

## Terror Narratives in Contemporary Literature: Analyzing Complexity, Conflicting Ideas, Challenges, and Suggesting Future Directions in Ian McEwan's *Saturday*

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### Abstract

This study offers a distinct perspective on the portrayal of terror in Ian McEwan's *Saturday*, focusing on the interplay between dominant neo-Orientalist and counter-narrative discourses. Neo-Orientalism refers to the contemporary revival of classical Orientalism, based on "good" vs. "evil" binary understandings. The research employs an interdisciplinary approach, integrating Edward Said's discourse analysis of Orientalism with postmodern perspectives through close textual analysis. It investigates how being situated within both dominant and counter-narratives elucidates the moral and ethical dilemmas and contradictions inherent in the depiction of the "Other," revealing the chaotic situation of the post-9/11 world characterized by uncertainty, anxiety, trauma, and helplessness, as well as the broader context of postmodern chaos. Through the examination of the influence of media on public perception and narrative framing, the study reveals how these elements shape McEwan's depiction of the issue. In essence, this study calls for transmodern perspectives, promoting a cosmopolitan and interconnected understanding of terror that transcends cultural dualities and acknowledges the complex realities often eclipsed in postmodern narratives.

**Keywords:** Terror, Neo-Orientalism, Post9/11, Counter-narratives, Postmodern chaos.

### Introduction

If there is ever a day for Americans to remember, and often better not to remember, it must be the eleventh of September. The event was a defining moment in the history of the United States of America, shaping public opinion and political discourse for years. It also served as a powerful inspiration for authors, who were compelled to closely examine its impacts and implications,

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eventually offering insightful details on such a tragic experience from a literary perspective. President Bush's proclamation of "war on terror" marks a fundamental turning point, leading to significant shifts in our perceptions of cultural relations, international policies, and security issues. At first glance, one might almost be certain that the phrase "war on terror" refer only to the military measures that followed the attacks, such as the conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan. However, this reading appears to disregard the border dimensions associated with this policy. As Holloway argues, "The idea of the 'war on terror' itself was a representation of events, a rhetorical construction, a series of stories about 9/11 and about America's place in the world" (4). This emphasizes that the "war on terror" does not only cover the physical actions but also the creation of narratives that shape public understandings. These narratives have noticeably recharged the Huntington's paradigm of "the clash of civilizations" and fueled the so-called neo-Orientalism. Through such lenses, the tragic events are used to spread more stereotypes and distort the realistic nature of terrorism, shifting the focus from understanding its complexity to contextualizing it in relation to the "war on terror," thus, approaching the subject in a completely unpredictable way. The media, along with politicians and certain major scholars, have led this misleading campaign, making it the dominant discourse surrounding the attacks.

As a response, it has become necessary to intercalate the literary voice into the medium. As DeLillo contends, "it is now left to us to create counter narrative" (34), emphasizing the responsibility on individuals, referring to authors, to shape alternative interpretations. Authors like Claire Messud, Ian McEwan, Art Spiegelman, Philip Roth, John Updike, Louise Glück, Frank Bidart, and Robert Pinsky were among the prominent writers who contributed to the emergence of post-9/11 literary genres (Keniston and Quinn 2), discussing themes related to fear, loss, grief, identity, insecurity, paranoia, and so on. Various literary productions, including novels, memoirs, short stories, etc., have remarkably increased, exploring and interpreting the terrible incident and its diverse consequences. Based on Alex Houens' analysis, three distinct narrative modes in literature have been identified as responses to the 9/11 attacks. The initial mode contains transformative realism (as a therapeutic absorption), which acknowledges the shocking singularity of the incident being portrayed while presenting it within a narrative framework. The second mode functions as a seismographic recording of events, where writing becomes a reflection of them, akin to an unconscious historical symptom. However, the third

mode is novelistic, a kind of apotropaic defense that deviates from reality to the extent that it introduces alternative worlds (421).

Regardless of the excessive literary productions taking place, many of them failed to “provide answers and give meaning to a newly uncertain world” and create alternatives to the dominant rhetoric (Keeble 6–8). Consequently, scholarly examinations of 9/11 literature uncover two distinct streams of representation: one in which some authors follow the “good vs. evil” tendency and another in which other authors engage more deeply with the complexities and meanings that can be obtained from the phenomenon. In the article entitled “Neo-liberal Narratives or Neo-orientalism: Reflections from Post-9/11 American Novel on Arab Woman,” Dr. Mubarak Altwaiji explores the concept of “neo-Orientalism” in connection with neoliberal ideologies, specifically analyzing Homa Pourasgari’s novel *The Dawn* (2009). He clarifies the way this work shapes perceptions of Arab Muslim women by contrasting the repressive East with the neoliberal West. Altwaiji has pointed out the complicated interrelations between neoliberal ideologies, religious beliefs, and geopolitical forces, arguing that neoliberalism is both an imposition from above but also a pervasive cultural influence. He explains how Pourasgari’s narrative creates binary oppositions in terms of “good” and “evil,” portraying the “East” as entirely oppressive and the “West” as liberating. He illustrates this through the main characters’ experiences, Dawn and Sahar, focusing on the latter’s struggles against a patriarchal system that enforces oppressive practices like forced marriage.

