

# Discourse Analysis: New Language and New Attitude towards Yemen in Contemporary British Novel; Salmon Fishing in Yemen as an Example

Mubarak Altwaiji<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Northern Border University, Saudi Arabia

Correspondence: Mubarak Altwaiji, Assistant Professor, Northern Border University, Saudi Arabia. E-mail: mubarak2006ye@gmail.com

Received: April 16, 2019 Accepted: June 12, 2019 Online Published: July 12, 2019

doi:10.5539/ijel.v9n4p326 URL: <https://doi.org/10.5539/ijel.v9n4p326>

## Abstract

In the critical work on European orientalism, the European scholars approach post 9/11 British neo-orientalist discourse with a totalizing view of representation; a part of the dominant misrepresentation. This study examines issues related to Yemen in Paul Torday's novel *Salmon Fishing in the Yemen* (2007). In *Salmon Fishing*, Torday uses fragmented forms of narrations for his new approach of representation. He uses newspapers, interviews, emails, news articles, document transcripts, diary entries, personal interviews, scientific reports and memoranda as narrative techniques to re-conceptualize the Yemeni people. This study investigates the British political and cultural attitudes towards Yemen and the improvement in the representation of Yemen in post 9/11 British discourse by focusing on the fissures between classic orientalism and neo-orientalism. In the analysis of *Salmon Fishing*, the study scrutinizes the views of Ralph Emerson and Georg Lukács which are usually associated more closely with studies on representations. The study manifestly identifies the harmony, cooperation and mutual understanding between the east and the west in post 9/11 British discourse on Yemen.

**Keywords:** British novel, improvement, neo-orientalism, Yemen, Yemenis

## 1. Introduction

The claim that, in most circumstances, discourses and rhetoric on nations are based on substantive observations of actualities, has been subject to many critical inquiries and is generally criticized (Mansbridge, 1999; Dyer, 2002; Sajed, 2019; White, 1980). Miller argues that writers repeat words and signs in narrative discourses to make sense of the world we live in: "Literature makes exorbitant and large-scale use of the propensity words possess to go on having meaning even in the absence of any ascertainable" (2002, p. 19). Classifying nations by race, colour or gender has continued for centuries and still remains close to the surface in common consciousness and contemporary studies. Contemporary narratives on nations are inextricably linked to old representations and do not contrast their historical realities. The voluminous images on the orientals, the Negros, the Latinos and the backward Indians are classic representations of nations that are created for imperial agendas and are still repeated with grand political purposes. Emerson says there is history for everything including words and images: "as we go back in history, language becomes more picturesque" and images and representations "approach each other in passages of the greatest eloquence and power" (1960, p. 21). The existence of a link between old and new representations often rests on the supposition that writers are keen and motivated to share the peculiarities of other nations with the readers with whom they share political and cultural affiliations.

In the last few decades, critical studies in social sciences and humanities have stripped ideality and neutrality from representation and turned it into a suspicious term and not practically proven: received with dubious reading, it continues, as it were, usually politically dominated. In *Nature*, Emerson refers to repetition in the use of words as a weakness of the word brought by the interlinked terminology of 'corruption of the language' and 'corruption of man' which makes words lose their creativity, effectiveness and sincerity: "corruption of man is followed by the corruption of language... Wise men pierce this rotten diction; so that picturesque language is at once a commanding certificate that he who employs it, is a man in alliance with truth and God (1960, pp. 33-34). For example, the majority of the images on the third world nations in the last two centuries are produced in the west especially in the USA, Britain and France; a fact that makes it easy to differentiate between intrinsic and

extrinsic intentions of the westerners to produce new narratives on the east using observational images and texts. Emerson's concept of '*corruption*' holds considerable appeal to readers of modern orientalism. Considering Emerson's lament for losing the truth in words, it has been tempting to argue that images are always a perfect projection because writers' perceptions are based on assumptions about their subjects. This article addresses the personal logic and the historic context of representations in the twenty-first century which have become not only a media-based discourse but also an index that can, I argue, helps us better understand what old perceptions and media do and what they are. Jones is one of the American writers who represents Islam and the Muslims after 9/11. In the *Afterward of The Jewel of Medina* for example, Jones explicitly tells us that this kind of discourse emphasizes the notion of 'writer is not alone', i.e., narratives have their roots in classic discourses and media:

