updike’s ‘Terrorist’”).²⁶ The book’s elliptical structure implements its vision of the Islamist sleeper running amok and threatening his environment in a self-fulfilling prophecy (“these devils seek to take away my God”; Updike 3). “True believers,” Ahmad tells his friend Charlie, “know that Paradise awaits the righteous” (Updike 174). Updike here uses the well-known stereotype of the deluded fundamentalist who aspires to murder ‘non-believers’ since he considers himself superior.

26 In the wake of 9/11, when *Terrorist* and *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* were published, audiences were faced with countless images of “Islamist sleepers” in television programs such as *24* (Fox, 2001–2010) and *Sleeper Cell* (Showtime, 2005–2006). In these shows, Arab Americans were frequently portrayed as hidden threats: next-door neighbors who simultaneously engaged in sinister terrorist plots (cf. *Reel Bad Arabs*). Most recently, the motif of an “immigrant invasion” has been employed in the 2016 presidential campaign, with Donald Trump making his infamous remarks about those “bad people” coming from Mexico. “The countries south of us are not sending us their best people ... They’re coming from all over Central and South America, and they’re coming probably—probably—from the Middle East” (*Great Again* 19–20). Trump’s ramblings on the Middle East bring to mind a wide array of established assumptions regarding Muslims. Notably, Trump cites neither statistics nor hard facts to prove his claim but “headlines and videos [that] tell us what we’re dealing with: rapes, kidnapping, and lining up civilians in order to cut their heads off” (*Great Again* 37).

Trump here taps into a number of clichés about radical Muslims from literary and cultural practice.

- 27 Along these lines of Orientalist imagery, Assef, one of the key characters in Hosseini's *The Kite Runner* is marked as a madman, partly German, partly Afghan, and "[a] sociopath" (Hosseini 34) who rapes boys and later joins the Islamist Taliban in Afghanistan.²⁷ In a key scene of the novel, the outcry "Beard Patrol" (Hosseini 267) is immediately connected with the horrors of Islamic terror inflicted upon the country by the religious zealots. *The Kite Runner* barely defuses this dynamic of fear and constant threat in its aesthetic construction. To the contrary, the novel efficiently plays with these stylistic devices of a "dread of Islam" to increase the power of its narrative.
- 28 Images of a militant Islam teeming with Bearded Terrorists and other Orientalist cliché figures connect to the contemporary climate in the United States with its fear of the "Muslim Other." The current political situation is based on a long tradition of Orientalist thinking that shapes a notion of the national self through disguised hints at the Other. It operates through a rhetoric of adaptation linked to what Said calls "the now traditional Orientalist ability to reconstruct and reformulate the Orient" (*Orientalism* 282). By transforming Islam—or at least aspects of it—into a virtual nightmare, texts across the gamut of the medial scale (from books to films and internet posts) create a specter of terror against which dominant culture must position itself. While pointing to the danger posed by Muslims *abroad*, this rhetoric equally aims at Muslim citizens already living in America, possibly harbingers of an Islamist invasion. The so-called "birther" movement that questioned whether Barack Obama was a natural-born U.S. citizen is a prime example of this paranoid imagination. Donald Trump, who functioned as an unofficial spokesman of the movement, repeatedly raised questions regarding Obama's national origins and, by implication, his religion. This included allegations that Obama was, in fact, a Muslim who preferred the Quran to the Bible—a claim visualized in thousands of memes on the Internet ("Did President Obama Use the Quran to Take His Oath of Office?"). As ridiculous as it may seem at first glance, these images have assumed the status of a plausible truth to many viewers over the years. It is through the intermedial mingling of half-truths spread on mainstream television (for instance, information based on biographical notes such as Obama's childhood in Indonesia and his father's professional background in Kenya) with purely invented narratives (e.g., conspiracy theories dispersed in YouTube clips and social media) that the "fear of an Islamic planet" is charged with its affective efficiency.