In another paper entitled “Neo-Orientalism, Neo-Conservatism, and Terror in Salman Rushdie’s Post-9/11 Novel” (2018), Bahriye Akman discusses the extent to which Salman Rushdie’s *Shalimar the Clown* can be viewed as a work that perpetuates neo-Orientalist perspectives. His analysis reveals that Rushdie’s novel embodies the main features of Orientalist rhetoric, described by Said as “the distillation of ideas about the Orient, its sensuality, its tendency to despotism, its aberrant mentality, its habits of inaccuracy, and its backwardness” (qtd. in Akman 215), which all have contributed to the empowerment of this discourse. In a similar vein, in “Satanized Verses: Terrorizing Islam in John Updike’s *Terrorist*,” a research paper published in 2021, Al-Joulán and Al-Sh’our shed light on the presence of neo-Orientalist notions within John Updike’s *Terrorist*, one of his widely read novels. They draw attention to the way Updike’s novel depiction of Islam is based on stereotypes, showing it as a violent, anti-

woman, and imaginative religion by selectively using Quranic verses out of their intended context. Other studies, however, found a distinct break with the dominant rhetoric and neo-Orientalist perspectives among some other authors. Eikonsalo Sini's article, "[S]ometimes America Needs to Be Pushed: Amy Waldman's *The Submission* (2011) and the Early American 9/11 Novels," highlights one of those authors, particularly Amy Waldman. It emphasizes how Waldman's *The Submission* reformulates the motifs, themes, and patterns present in early, canonical 9/11 writings. The work compares *The Submission* basis of analysis with that of Don DeLillo's *Falling Man* (2007), John Updike's *Terrorist* (2006), and Jonathan Safran Foer's *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close* (2005), underlining how each author creates the 9/11 narrative. Waldman's work redirects reader sympathy in new directions, evaluates the current atmosphere of uncertainty, fear, and doubt, and questions the sacralization of the 9/11 attacks and their victims. The article clarifies that Waldman offers complicated identities by offering a more diverse variety of characters and deconstructing stereotypes, in sharp contrast to the simple oppositions and stereotypes frequently seen in DeLillo, Updike, and Foer's earlier novels. Similarly, with a particular focus on Mohsin Hamid's *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*, Shymchyshyn Mariya's "The Confession of the Other: Mohsin Hamid's *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*" (2022) presents the novel as a captivating illustration of counter-narratives that challenge biased discourses. This research attempts to examine how the September 11th attacks have affected worldwide narratives and views. As a voice for marginalized people in popular discourse, Changez, the protagonist, challenges readers to reevaluate opinions on Muslims and calls for a more thorough comprehension of the causes of conflict. The study comes to the conclusion that the book opens up new channels for insightful international discussions by highlighting Changez's appeal for positive communication between the "East" and the "West" and a criticism of American foreign policy.

*Saturday* (2005), written by renowned author and screenwriter Ian McEwan,<sup>1</sup> is among the most captivating novels regarding the post-September 11 terror. The book has drawn a lot of scholarly interest, with extensive analysis and exploration. Michael C. Frank's paper, "Living with the 'War on Terror': Fear, Loss, and Insecurity in Ian McEwan's *Saturday* (2005) and Graham Swift's *Wish You Were Here* (2011), notably enriches our comprehension of McEwan's literary work. Frank analyzes the progression of reactions to the September 11 attacks, highlighting the transition from the immediate post-9/11 discourse that centers on the firsthand

accounts of survivors and those impacted in New York to the more expansive “War on Terror” framework. This subsequent viewpoint investigates the worldwide cycle of violence and counter-violence, shaped by governmental counter-terrorism initiatives. He compares the family of Perownes in McEwan’s story with the general population of the United Kingdom, illustrating how their fears reflect a collective feeling of vulnerability and anxiety about the threat of terrorist attacks in London.

Another noteworthy research paper on *Saturday* is “The Era of Crises: A Thematic Analysis of Ian McEwan’s *Saturday*” (2019) by Yuan Shen and Yichao Song. It thoroughly analyzes the novel as a representation of the crises that emerged in the post-9/11 era, providing a panoramic view of the 21st century. It highlights the aftermath of terrorism and its effects, which led to varying positions about the war in Iraq and the rise of uncertainty surrounding identities, the future, and attitudes towards Muslims. The study also explores the crises within post-industrial culture, including consumerism, the clash between culture and science, and the homogeneity apparent in London building characteristics. It shows the way McEwan’s novel deals with individual crises, examining distorted intersubjectivity, issues of discipline and institutionalization, and the process of recovery.

“London is ‘Waiting for Its Bomb:’ History, Memory, and Fear of Destruction in Ian McEwan’s *Saturday*,” written by Chen Chung Jen provides other reading to the McEwan novel. In this study, *Saturday* is discussed as an exploration the collective fear stemming from the 9/11 attacks, reflecting on historical moments of confrontation and destruction. Through the protagonist Henry Perowne’s soliloquies, McEwan examines how recollecting past fears can help us understand our present and anticipate future crises. The paper argues that fear is unpredictable and unmanageable, emphasizing its social and historical dimensions. Applying Maurice Halbwachs’s theory of collective memory, it highlights how memories of past traumas intensify contemporary anxieties. Ultimately, recalling chaos fosters communication, compassion, and a sense of shared experience, transforming insecurity into fleeting moments of solidarity in the face of disasters. In “Literature and Professional Society: Modernism, Aesthetics, and Ian McEwan’s *Saturday*,” Regina Matsunaga Martin, for her part, treats the novel in relation to the transition into the twentieth-century modernism, focusing on two key issues: the modernist interrogation of aesthetics and the rise of professional classes. By