... when the U.S. sent troops into Afghanistan, I began hearing news about the reversals for women there under the Taliban, how girls were no longer allowed to go to school and women were required to wear *burqas*... I was disturbed by these reports and... I knew very little about Middle Eastern culture or Islam at the time (2008).

## 2. Literature Review

British writers like Daniel Defoe, Christopher Marlowe, William Shakespeare, John Webster, and John Ford are the first in the west to write on Arabs and Muslims. Very long time ago in 1719, *Robinson Crusoe* advocated the British eighteenth century superiority and hegemony over the whole orient. When Crusoe escapes slavery from the hands of the Turks, he compels the Muslim boy, Xury, to swear by Mahomet to be faithful to him: "Xury, if you will be faithful to me, I'll make you a great man; but if you will not stroke your face to be true to me"—that is, swear by Mahomet and his father's beard" (Defoe, 2009, p. 22). Defoe uses Mahomet instead of Mohammed; an image that "changed very little from generation to generation" (Ridley, 2019, p. 6). Reeves and Stewart note that British literature has a "stubbornly biased and consistently negative outlook" in which images of Muhammad "bear no resemblance to the Muhammad familiar to Muslims, seen by them as the noblest of men, kindest of husbands and fathers, most faithful and forgiving of friends, who humbly accepted the Europe" (2003, pp. x–xi). Representation of Mohammed leads to several conclusions such as Mohammed is not a messenger of God but an inventor of religion: "Muhammad, with the sword in one hand and the Koran in the other, erected his throne on the ruins of Christianity and of Rome" (Gibbon, 1932, p. 56). Quinn lists the most frequent images of Prophet Mohammed in the British writings as follows:

They reoccur in subsequent centuries with costume changes appropriate to the age and can be classified as: 1) the Prophet as Antichrist, heretic, or Satan. 2) the prophet as fallen Christian, corrupted monk, or Arab Lucifer. 3) the prophet as sexual deviant, polygamist, and charlatan. 4) the Prophet as wise easterner, holy person, and dispenser of wisdom. The final image of the Prophet as sage was infrequently employed, and until recent centuries, appeared only fleeting (2008, p. 24).

An Arab in the British literature is an elastic subject that extends "from a stone representing a man to a novel representing the day in the life" (Mitchell, 1990, p. 13). With novel in the forefront to represent Arabs, different images had been produced in which truth is not as important as their perception and recognition by the reader. British novel's active involvement in literary contribution to orientalism has always been the cultural part of building the national identity, defining the autonomy of the British literary academia and an engagement in the political issues of the east. The ability of this genre in representing the diverse social, political and economic aspects of the east can also have an unquestionable impact on readers and lead to enormous changes in their beliefs and thoughts. Dijk offers an interdisciplinary approach in *Discourse, context and cognition* in which he argues that socio-cognitive approach to discourse "makes explicit many properties of text and talk that are now taken for granted" (2006, p. 161). An important part of the Dijk's socio-cognitive approach is the 'mental models' that govern the relationship between images, text and process of production of meanings through which readers "may falsely 'recall' information from discourse that was never explicitly mentioned in such discourse" (2006, p. 170). These mental models do not only receive texts as an individualistic property of the writer but also as a true piece of information which reflects reality that shaped the whole versions of European discourse mainly British and French orientalisms.