4. Conclusion

- 29 To conclude, I have argued that a vast number of texts in contemporary U.S. public discourse address notions of Muslims as "alien" to mainstream American values. These "texts" can be films, newspaper reports, books, internet blogs, or stand-up comedy shows. They do not endorse Islamophobic sentiment or intentionally support such notions or feelings. However, through the power of intermedial exchange, elements of Islamophobia are often conveyed and disseminated subliminally, within the banal context of everyday social practice that accompanies the cultural production of texts. What I have tried to showcase is that "accents of alarm and fear" (Said, *Covering Islam* xxxv) inform—and often dominate—these cultural negotiations. Hamid's thriller *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*, for example, invokes an atmosphere of deep distrust between

the two main characters, a Pakistani professor and an American visitor. While challenging us on some assumptions regarding Islam, the novel also plays with visceral images of threat and incompatibility between Muslims and Christians. In a similar vein, Updike's *Terrorist* employs the signifier of the "Muslim sleeper" to talk about fears of uncontrollable Islamic terror, fueled by already existing discourses in U.S. cultural practice. Hosseini's *The Kite Runner* makes use of a cinematic aesthetics to let readers live through the horrors of Taliban terror in Afghanistan—a fear that mirrors the Western viewpoint of fear and disgust.

- 30 In all three novels, the specter of a militant, anti-Western Islam is negotiated, in which the Muslim characters pose a vital threat to American values (albeit with interspersed components of ambiguity, redemption, and at least partial reconciliation). It is through intermedial exchange, that is, the interaction of film, literature, television, and the Internet, that readers are effectively prepared for such stereotypes. Islam emerges here as a religion at war—with America, in particular, and with life and progress, in general. The continuous reference to images already established by the media is part of what Rajewsky calls the "illusion-forming quality" (54) of intermedial processes. Through this act of illusion-making, analogies are drawn between the "principles, rules of communication, and strategies" (55) of one particular text, such as, for example, a speech by Donald Trump, and those employed by texts from another medium, say, an internet blog, a Fox newscast, or an adventure movie.
- 31 By means of this interaction between the media, fears of Islam are fomented and transformed into a subjective reality to be adopted and appropriated by the recipient. It is worth mentioning that these operational mechanisms between the media would be impossible without a social practice that enables the discourse of Islamophobia to continue. Through social media (Facebook, Twitter, etc.), key elements of the discourse are isolated and magnified, enhancing an already-pervasive visual practice (television, cinema, etc.). This cultural fantasy of Islam becomes active through elements of intermedial exchange, burning itself into the dominant imagination and growing into a monster, an existential threat that is none. Thus conceived, the fear of an Islamic planet is no more than a fiction turned into a perceived fact through the power of the media.

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NOTES

1. Other examples, in which Trump referred to "Radical Islamic Terrorism," include an interview on the French presidential elections in April 2017, and a July 2017 address in Poland. He also used the phrase "Islamic terrorism" in his 2015 campaign book *Crippled America* (that was retitled into *Great Again: How to Fix Our Crippled America* after Trump had won the elections) (*Great Again* 13).
2. Pintak acknowledges the broad cultural and political background that enabled the emergence of this type of fear: "Trump's words reflected a simplistic and distorted worldview, but the fault did not lie with him alone. Donald Trump was the almost-inevitable product of a long history of misguided politics and misleading assumptions about Islam" (1).