comparing *Saturday* with modernist works like *Mrs. Dalloway* and *Howards End*, the thesis highlights how literary and aesthetic values are shaped by the tension between leisure-class and professional-class ideologies. It also establishes a theoretical framework for understanding the continual struggles between literary criticism and recent movements like “new aestheticism,” “new formalism,” and “postcritique,” all in reference to professional class dominance. Besides the broad spectrum of studies that were reviewed on *Saturday*, this study provides an in-depth analysis of the portrayal of post-9/11 terror and related concerns like fear, suspicion, positions, and actions toward the “Other.” It examines the extent to which this narrative aligns with or deviates from the influence of dominant narratives, informed by neo-Orientalist perspectives. The study seeks to identify the unpredictable factors that influenced McEwan’s depiction of terror, particularly the role of the mainstream media on shaping views. The research relies on an interdisciplinary approach that takes into account knowledge from multiple academic fields. It employs Edward Said’s discourse analysis of Orientalism as a foundational framework, alongside postmodern political and analytical perspectives. This framework allows for a clear exploration of the specific effects of the postmodern era reflected in the narrative. Finally, the research offers an alternative paradigm that may facilitate a deeper exploration of the theme of terror.

### **9/11 and the “War on Terror” as Fuel for Neo-Orientalism**

The “War on Terror,” initiated after the September 11 attacks, has intensely influenced global perceptions of the “East,” particularly the Islamic world. This campaign, framed as a struggle against terrorism, has inadvertently fueled a resurgence of a new version of traditional Orientalism. In 1978, Edward Said published his most effective scholarly work, *Orientalism*, which rapidly became one of the major concerns among researchers and critics, especially those in the field of postcolonial studies. In this book, Said tries to unmask the real intentions behind the Western discourse of so-called “Orientalism,” which outwardly appeared as an academic discipline of knowledge about the Orient. However, this kind of knowledge was merely ideological bait to gain more power over it. “Orientalism can be discussed and analyzed as the corporate institution for dealing with the Orient, dealing with it by making statements about it, authorizing views of it, describing it, teaching it, settling it, and ruling over it; in short, Orientalism is a Western style for dominating, restructuring, and having authority over the

Orient” (Said 3). Inspired by Michel Foucault, Said drew attention to the relation between discourse, knowledge, and power in Orientalism and how they are inextricably related. It is therefore “knowledge [that] gives power; more power requires more knowledge, and so on, in an increasingly profitable dialectic of information and control” (Said 36). In other words, such knowledge about the Orient is neither pure nor “innocent, but profoundly connected with the operations of power” (Loomba 42). This type of knowledge lies in maintaining political policies of dominance and reinforcing imperial projects. In light of this, Said’s book has challenged the stereotypical discourse of Orientalism, which portrays non-Western culture on the basis of binary oppositions and divides the world in terms of a superior Self (the West) and an inferior Other (the East). Orientalists have strategically used the supposed differences between the two groups to construct a rhetoric that serves imperialism. Not far from classical Orientalism, neo-Orientalism is just an updated version of an ancient story of hegemony. Due to the excessive growth of globalization, technology, and means of communication, the media exerts a stronger sway over individuals’ perceptions, particularly those related to Islam and terrorism. Thereby, “both the electronic and print media have been awash with demeaning stereotypes that lump together Islam and terrorism, Arabs and violence, or the Orient and tyranny” (Said 347). In other words, the World Trade Center attacks provided an ideal opportunity for the neo-Orientalist rhetoric to further misconceptions about the “Other,” namely, Arab Muslims, and portray them as a serious threat to international security. In the context of neo-Orientalism, Muslim Orientals “are not only trapped in archaic traditions, a frozen history, and irrational behavior; they are, far from being exotic or benign, dangerous; they are threats to the cultural values, civilizational integrity, and the physical well-being of the West” (Bayat). Apart from the media, there have been key think tanks run by scholars<sup>2</sup> who have actively developed this anti-Muslim mode of thinking and have gravely established a biased image of Islam (Wajahat et al.). Notably, numerous literary works produced after the 9/11 have mirrored the approaches of neo-Orientalists and the mainstream media by creating more misconceptions about Muslims and further deepens the gap between the West and the “Rest.”

Ian McEwan’s *Saturday*, as mentioned earlier, holds a significant influence within the context of post-9/11 literature. The story takes place in London during the anti-Iraq War manifestations in February 2003. In this novel, McEwan, as Virginia Woolf’s *Mrs. Dalloway*, tells a one-day story through the eyes of a middle-aged Londoner. It is about the difficult day experienced by the

successful neurosurgeon, Henry Perowne, who lives in a state of fear and anxiety because of an anticipated terrorist bombing in London while thinking about his position regarding the imminent war in Iraq. Such narrative provides an effective entry point for analyzing the representation of terror in contemporary literature, especially considering the author's weight on the literary surface:

The names of the most famous contemporary writers [including McEwan] have become international brands. When they speak, the world listens. And increasingly, they speak not just through their fiction but also via newspaper opinion pages, influential magazines, television chat shows, and literary festivals. Novelists are no longer just novelists; they are also global pundits shaping our opinions on everything from art, life, and politics to civilization, as we know it (Sardar).