For centuries, British literature dominated the orientalist academia. Though postcolonial orientalist discourse witnessed a notable decline for the last five decades, it, however, continued to be preoccupied "with ancestry and descent, with tracing the genealogy of the present in the past, and with discovering or creating links to a formative history" (Gilmour, 1993, p. 28). In Faulkner's words "the past is not dead. It's not even past" (1975, p. 80). The implication is that postcolonial British novel continues to be an important element in defining the national identity and a creative approach for establishing a strong image of the state abroad. It continues to play the role of "a

determinant and also a manifestation of national identity” which “can contribute to a sense of national identity and also occasionally act as state-of-the-nation pronouncements” (Dinnie, 2008, p. 121). In British novel of this era, the historical conflict between the Islamic east and the Christian west has been a catalyst for literary works that facilitates a teasing out of epistemological issues related to this academia. Therefore, much of the sound and fury in postcolonial British orientalism revolves around images which explain the earliest ‘clash of cultures’—in which relations between Europe and Arabia were governed (Ward, 2018, p. 10). These images of Arab antagonists stick firmly to the popular stereotypes of evil, wealthy, backward and dangerous Arabs; images that are used interchangeably in spite of the linguistic difference between them.

### 3. Methodology

This study of contemporary English novel makes reference to many writers whose contributions enriched neo-orientalist academia in general. Based on various examples from theoretical and historical backgrounds, this study will use the analytical approach to various issues in the text. It progresses through explaining how modern British novel on Yemen flourishes again and, how words function significantly as a vehicle of transmitting nation's interests. The connection between word, writer, and meaning, it is commonly agreed, is a technique through which power of text operates. Therefore, in order to analyse the power of text, special attention is given to theoretical debates about cultural representations that have been present in the recent decades. This is, too, a worrying development for what is more at stake than logic in modern representation is not the represented subject but the scholastic approach to it. In literature, it is always reassuring to consider narratives as a prosaic entity of history in which representations reveal less about the nature and the experience of the people than they do for their own worlds of superiority and hegemony. Instead of presenting authentic descriptions of the present, novel, according Lukács presents the past as “the concrete precondition of the present” because “the writers do not present seamless or single-voiced arguments. But they affirm connections” (1981, p. 18). Novels of hegemony (with no exception) produce images based on the past as the legitimate authority of the present which may call into question whether readers conceptualize the connections and how to deal with them, adequately.

### 4. British Neo-Orientalist Discourse

9/11 terrorist events have been a turning point in the twenty-first century British scholarly representation of the modern orient; the attacks and the western backlash have sharpened the existed images and instigated a new reign of east-west relationship marked by loss of credibility and trust. Nash (2005) defines British neo-orientalism as a “flexible interpretations of western imperialism” with “the frame of colonial and postcolonial discourse” that “allows for a continuing debate about the West’s relations with the Islamic world” (p. 47). British neo-orientalism can be distinguished from classic orientalism in the following trends: firstly, it focuses on representing cultural and economic bonds with the old colonies and secondly, it enforces the neo-liberal agendas in a globalized world, at least at the Anglophone-world level. Novel has the ability to represent the cultural and political aspects of the oriental life; habits, food, familial relations, appearance, marriage, language, religion and behaviours. These trends are the integrally common features that mark most of the modern British narratives enunciating attitudes, opinions and perceptions of the Arabs in British writings. Of course, Yemen is a part and parcel of the orient and the volumes of neo-orientalist representations are applicable on it.