3. “Muslims,” Pintak writes in his study *America & Islam*, “were the first enemies of the new republic ... In the years after independence, the Barbary pirates were ravaging American shipping along the North African coast, prompting Thomas Jefferson to order a navy be built to mount what would be the first of many U.S. military interventions in the Middle East” (6).
4. In my usage, the term “exchange” refers to the interaction and interconnection between distinct levels of cultural practice, in this case, literature, television, and cinema. Thus, my reading is informed by a New Historicist and poststructuralist understanding of cultural processes of dialogue across the media and across various text types. Similar to the concept of “circulation,” the idea of *cultural exchange* owes a lot to Stephen Greenblatt’s theory of “restless oscillation” (Greenblatt 8) between history and textuality, in the process of which “practical strategies of negotiation” come into effect.
5. In all quotes, the italics are in the original. In the event that italics have been added, it will be noted.
6. Since Islamophobia operates as “a fear or dislike of Islam that by consequence extends to all Muslims without differentiation” (Allen, “Islamophobia” 376), it exploits, by definition, a set of cultural stereotypes which are emboldened by the media and other “communities of interpretation,” as Edward Said puts it (*Covering Islam* 36-68).
7. Chris Allen, a sociologist at University of Leicester’s Centre of Hate Studies, has examined the phenomenon of Islamophobia in a number of groundbreaking publications—e.g., *Islamophobia* (2010) and *Reconfiguring Islamophobia* (2020). Allen places special emphasis on the global impact that Islamophobic attitudes disseminated in the Western media have on the lives of Muslims in different countries. Citing a much-publicized UN report, he notes: “[G]iven the marked increase in Islamophobia since the turn of the century, if immediate action was not taken, Islamophobia would pervade the lived experience of an ever-growing number of Muslims around the world” (Allen, *Reconfiguring Islamophobia* 1). Other scholars have cautioned to take into account the nuances that may come into play in social practices of Islamophobia. In *Islamophobia Islamophilia*, Andrew Shyroch draws attention to the fact that to many recipients there is a perceived “rationale” behind their fear of Islam, rooted in the alarming numbers of medially represented threats linked to persons of Muslim faith (9).
8. Karen Armstrong argues that “we have a long history of Islamophobia in Western culture that dates back to the time of the Crusades” (17). In recent decades, representations of Islam as a radical political movement (symbolized by Malcolm X’s and Cassius Clay’s much-publicized conversions to the Muslim faith) contributed to a resurgence of Islamophobic sentiment. This development has been exacerbated since the 1980s and especially in the aftermath of 9/11, when Islam became widely associated in popular culture with a “violent creed” (see Kabir 11-30, 15).
9. Films employing the stereotype of the “reel bad Arab” include Steven Spielberg’s *Raiders of the Lost Ark* (1981), David Cameron’s *True Lies* (1994) and Edward Zwick’s *The Siege* (1998). In a famous scene from *Lost Ark*, Indiana Jones, on one of his journeys into the “Orient,” is faced with a sable-rattling Muslim whom he abruptly shoots in the head. Similarly ridiculous figures can be found in Cameron’s *True Lies*, in which a group of “Arab terrorists” is paraded as caricatures of Western projections of the Middle East. Zwick’s *The Siege* cuts between scenes of praying Muslims and images of exploding bombs, conjuring up the specter of “Muslim terror” (cf. Landes).
10. Through the act of hyperbolic exaggeration, the “tension between ‘Islam’ as a transcendent, compelling Oriental fact and the realities of everyday human experience” (Said, *Orientalism* 278) is at once highlighted and playfully erased. As a device in fiction (especially when deploying realistic modes of storytelling), the hyperbole may no longer be recognized as a rhetorical figure, but serves to replace lived social practice by a mere specter that is now perceived as a gruesome reality (just as the image of a bearded Osama bin Laden has come to function as a distorted proxy of Muslim experience).