This is the way Ziauddin Sardar introduced his article, "The Blitcon Supremacists," through which, he goes to emphasize the great impact of such prominent writers like McEwan on affecting our insights and understandings about global issues.

### **Overdose of Fear and "Less Knowledge:" A Path to an Endless Suspicion**

One of the central themes that McEwan discusses in *Saturday* is fear and how this disturbing emotion dominates the protagonist's day and thoughts. Right from the beginning of the novel, fear was a key element in McEwan's portrayal of Perowne's troubled day. As he woke up from his bed, he watched a burning plane in the sky, anticipating that it was London's turn to be bombed:

He's moving towards the bed when he hears a low rumbling sound, gentle thunder gathering in volume, and stops to listen. It tells him everything. He looks back over his shoulder to the window for confirmation. Of course, a comet is so distant it's bound to appear stationary. Horrified, he returns to his position by the window. The sound holds at a steady volume while he revises the scale again, zooming inwards this time, from solar dust and ice back to the local. Only three or four seconds have passed since he saw this fire in the sky and changed his mind about it twice. It's travelling along a route that he himself has taken many times in his life (McEwan 14).



Perowne's fear was increasing as he obsessively continued looking for the reason behind the plane crash. When his son asked him for the first time about whether the terrorists might have had a hand in that, he replied directly, "It's a possibility" (31). Shortly after, when Theo asked him mainly the exact same question, but this time using the term "jihadists," Perowne could not give him any certain response; then he suggested waiting for the coming news: "I don't know what I think, Henry says; it's too late to think. Let's wait for the news" (34). Even once he realizes that the plane crash has nothing to do with terrorists, his relief seems to be temporary and fleeting. All day long, he was preoccupied with internal thoughts regarding the impending war in Iraq. "Good news, but as he walks out of the kitchen in the direction of the larder, Henry feels no particular pleasure, not even relief. Have his anxieties been making a fool of him?" (McEwan 178). This means the doctor's fear seems to manifest as more than just an immediate reaction to the burning plane he witnessed. Further, it was a constant fear of insecurity and a strong expectation of potential threats, indicating that his fear evolved into a state of paranoia. The latter denotes the "pervasive and unwarranted mistrust and suspicion of others. People who are paranoid are locked into a rigid and maladaptive pattern of thought, feeling, and behavior based on the conviction that others are "out to get them" (Oltmanns and Okada 503). In consideration of this, one may argue that the author's exploration of fear here reveals two contrasting dimensions. The first dimension captures the profound social context following the events of September 11 and the broader implications of postmodernity. This is reflected in the author's ability to depict the psychological and social chaos faced by individuals experiencing doubt, insecurity, and dislocation, particularly through the main character from the story's outset, only in a single day.

In contrast, the second dimension emphasizes how an excessive focus on fear may contribute to the spread of suspicious and anxious anticipatory sensations directed against "Muslims," thus empowering Islamophobia. Fear, as defined by the American Psychological Association, is "the intense emotion aroused by the detection of an imminent threat, involving an immediate alarm reaction that mobilizes the organism by triggering a set of physiological changes." When threats are framed as "Islamic terrorism," it can lead to a broad generalization that conflates the actions of extremist groups with the wider Islamic community. This framing often brings into line with neo-Orientalist standpoints, depicting Islam as a source of threat to the

Western world. The protagonist's reflections on potential dangers in London may be understood through this outlook:

London, his small part of it, lies wide open, impossible to defend, waiting for its bomb, like a hundred other cities. Rush hour will be a convenient time. It might resemble the Paddington crash-twisted rails, buckled, upraised commuter coaches, stretchers handed out through broken windows, the hospital's Emergency Plan in action. Berlin, Paris, Lisbon. The authorities agree an attack's inevitable. He lives in different times - because the newspapers say so does not mean it is not true. But from the top of his day, this is a future that is harder to read, a horizon indistinct with possibilities (McEwan 274).

This passage exemplifies the perception that Western cities like London are facing an "Islamic threat," which reinforces a climate of fear and suspicion. The connections between fear and Islamophobia are significant, as fear often serves as the foundation for negative perceptions of Muslims. Brandt notes, "The term 'Islamophobia' is grounded in the realm of fear. It indicates a strong fear of the Islamic religion or of Muslims, often regarding either of them as the geopolitical source of terrorist attacks" (2). Such characterizations can shape societal attitudes, perpetuating a cycle of misunderstanding and suspicion. In *Covering Islam*, Edward Said further stresses the relation between fear and Islamophobia, describing the latter as "more fear and less knowledge about Islam" (43). That is to say, even this fear is a reflection of the post-9/11 trauma, it is often mirrored within a limited framework; this limitation arises from a deficiency of knowledge and understanding provided about Islam, overlooking the religion's features or cultural context beyond existing stereotypes.

### **Between "Democratic Mission" and Imperialistic Venture: Pro and Con Positions on War**

The Iraq War has generated considerable discourse within the novel, presenting two opposing perspectives on its justification and implications. On the one hand, a view that rationalizes the war in the name of a "democratic mission" aimed at promoting freedom and stability in the region. Conversely, others argue against the war, citing uncertainty about its true motives and consequences. In this context, the depiction of the Iraqi character view is particularly significant, as he serves as the sole Arab character in the narrative. By linking his story to the legitimization

of the Anglo-American war in Iraq, this may cultivate perceptions of cultural disparities and distinctions between Western and Islamic authorities. This dynamic underscores the “Us” versus “Them” dichotomy, specifically highlighting differences, in terms of “democratic West” and the “authoritarian East.”