British literature has produced a considerable writing on Arabs since 9/11. Torday’s *Salmon Fishing* (2007), Rimington’s *At risk* (2004), Cleave’s *Incendiary* (2005) and Rushdie’s *Shalimar the clown* (2005) are good examples of novels inspired by post 9/11 western media. This study takes Torday’s *Salmon Fishing in the Yemen* as an example of English novel in which images about Yemen are introduced as a source of knowledge for the western reader in the modern time. *Salmon Fishing* is the first novel of Paul Torday who has written five more novels to date. It is an account of issues related to the nation’s life and culture. It is also a perfect description of east-west reconciliation and mutual understanding. Torday’s *Salmon Fishing* is a story of a very rich Yemeni Sheikh, Muhammad ibn Zaidi, who enjoys fishing in Scotland where he owns a house. His interest in fishing inspires him to create a similar environment in Yemen, in Wadi Aleyn, Haraz, a hot environment, for growing salmon fish in order to improve the people’s income in Yemen. The Sheikh introduces his idea to Harriet Chetwode, an English lady who cares for his properties. Harriet requests the assistance of Department of Fisheries in the British government represented by the department’s most knowledgeable fisheries expert, Dr. Alfred Jones to prepare a plan for the project and make it work. Jones instantly dismisses the idea and after a long discussion with Harriet and some political pressure he accepts to reconsider. The people in all Arab countries have conflicting views on the idea of the project; some considered it a promising project and some had doubts about it because the western climate and Yemen climate are incomparable:

There are many who think that the introduction of salmon into a desert is neither a realistic nor an economic proposition. Others however state that the project is being supported by a leading fisheries scientist from the UK and being boosted by the sale of salmon fishing permits (Torday, 2007, p. 87).

*Salmon Fishing in the Yemen* is a political satire about mutual understanding, harmony and reconciliation between nations. The novel is written in different fragments; the writer starts writing it in the form of emails, then he loosens the narrative writing style to include news articles, television and newspaper interviews, document transcripts and memoranda. Devotion and sincerity of the salmon fishermen express possibilities of demolishing boundaries between the nations and cultures despite the negative and dark heritage. *Salmon Fishing* is a British non-political dialogue with the Yemen. This project of salmon is inspiring, because the three people and the salmon project can act as a bridge between the two cultures. The Prime minister, Jay Vent and his assistant, believe in solving the problems between east and west:

**Jay Vent [Prime Minister]:** You know, Andy, sometimes someone comes up with an idea that is improbable but truly, truly heroic. I think that's what we've got here, with my old friend Sheikh Muhammad. he has a vision.

**AM:** A lot of people, perhaps not knowing enough about it, would describe it as more of a hallucination than a vision.

**JV [turns to camera]:** Yes, Andy, maybe to some people it does sound a little crazy, but let's not be afraid of thinking outside the box. My government has never stepped away from challenging new ideas, as you know. You know, Andy ... the Yemen salmon project is rather a special project that I feel deserves some sympathy and encouragement (Torday, 2007, p. 106).

*Salmon Fishing* is a response to many political issues; in addition to 9/11 it also deals with the British interventions in Iraq and Afghanistan. It is a record of the views of the Britishers who cooperated with the United States to invade Iraq. Vent says: "We're pretty much committed to going down a particular road in the Middle East ... and it would be difficult to change that very much without people beginning to ask why we'd started down it in the first place" (2007, p. 50). Torday has been too specific about the political bureaucracy of the subsequent governments; his vision is compelling because as the narration progresses the readers truly believe in the wrong decisions of the UK against Iraq: "the UK now appears to be shifting its political ground" (2007, p. 88). The idea of *Salmon Fishing* is that understanding between nations is not far-fetched. And, to achieve this goal, the novel has a confluence of factors: the salmon fish; the typical fish in Europe, Yemen, prime minister's different attitudes towards Arabia; the British fisheries expert and fishing aficionados and most importantly the mutual passion for understanding. According to Koban *Salmon* has:

an unusual triumvirate of themes that, by hook or by crook, seem to gel: the world of British and Yemeni politics merging peacefully—but sometimes problematically—together; the love affair between Fred (and fisherman in general) with salmon and the pastime of fishing; and finally the other love affair that Fred has with Harriet (2012).