11. The character of Haissam Haqqani, who is played by Turkish-born German actor Numan Acar, appears in season four of *Homeland* in 2014; the role is reprised in *Homeland*'s eighth and final season.
12. In his pungent critique of *Homeland*, Mohammad Zaheer reveals a number of discrepancies and factual mistakes. "Arab characters have been given Persian names," and Pakistan's capital Islamabad is one-sidedly depicted as a "grimy hellhole and war zone" (Zaheer).
13. The character of Abu Nazir in *Homeland*'s seasons 1 and 2 stands out as the epitome of Islamic fanaticism. Functioning as "the show's central nemesis" ("Hollywood's Terrorist"), Abu Nazir is marked as an utterly destructive and vicious figure, being an al-Qaeda "terrorist mastermind" ("Hollywood's Terrorist") driven by impulses of vengeance against the United States that had organized a drone attack killing his son.
14. The figure of Haissam Haqqani is designed as a reference to the real-life Haqqani network, an Afghan guerilla group that deployed asymmetric warfare against U.S.-led NATO forces and the government in Afghanistan. The group pledged allegiance to the Taliban in the mid-1990s and later became affiliated with the emergent terror network of al-Qaeda (see Ressler and Brown).
15. According to a *Forbes* list from July of 2009, Jeff Dunham was the third highest-paid comedian in the United States in that year after Jerry Seinfeld and Chris Brown (see Rose). Dunham's show *Spark of Insanity*, first taped at the Warner Theater in Washington, D.C. in 2007, became an instant sensation, taking the artist onto a two-year tour through the USA and Europe with 386 venues worldwide.
16. In this closing section of the novel, Hamid uses the device of the unreliable narrator to reinforce a sense of suspense and keep his readers in limbo regarding Changez's true identity. "What exactly did I do to stop America, you ask?" the narrator mockingly asks the American (and, by implication, the reader), "Have you really no idea, sir?" (Hamid 191). When the novel returns to this question ten pages later, we are still not given a satisfactory answer. Changez's admission that all he can do is to "attempt an answer, even though it may well leave you disappointed" (Hamid 210) is vested in images that corroborate the impression of obscurity surrounding the character. Not only does he begin his explanation with the ambiguous phrase "as we come to the end of our time together" (Hamid 210), the ensuing account of his protest against America reveals more in intimations than factual descriptions, suggesting, for example, that he "was perhaps more forceful on this topic than I intended" (Hamid 207). Notably, Changez's tale is interconnected in these passages with references to images produced by "international television news networks" (Hamid 207), which underlines the novel's aesthetics of intermedial exchange.
17. Although the Islamic State started its public beheadings about seven years after the first publication of Hamid's novel, there is still a strong aesthetic connection between these two cultural "texts." A reader of *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* in 2014 or 2015 would easily connect the novel's references to the motif of beheading with the gory executions filmed and screened by IS which went viral during these years. This subliminal interconnection underscores the sheer power of intermedial exchange, with images from literary texts eerily corresponding to images disseminated through websites and social media forums. Hamid's cross-reference to Washington Irving's gothic short story "The Legend of Sleepy Hollow" (the title incorrectly used as a reference point to Tim Burton's film) underlines the importance of intermedial allusions within the novel's aesthetic structure.
18. The novel consistently accentuates this interconnection between literature and the media industry. In one passage, the narrator Changez reminisces how he travels with his friend Jim to Santiago de Chile where he meets the chief editor of a publishing company. When asked "What do you know about books?" Jim replies: "I specialize in the media industry" (Hamid 160). It is only then that the narrator decides to reveal his family's connections to literary art ("My father's uncle was a poet ... Books are loved in my family" 161). Referring to the novel's fascination with

acts of storytelling and writing (Changez's girlfriend is a writer as well), Mohamed Salah Eddine Madiou has interpreted *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* as a work of metafiction whose aesthetics is based on intertextual and self-referential strategies of composition (271ff).

19. "The hero is Islamic," Chan concludes, "but there is nothing Islamic about him except some brief rhetoric related to the 9/11 attacks on the New York where he used to live" (830).

20. The characters' affinity with U.S. American cinema is highlighted early in the novel. While growing up in the heart of predominantly Islamic Afghanistan, Amir and Hassan become fond of American westerns. "We saw our first Western together, *Rio Bravo* with John Wayne, at the Cinema Park, across the street from my favorite bookstore" (Hosseini 28). By accentuating the aesthetic proximity between film and literature, the novel augments the impression of an exchange between the media, both on the narrative and on the aesthetic level (cf. Hosseini 88, 229).