Miri Taleb is in his late sixties, a man of slight ... He did his PhD at university of University College London and speaks excellent English. His field is Sumerian civilization, and for more than twenty years, he taught at university of Baghdad and was involved in various archaeological surveys in the Euphrates area. His arrest came one winter’s afternoon in 1994, outside a lecture room where he was about to teach ... Three men showed their security accreditation, and asked him to go with them to their car. There they handcuffed him, and it was at that point that his torture began. The cuffs were so tight that for sixteen hours, until they were removed, he could think of nothing else but the pain (McEwan 62).

Through the emphasis on Professor Taleb’s story, the novel may display a binary cultural opposition between the Judeo-Christian West and the Islamic East, based on the idea of Western superiority over Eastern inferiority, a similar view of the Orientalist discourse. The latter regards “Europe (the West, the ‘Self’) as essentially rational, developed, humane, superior, authentic, active, creative, and masculine, while the Orient (the East, the ‘Other’) is irrational, aberrant, backward, and crude, despotic, inferior, inauthentic, passive, feminine, and sexually corrupt” (qtd. in Hasan 30). Professor Talib’s tale highlighted in the novel demonstrates Islamic Arab culture in the light of the mentioned understanding of the “Other,” it represents Islamic society as a dystopian realm, a static entity defined by tyranny that starkly contrasts Western liberal and democratic ideals:

Meri spent his time in stinking, unventilated cells - six feet by ten with twenty men crammed inside. And who were these men? The professor giggled mirthlessly. Not the expected combination of common criminals mixed in with intellectuals. They were mostly very ordinary people, held for not showing a car licence plate, or because they got into an argument with a man who turned out to be a Party official, or because their children were coaxed at school into reporting their parents’ unappreciative remarks at the dinner table about Saddam. Or because they refused to join the Party during one of the

many recruitment drives. Another common crime was to have a family member accused of deserting from the army (McEwan 63–64).

The repressive conditions and arbitrary arrests of ordinary Iraqis in this passage serves to raise concerns around justice and democracy, ultimately welcoming the “legitimacy of war.” What is more, such an image given to the Islamic world is not restricted to Iraq but extends to encompass most of the Islamic Arab countries; as Perowne puts it clearly, “It is not just Iraq. I am talking about Syria, Iran, and Saudi Arabia, a great swathe of repression, corruption, and misery” (192). This observation may suggest a connection to a foundational assumption of neo-Orientalism, which revolves around a cultural clash that characterizes Islamic countries as inherently authoritarian and backward. In contrast, the Western world is often viewed as democratic, advanced, and more humane.

The discussion surrounding a modern cultural clash between the Western and non-Western worlds originated with Samuel Huntington’s controversial essay “The Clash of Civilizations?” published by *Foreign Affairs* in 1993. In this essay, Huntington provides a detailed scenario regarding the global situation after the Cold War and the end of history dialectical conflict with the decline of communism. Huntington’s supposition had not attracted much notice until the 9/11 attacks, which dramatically made it a major reference to evaluate the events. He contends that “the great divisions among humankind and the dominating source of conflict will be cultural” (1), implying that the world is witnessing a new kind of struggle that is neither economic nor social but rather cultural. Subsequently, he goes even further to claim that “as people define their identity in ethnic and religious terms, they are likely to see an ‘us’ versus ‘them’ relationship existing between themselves and people of different ethnicity or religion” (Huntington 5). Although Huntington argues in his two works (“The Clash of Civilizations?” and *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order*) that the clash will occur between the Western and non-Western civilizations, he engaged in extensive discussion regarding both potential and actual disagreements, specifically between what he identifies as the West and the Islamic and Confucian civilizations. Notably, Islam receives a significantly greater amount of attention, often in a hostile way, compared to any other civilization (Said, “The Myth” 2).

The support expressed by an Arab character for the war in his home country functions to argue in favor of the military involvement in Iraq. The position of an Arab “intellectual” is meant to interpret the invasion as a legitimate mission backed and welcomed by Arabs themselves. By characterizing Professor Meri as an “intellectual,” his position is given added weight. “The whole system runs on fear, and no one knows how to stop it. Now the Americans are coming, perhaps for bad reasons. But Saddam and the Ba’athists will go. And then, my doctor friend, I will buy you a meal in a good Iraqi restaurant in London,” (McEwan 64) Professor Meri Taleb pointed out. In such a way, military interference in Iraq is presented as a helping hand given to subjugated people, responding to their own call for democracy. This brings to mind the so-called “civilizing mission,”<sup>3</sup> which is commonly used to legitimize colonial expansion in the name of civilization. In contemporary times, a similar mission is employed to legitimize military invasions in the name of democracy. In this version, the war is shown as a mission “to save Arab people from Arab government.” As it is prominently articulated by Bernard Lewis, one of the leading neo-Orientalist scholars, who has advocated for “tough” action in the Middle East and claimed that U.S. invaders would be received by people there as “liberators” (Abrahamian 541). In so doing, the narrative leads to two different understandings and insights of violence and appears from two different viewpoints as well. The first outlook examines the violence committed by the invading forces, particularly in the context of the impending Iraq invasion. Here, violence is framed as somewhat “legitimate,” “soft,” “justifiable,” “defensible,” and “inevitable.” This is evident in the main character’s declaration, “But in five years, we might not regret it. I’d love to see the end of Saddam; you are right, it could be a disaster. But it could be the end of a disaster and the beginning of something better” (McEwan 185). On the contrary, a second view on violence is associated with the Iraqi government, represented as “hard” and “unaccepted” violence, and it is visualized in the Iraqi character Professor Taleb’s oppressive story. This distinction in conceptions strengthens dominant discourses by promoting the notion of a distinct “good vs. evil” dynamic. Essentially, “any action undertaken in the name of good is legitimized, no matter how destructive, on the grounds that it is attacking evil” (Kellner 48). This is clearly demonstrated in Henry’s assertion, “Like I said, I’m not for any war. But this one could be the lesser evil. In five years, we will know” (McEwan 185). In fact, distinguishing between “good” and “bad” violence, leads to confusion and misinterpretation of the concept, as Müller explicates, “the moment we claim to be able to distinguish ‘good’ violence from ‘bad,’ we lose