*Salmon Fishing* is a positive progress in the representation of Arabs in English novel and oriental studies in Europe. There is no linguistic evidence in the novel to support classical arguments that Arabs are misrepresented in English novel. The Prime Minister's advisor exhorts Jones to succeed in the task because his government needs to create positive images in the middle east through this connection: "British policy in the region now appears to be looking for ways to take cultural and sporting images, likely in an effort to soften the impact of recent military actions in southern Iraq" (Torday, 2007, p. 88). Yemenis are as equal to the westerners. The Yemeni Sheikh stands strong in the face of challenges posed by Islamic radical groups; his faith, enthusiasm and money overcome all the hindrances to achieve an economic project for the society. If anyone else thinks that the project has no long-term viability in Yemen, Sheik believes that his faith in the project is a necessity. He tells Jones that "without faith, there is no hope. Without faith, there is no love"; such expressions are admired by Jones who lost his faith in church (2007, p. 291). The Prime Minister's director of communications, Peter Maxwell, embraces a new understanding of the east and shows a strong commitment to make the project see the light. He tells the Sheikh: "We think this project is an excellent idea, Sheikh, very imaginative and innovative, and the prime minister is delighted you are using British engineers and scientists to achieve your goals" (2007, p. 143). A strong determination to achieve understanding between east and west in *Salmon Fishing* has never been seen in any of post 9/11 British novels. In addition to Yemen and the salmon project, there are the British Parliament, the faithfulness, the secularism and love; Torday brilliantly manages to mix these elements and accomplishes a seemingly impossible task. Dr. Jones, a secularist, is a man of science who is engrossed in research and scientific publications, and Sheikh Zaidi, a man of religiosity and faith in God explain this determination. The extent to

which the former listens to the latter presents a new stream in British neo-orientalism:

We very much want to be a part of it, so that the Yemen nation can understand that we British are a sympathetic ally, pro-democracy and pro-fishing, ready to share our technology to help aspiring Yemeni anglers fulfil their dreams (2007, p. 143).

*Salmon Fishing* is a neo-orientalist discourse introduced through a clever juxtaposition of satirical narrative techniques and a combination of images on the British friendly politics, mutual understanding and Arab nationalism. Unlike classical orientalist discourses, *Salmon Fishing* offers ripples of mild criticisms of the Yemeni groups who object to the development of the country; these criticisms target the division of the society into social castes and classes especially the untouchable Yemeni caste Akhdam: "In our country we too have many different ranks but everyone accepts these ranks without question. I am a sheikh from the *sayyid* class. My advisers are *cadis*. My estate workers at home are *nukkas* or even *akhdam*... Here in the UK this is not the case. No one seems to know what class they belong to" (2007, p. 54). The British government, however, believes that working together with all Yemenis on such cultural project will bring good news from the Arab world: "Look, with all this bad news coming out of the rest of the Middle East, isn't this a potential good news story?... Isn't this a good news story about Anglo-Yemeni cooperation?" (Torday, 2007, p. 14381). The Yemeni mystical Sheikh is presented as a role model for Yemenis; his national project and the friendship he built with the Brits will be a micro model for modern Yemeni foreign relations: "my countrymen-*sayyid*, *nuqqa* and *jazr* and all classes and manner of men-will stand on the banks side by side and fish for the salmon... their natures, too, will be changed. They will feel the enchantment of this silver fish" (2007, p. 56). He will spare no expense to make this project happen. He says: "It would be a miracle of God if it happened. I know it. My money and your science, Dr Alfred, would not alone achieve any such thing. But just as Moses found water in the wilderness, if God wills" (2007, p. 56).

## 5. Conclusion

Torday's *Salmon Fishing* is not about a European fisheries agency or enterprise; it is a British neo-orientalist manifestation of a new discourse, images and political attitudes. *Salmon Fishing*'s idea of farming is an unconvincing western project in the desert of Arabia and is mocked by the media and opposition parties because it is quite difficult to grow the clod-natured fish in the hot environment of Arabia. *Salmon Fishing*, however, is a literary demonstration of a change in relationships between the east and the west that becomes as warm as the relationship between Alfred and Harriet who fall in love at the site of the salmon project in Yemen. It is a cultural negotiation and commitment to new beginnings; a fact that holds the novel's narrative techniques together as the novel is told through various unconnected forms such as emails, diary entries, newspapers article, interviews, scientific reports etc. The cultural relationship that the novel builds through the British government and its policy towards Yemen reflects the fact that the two nations are keen to start a new era. In the Yemeni tribal side, too, though the reader comes across a number of difficulties such as the terrorist threats and the nasty behaviours of a group of tribesmen, the novel ends with a hope of a great success. At the end of the novel, the salmons swim up and down the waters of the Wadi. The common goal of both the Yemeni citizen and the British government is finally achieved and the sheikh enjoys fishing.