21. The "sleeper" is a crucial motif in the invasion rhetoric of cinema and literature, going back to the genre of science fiction films of the 1950s. In movies such as Don Siegel's *Invasion of the Body Snatchers*, seemingly innocent U.S. citizens turn out to be messengers of an alien nation that attempts to infiltrate and colonize America. Born out of the paranoid climate of McCarthy's "red scare" America, the gist of these films is revived in productions from the 1970s and 80s, such as Ridley Scott's *Alien*, in which evil forces literally "snatch" the bodies of Americans to breed into U.S. society and extinguish the basis of U.S. culture.

22. Notably, the movie version, directed by Indian filmmaker Mira Nair, resolves some of the ambiguities contained in the novel. While the book plays with the notion of an actual danger emanating from Changez, the film exposes its protagonist as a victim of totalitarian power structures that privilege a dominant western "truth" over the subjugated realities of Muslim lives.

23. What turns this ending into a kind of twist is the fact that the narrator (Changez) finally transforms into the narratee (Kurtz) who meets the actual narrator (Marlow). In contrast to the movie version, which directs the viewer into a position of identification with Changez-the-victim, the book leaves space for an interpretation in which the threat of Changez is not just imagined, but real.

24. The time frame indicated in this passage is a reference to the 9/11 attacks which also took place at the end of the summer (on September 11, 2001).

25. I am using the spelling "Mohamed Atta" here to refer to the real-life Egyptian hijacker and co-architect of the 9/11 attacks, in which four commercial airplanes were commandeered to destroy various civilian and military targets in the United States; in the novel *Terrorist*, however, he is spelled "Mohammed Atta" (Updike 275).

26. Anna Hartnell takes a slightly more favorable stance towards Updike's book. While criticizing the author for his "inability to fully acknowledge the communal aspects of Islam" ("Violence" 497), she also lauds *Terrorist* as an "important intervention that occasions a reflection on the relationship between religion and violence" ("Violence" 478). "Updike's decision to tackle the perspective of the 'perpetrator' is a courageous attempt to pull away from the prevalent cultural tendency to privilege the category of 'trauma' in treatments of 9/11" ("Violence" 478).

27. The sepia-colored cover of the first edition of Hosseini's novel, published with Bloomsbury in 2003, anticipates this theme of invasion. The image shows the rear image of a little boy in shorts and a t-shirt—presumably the author's fictional alter ego in the narrative universe of the novel—who approaches the entrance of a house to peek into the building's interior, suggesting a sense of vulnerability and defenselessness. By portraying the boy from behind, the book creates an aura of exposure and imminent danger, to be revealed as radical Islamic fundamentalism.

ABSTRACTS

The post-9/11 era is marked by an unusual rise of Islamophobic rhetoric that permeates the U.S. cultural imaginary and connects a wide range of medial discourses from literature and cinema to television and the World Wide Web. Orientalist stereotypes have informed Hollywood blockbusters and television series as well as acclaimed novels such as Khaled Hosseini's *The Kite Runner* (2003), John Updike's *Terrorist* (2006), and Mohsin Hamid's *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* (2007), not to mention Donald Trump's speeches and writings on "radical Islamic terrorism." My essay argues that contemporary public discourse in the U.S. addresses an array of viral images, portraying Muslims as essentially "alien" to mainstream American values. The fears of a potential—or already ongoing—"Islamization of America" are kept alive through continual interaction between texts and images from hegemonic visual discourse, involving what I call "intermedial exchange" between literary texts, films, television shows, magazines, newspapers, and the Internet.

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Keywords: Intermedial Exchange, Islamophobia, *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* (Hamid), *Terrorist* (Updike), *The Kite Runner* (Hosseini), (Islamic) Terrorism, Donald Trump

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