the proper use of the word and get into a muddle. Above all, as soon as we claim to be developing criteria by which to define supposedly ‘good’ violence, each of us will find it easy to make use of these in order to justify our own acts of violence” (qtd. in Žižek 62–63).

In spite of this fervent backing for the war, in other parts of the novel, particularly through Daisy’s perspective, the author presents a markedly different viewpoint on the military interference in Iraq. Daisy, unlike her father and Professor Meri Talib, expresses her opposition to the conflict in an insightful manner. This is particularly evident in the acute debate with her father, during which she shares her concerns about the ethical and moral aspects in addition to the consequences of the war:

She pulls away from him and faces him with a look of anxious surprise. Daddy, you’re not for the war, are you . . . You’re saying let the war go ahead, and in five years if it works out you’re for it, and if doesn’t, you’re not responsible. You’re an educated person living in what we like to call a mature democracy, and our government taking us to war. If you think that’s a good idea, fine, say so, make the argument, but don’t hedge your bets. Are we sending the troops in or not? It’s happening now. And making guesses about the future is what you do sometimes when you make a moral choice. It’s called thinking through the consequences. I’m against this war because I think terrible things are going to happen. You seem to think good will come of it, but you won’t stand by what you believe.’ He considers, and says, ‘It’s true. I honestly think I could be wrong. (185–186)

Daisy seems the only certain and confident one about her position in her family. Even Perowne, who seems more with the war, appears in other times uncertain, “Perowne has had ambivalent or confused and shifting ideas about this coming invasion” (62). Theo, for his part, who is “against the war in Iraq. His attitude is as strong and pure as his bones and skin. So strong he doesn’t feel much need to go tramping through the streets to make his point” (149). Each character’s position in the novel is influenced by their background, particularly Daisy and her father, highlighting a conflict between literary and scientific observations. This tension further manifests as a struggle between rationality and emotion. The Doctor embodies the rational perspective that dismisses spiritual or emotional approaches to understanding life. He is a secular character par excellence. He is even introduced as a nonbeliever from the very beginning of the novel and begins to question the existence of a loving God as he reflects on his headmistress’s

teachings. “This was when he first suspected that the kindly child-loving God extolled by his headmistress might not exist. As it turned out, most major world events suggested the same.” (McEwan 32). Like Perowne, McEwan holds a secular worldview. He links freedom with secularism, firmly asserting that “people must be free to worship all the gods they want. But it’s only the secular spirit that will guarantee that freedom” (qtd. in Bandin and González). As he further announced that, “the novel is a product of the Enlightenment, which has always been we a secular and skeptical form” (Owem). In contrast to Henry Perowne’s rationality, his daughter seems to embody a more emotional and intuitive perspective. As a poet, she engages deeply with feelings, exploring the complexities of human experience and moral dilemmas. This enables her to be more concerned with ethical questions not solely through logic.

### **Media as an Epicenter of the Creation of Misleading Narratives**

The postmodern era has witnessed a quantum leap in the field of technology. A key aspect of that is the widespread use of media, which, as the Canadian philosopher Marshall McLuhan predicted many years ago, makes the world a “global village” interrelated by an electronic nervous system. As a result, the media has grown to play a significant role in shaping global perceptions about a variety of issues and events. The 9/11 events will serve well enough as an example of that, as the media has gone beyond simply covering the incident to further fuel the neo-Orientalist discourse either by spreading stereotypes, rationalizing military interventions, or instilling fear of the “Other.” And once again, the Huntington-mentioned thesis of cultural conflict became an underlying reference in treating the tragic events, particularly among the mainstream media, which “framed the whole crisis within the context of Islam, of cultural conflicts, and of Western civilization threatened by the “Other” [namely Muslims]” (Abrahamian 531). Throughout the novel, the protagonist seems to be heavily influenced by the media, as evidenced by his keenness to watch the TV news to find out more details about the plane crash. In addition to the following passage in which he explains how he feels about his consumption of news, “He suspects he is becoming a dupe, the willing, febrile consumer of news fodder, opinion, and speculation, and of all the crumbs the authorities let fall” (McEwan 178). For his part, McEwan clearly explained in an interview with the Guardian how the New York nonstop broadcast made him an “information junkie craving facts and images” (Frank 126). In order to clearly understand the relation between these images and mass media, it is then necessary to refer to the French philosopher Jean