## Acknowledgment

The author acknowledges the financial support of this study under the grant no. EAR-2018-1-8-F-7826 from the Deanship of Scientific Research at Northern Border University, Arar, KSA.

## References

- Defoe, D. (2009). *Robinson Crusoe*. Maryland: Serenity Publishers.
- Dijk, T. A. (2006). Discourse, context and cognition. *Discourse Studies*, 8(1), 159–177. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1461445606059565>
- Dinnie, K. (2008). *Nation Branding: Concepts, Issues, Practice*. London and New York: Routledge.
- Dyer, R. (2002). *The Matter of Images*. London: Routledge.
- Emerson, R. W. (1960). Nature '1836'. In E. W. Stephen (Ed.), *Selections from Ralph Waldo Emerson: An Organic Anthology*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin.
- Faulkner, W. (1975). *Requiem for a Nun*. New York: Random House.
- Gibbon, E. (1932). *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*. New York: FRED DE FAU @ COMPANY PUBLISHER.

- Gilmour, R. (1993). *The Victorian Period: The Intellectual and Cultural Context of English Literature 1830–1880*. London and New York: Longman.
- Jones, S. (2008). *The Jewel of Medina*. New York: Beaufort.
- Koban, C. (2012). *Salmon Fishing in the Yemen: A Review*. Retrieved August 11, 2018, from [http://www.craigerscinemacorner.com/Reviews/salmon\\_fishing\\_in\\_the\\_yemen.htm](http://www.craigerscinemacorner.com/Reviews/salmon_fishing_in_the_yemen.htm)
- Lukács, G. (1981). *The Historical Novel* (Trans. Hannah and Stanley Mitchell). Harmondsworth: Penguin.
- Mansbridge, J. (1999). Should Blacks Represent Blacks and Women Represent Women? A Contingent “Yes”. *Journal of Politics*, 61(3), 628–657. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2647821>
- Miller, J. H. (2002). *On Literature*. London And New York: Routledge.
- Mitchell, W. J. (1990). Representation. In F. Lentricchia & T. McLaughlin (Eds.), *Critical Terms for Literary Study*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.
- Nash, G. P. (2005). Revisiting Pro-Muslim British Orientalists. *ISIM REVIEW*, 16(1), 46–47. <https://doi.org/10.1177/095647480501600119>
- Quinn, F. (2008). *The Sum of All Heresies*. New York: Oxford University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780195325638.001.0001>
- Reeves, M. & Stewart, P. (2003). *Muhammad in Europe: A Thousand Years of Western Myth-Making*. New York: New York University Press.
- Ridley, Y. (2019). *The Rise of the Prophet Muhammad: Don't Shoot the Messenger*. UK: Cambridge Scholar Publishing.
- Sajed, A. (2019). How we fight: Anticolonial imaginaries and the question of national liberation in the Algerian War. *Interventions: International Journal of Postcolonial Studies*, 19(4), 1–17. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1369801X.2019.1585918>
- Torday, P. (2007). *Salmon Fishing in the Yemen*. London: HARCOURT, INC.
- Ward, W. (2018). Orientalism and the Study of the Pre-modern Middle East. *Athens Journal of Mediterranean Studies*, 4(1), 7–18. <https://doi.org/10.30958/ajms.4-1-1>
- White, H. (1980). The Value of Narrativity in the Representation of Reality. *Critical Inquiry*, 7(1), 5–27. <https://doi.org/10.1086/448086>

### Copyrights

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

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