Baudrillard's theories. The latter was one of the most influential postmodern philosophers who profoundly discussed the media's impact on reality in light of a capitalist society dominated by signs and images. In *Simulacra and Simulation*, he goes to examine the way reality no longer exists as it is replaced by simulated images of reality, which gradually reach what he called "hyperreality." In other words, one will not be able to distinguish between what is real and what is artificial since the copy is becoming even "more real than the real itself." In such a way, individuals' different orientations and positions toward a particular issue are determined by what the media portrays as reality, which is actually just a manipulation of reality to serve specific purposes. What makes the media a powerful means of control is its role as an irreplaceable and unrivaled source of news and information. Despite Perowne's fears about a potential threat, which may be created by media itself, he kept obsessively checking TV news. In Baudrillard's view, "Now the media are nothing else than a marvelous instrument for destabilizing the real and the true" (587). Edward Said in *Covering Islam* has a similar insight vis-à-vis the issue of misleading media specifically related to Islam and its impacts. In this book, Said endeavors to debunk the Western media's misrepresentation of Islam and Muslims all around the world and the different stereotypes and biases they expose. This may also take us back to what the Slovenian political theorist Slavoj Žižek calls "symbolic violence." In his book *Violence* (2007), Žižek has offered an in-depth understanding on the issue of violence and its complexities. He draws distinctions between subjective violence and objective violence. For him, subjective violence contains physical and concrete acts such as crimes, terror, etc.; it is the type of violence that is apparent and directly experienced. However, objective violence, as he proposes, is a more profound and increasingly prevalent form of violence. It appears in two forms: systematic and symbolic. Systematic violence signifies the structural and institutional mechanisms that maintain power imbalances and dominance within society. It involves economic exploitation, political oppression, and social inequality. Symbolic violence, on the other hand, is deeply embedded within language, narratives, culture, and ideology. It is performed through the indirect mechanisms of social control, modeling observations, values, and norms. Symbolic violence influences individuals' behaviors and choices by imposing cultural biases, reinforcing social hierarchies, and legitimizing existing power structures. Drawing on Žižek's theoretical framework of symbolic violence, distorted media exemplifies this very particular form of violence, often shaping public perceptions and narratives in ways that maintain stereotypes and



social divisions, thereby contributing to a broader culture of violence that extends beyond physical acts.

### **From Confusion to Realization: Proposing an Alternative Paradigm for Understanding Terror beyond the “War on Terror”**

Confusion and uncertainty are significant topics in the story, which are exemplified by the investigation of dualities. The narrative moves from a plane burned in flames, anticipating an attack, to pro and con war viewpoints, incorporating numerous personalities, from a scientist neurosurgeon to a literary poet, from the violent Baxter to the sensitive Baxter who seeks solace in poetry. All of these opposing motifs underscore the text’s ongoing confusion. Many scholars have noted that these oppositional and paradoxical uncertainties reflect the complexities of individual social and moral lives in the aftermath of the September 11 events. Joanna Kosmalska’s paper “Dichotomous Images in Ian McEwan’s *Saturday*: In Pursuit of Objective Balance” provides a profound analysis of this dualistic treatment of the subject. The researcher discusses how the novel navigates the tension between personal and political realities, discusses how McEwan uses the character of Henry Perowne to embody the ambivalence of modern life, showing the conflicting emotions and thoughts that arise in response to both personal crises and global events. The paper demonstrates how this dichotomy is further expressed within the narrative structure, which sets the peaceful moments at home against the constant fear of violence and threat. This indicates that such contradictions reflect not only the complexity of Perowne’s character but also serve as a critique of media and societal narratives’ influence on individual perception. Kosmalska’s analysis enriches our understanding of how McEwan conveys the moral ambivalences of contemporary existence and nudges his readers to confront the multi-dimensional nature of truth and reality within the novel.

However, it is also important to add that this dualistic vision is indicative of the novels’ positioning between counter-narratives and dominant narratives. It is influenced by dominant narratives, particularly those propagated by the media, while simultaneously attempting to engage with the complexities of post-9/11 terror through a counter-narrative lens. It shows a position of complexity to portray Islam beyond “war on terror” effects. Additionally, this confused dualistic perspective expresses the chaotic situation of the modern world, opening the doors for the rise of phenomena such as terrorism. The 9/11 attacks precipitated a tidal wave of

accusations that sought to establish a link between the Islamic religion and the emergence of terrorist ideologies, often framing Islam as a pre-modern obstacle to neoliberalism and progress. Bernard Lewis was one of the prominent figures who made harsh comments against Muslims in this context, attributing the attacks on the World Trade Center to Islam itself. He argued that these events stemmed from the Middle East's "failure to separate religion from politics, the incompatibility of democracy and Islam, humiliations over military defeats, resentment over the destruction of the Caliphate, hurt pride over a lost civilization, rejection of modernity, nostalgia for the past, obsession with the Medieval Crusades, and fascination with terrorism" (Abrahamian 541). Mahmood Mamdani has challenged such assumptions linking terrorism to pre-modern Islamic beliefs. He clarified that terrorism is fundamentally influenced by modern and imperialistic factors, possessing a multidimensional nature that reflects socio-political dynamics. In his terms, "Terrorism is not born of the residue of a pre-modern culture in modern politics. Rather, terrorism is a modern construct" (767). In light of this, it can be said that terrorism cannot be treated through the same ground it emerged from. The uncertain contradictions that authors grapple with in addressing these events stem from this very complexity. In a nutshell, terror must be analyzed through an alternative rationale that transcends the framework of modernism and postmodernism as its evolving eco, particularly within the emerging "transmodern" paradigm.

"Transmodernity is almost an umbrella term that comprehends all that is virtual, transnational, transethnically cosmopolitan, connective, glocal, strategic, and transubiquitous, among other things, and, as such, requires reconceptualization in all fields of knowledge, including those of literature and criticism (Aliaga-Lavrijsen and Yebra-Pertusa 9). Ateljevic contextualizes the shift toward transmodern philosophy within the post-9/11 global crisis, marked by wars, terrorism, climate change, overconsumption, and social alienation, leading to widespread feelings of anxiety and powerlessness. She posits that transmodernity represents a "fresh and promising move towards a new era of humanity," offering hope for a more positive and reassuring outlook on our present and future (200–203). Understanding such a phenomenon requires fostering, as Enrique Dussel claims, "intercultural dialogue" based on a transmodern vision between different cultures, including those that were marginalized (50). This philosophy, according to Luyckx Ghisi, calls for a shift away from the excessive emphasis on rationality and science, which has isolated us from our bodies, souls, and creativity. He advocates for a

sustainable and socially inclusive world where science and technology contribute to the common good. Ghisi also highlights how this rationality has intensified Western anxieties about death due to disbelief in immortality. He proposes “reenchantment,” a transmodern approach that aims to restore wholeness and joy by integrating intelligence, emotions, and various aspects of human experience (41–42).

## **Conclusion**

It has been approximately 23 years since the attacks on the iconic twin towers of the World Trade Center, and it still remains a concern as it marks one of the most influential events in the contemporary world. Numerous discussions have taken place about this tragedy, and many more are likely to occur in the years to come. The early response to the events was dominated by the narratives presented by media and key politicians, which often framed the attacks within a context of fear and urgency. This led to an urgent “War on Terror” and the creation of narratives and stories around it. The tension resulted in these narratives, and from neo-Orientalism, positioned the world in a conflict between the “West” and the “Rest.” This framing emphasized cultural and ideological differences, often strategically used to create biased images, particularly of Islamic cultures. In literature, there has been a mission to represent these subjects, striving to challenge and move beyond dominant narratives. Authors have sought to give voice to the complications that often get overshadowed in mainstream discourses. However, not all of them could show full rupture from the dominant rhetoric in their literary productions.

The novel under examination in this study, Ian McEwans’ *Saturday*, reveals a type of novel that engages with counter-narratives yet is not fully detached from the influence of the dominant discourse. This is largely due to the significant impact of mainstream media and the power of image consumption in a “hyperreal” world, which influences both the author and his main character. An overemphasis on the fear of an impending threat of “Islamic terrorism” and a sense of insecurity, without offering a deeper knowledge and distinction between extremists’ misinterpretation of Islamic religion to justify their violence and the real Islam, may serve greatly the neo-Orientalist beliefs. The Iraqi professor Meri Talib, on the other hand, and his understanding of war in his own country as a “democratic mission” may also reinforce the “Us vs. Them” binary perspectives. However, the contradictory positions regarding the invasion of Iraq highlight the complexity of the post-9/11 world, which is marked by profound uncertainty,

trauma, and fear of the “Other,” all vividly represented across every screen in every house. Individuals grapple with feelings of insecurity, helplessness, and anxiety, often caught in a struggle between their moral and ethical beliefs and the dominant discourses that shape their realities. This tension manifests in various ways, as people struggle to reconcile their personal values with the policies and actions of their governments. The author, at this point, successfully engages the reader in this feeling of dilemma, providing a compelling alternative counter-narrative. Consequently, such chaotic situations demand a more optimistic atmosphere, new stable moral, ethical, and religious meanings, and a recognition of the reality eclipsed by postmodern discourses. This study suggests a new lens to address the theme of terror, particularly through the emerging philosophy of transmodernism, which advocates for a cosmopolitan, transcultural, and interconnected meaningful world beyond dualities.

### Endnotes

1. Ian McEwan's writings since the 21st century have consistently engaged with current political and social issues. His novels have addressed a range of contemporary topics, including the 9/11 terrorist attacks in *Saturday* (2005), global warming in *Solar* (2010), surveillance and privacy in *Sweet Tooth* (2012), and the impact of artificial intelligence in *Machines Like Me* (2019) (Jie 403).
2. These main scholars are:
  - i. - Frank Gaffney of the Center for Security Policy.
  - ii. - Daniel Pipes at the Middle East Forum.
  - iii. - David Yerushalmi at the Society of Americans for National Existence.
  - iv. - Robert Spencer of Jihad Watch and Stop Islamization of America.
  - v. - Steven Emerson of the Investigative Project on Terrorism (Wajahat et al. 7).
3. It is an effort to change a dependent culture into one more similar to the dominant society, a social group, an imperial elite, or an ideological community. Due to its perception of itself as a superior civilization. Further, the dominant society considers and presents this shift as an improvement (Barth and Hobson).

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