

**READING THE OTHER AND READING OURSELVES:
AN INTERPRETIVE STUDY OF AMAZON.COM REVIEWS ON BESTSELLERS
ABOUT MUSLIMS**

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Since September 11, 2001, Western readers have been turning to bestselling texts written by or about Muslims in their need to learn more about Muslims. These texts promise an insider's view of predominantly Muslim countries and peoples and are informally influencing and educating many Western readers in their perceptions of Muslims because they are so widely read and discussed. In this study, I explore how Westerners are reading and interpreting the Muslim Other as portrayed in these bestsellers and how they are often unaware of the Orientalist lens through which they read and interpret the Other. I also consider how Westerners may read these texts more critically and responsibly.

I perform a conceptual analysis of how Western readers read and interpret the Muslim Other, as expressed through the "texts" of their Amazon.com reviews of bestsellers *Reading Lolita in Tehran*, *The Kite Runner*, and *Three Cups of Tea*. Using Edward Said's (1978, 1993) postcolonial theoretical concept of Orientalism and employing postcolonial theorists who expand on Said's concept to craft my theoretical frame through which I analyze these texts, I illuminate the texts' problematics associated with representations of identity and otherness to show how their reading responses perpetuate negative, colonizing stereotypes of Muslims. I then bring in a second theoretical frame, reader response theory, to reinterpret my first analysis of their reading responses within the context of pedagogical challenges of teaching students to read the Other. In crafting this second theoretical frame I provide an added perspective of a poststructural

consideration of the relationship between Self and Other and utilize the work of such theorists as Boler (1994), Burwell, Davis, and Taylor (2008), Felman and Laub (1992), Grobman (2007), Taylor (2007a, 2007b), Todd (2003), and Welch (2000), whose challenges to reveal contextualized reading practices and present more responsible approaches to reading are developed from cross-disciplinary discussions of reading the Other. I also explore the pedagogical implications of reading the Other, challenging the way in which reading the Other is currently approached in teaching multicultural literature in the elementary and secondary classroom.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	IX
1.0 INTRODUCTION.....	1
2.0 METHODOLOGICAL, CONCEPTUAL, AND THEORETICAL UNDERPINNINGS.....	11
2.1 THE ROLE OF THE RESEARCHER AND METHODOLOGICAL CONSIDERATIONS.....	11
2.1.1 Finding Hermeneutics and Finding Myself.....	13
2.1.2 Hermeneutics and Literary Textual Analysis.....	17
2.1.3 Process of Hermeneutic Conceptual Analysis.....	18
2.2 CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK AND DISCUSSION OF THEORETICAL UNDERPINNINGS	21
2.2.1 A Postcolonial Perspective	26
2.2.1.1 The Need to Know.....	31
2.2.1.2 Orientalist Representations of the Muslim Other.....	35
2.2.1.3 Reading for Easy Empathetic Identification	39
2.2.2 A Reader Response Perspective	40
2.2.2.1 Reading to Understand Rather Than to Know the Other.....	43
2.2.2.2 Reading with a Situated Awareness	44

2.2.2.3	Reading for Sameness and Strangeness	46
2.2.2.4	Reading Responsibly	51
3.0	BACKGROUND AND JUSTIFICATION OF THE TEXTS, THE CONTEXT, AND THE AUTHORS.....	56
3.1	WHY LITERATURE?	58
3.1.1	Selected Literary Texts	59
3.1.2	Defining “Bestseller”	60
3.2	WHY AMAZON.COM?	62
3.3	THE COUNTRIES	66
3.3.1	Afghanistan	68
3.3.2	Iran.....	72
3.3.3	Pakistan	75
3.4	THE TEXTS.....	77
3.4.1	The Kite Runner	77
3.4.2	Reading Lolita in Tehran.....	82
3.4.3	Three Cups of Tea	85
3.5	THE AUTHORS	91
3.5.1	Khaled Hosseini	92
3.5.2	Azar Nafisi.....	93
3.5.3	Greg Mortenson.....	97
4.0	READING TO KNOW THE OTHER: A POSTCOLONIAL PERSPECTIVE	101
4.1	READING TO KNOW THE OTHER.....	104
4.1.1	Searching for an Alternative to the Media.....	105

4.1.2	Trusting the Expert	112
4.2	RE-PRESENTING ORIENTALIST REPRESENTATIONS	123
4.2.1	Essentializing the Other	124
4.2.2	Saving the Muslim Woman.....	127
4.3	READING FOR EASY EMPATHETIC IDENTIFICATION.....	133
4.4	KNOWING WHAT IS BEST FOR THE MUSLIM OTHER.....	141
4.5	CONCLUSION	145
5.0	READING TO UNDERSTAND THE OTHER AND ONE’S SELF: A READER RESPONSE PERSPECTIVE	150
5.1	READING TO UNDERSTAND LITERARY TEXTS.....	154
5.2	READING FOR SITUATED AWARENESS	163
5.3	SITUATED READING FOR SAMENESS AND STRANGENESS	169
5.4	READING WITH A SENSE OF RESPONSIBILITY.....	174
5.4.1	Experiencing Guilt.....	175
5.4.2	Reading as a Witness to Testimony.....	178
5.4.3	Empathy Reconceived	182
5.5	CONCLUSION	185
6.0	CONCLUSION.....	189
6.1	RECONSIDERING AND EXTENDING ORIENTALISM	192
6.2	EXTENDING MULTICULTURAL EDUCATION.....	195
6.3	LIMITATIONS AND OPPORTUNITIES FOR FUTURE RESEARCH..	200
	APPENDIX A	207
	BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	214

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1.0 INTRODUCTION

In short, since 9/11, knowing about the Muslim Middle East is not a luxury, it is a matter of life and death. We need to know if “they” and their many constellations of cultures out there are really the media-packaged, neat rows of prayer driven by faith, emotion, and instinct. We hear that some blow themselves up just so someone else might die in the process. It seems so unnatural, so wrong. Didn’t these same people write delightful poetry at one time? Didn’t they carve exquisite calligraphy on their windowpanes and even doorknobs? Didn’t they welcome an exiled Jewish community fleeing Spain in the late fifteenth century? What happened? Something says we must find a candle, for there has to be more to the elephant. (Keshavarz, 2007a, p. 2)

This study began with a need. It began with my need to know as a reader, a researcher, a non-Muslim Westerner. On September 11, 2001, I spent the day with my high school English classes watching the events unfold on one of the school televisions in disbelief and trying to talk with my students through our immediate shock and incomprehension. Since then, I have struggled with my own perceptions of Muslims: what my perceptions are and what they should be. I have puzzled over images of Muslims I have seen portrayed in the media, images that reinforce negative stereotypes of Muslims that have prevailed in Western culture for centuries. Reading postcolonial theorists like Said (1978, 1981, 1993, 2004), Spivak (1990, 1994, 1999), and Willinsky (1998), I put my faith in their claims that these public images and discourse are not informed by absolute truth, but rather by our own Western situated beliefs stemming from colonialism. On that day and since, I have encountered comments and questions from individuals that reflect a general ignorance about and often hostility toward Muslims. I have encountered these attitudes and beliefs with both adults and children in a K-12 and graduate school classroom

setting, with children I interact with currently as an educational outreach coordinator, and with individuals with whom I discuss my research. I have often felt inadequate as an educator and a researcher in presenting a confident portrayal in teasing out with them the differences between essentialized caricatures and something more closely representing the reality. Part of my struggle has been in coming to terms with the lack of there being an absolute truth, an exact answer.

In bookstores and on Amazon.com, several bestselling and not-so-bestselling books by or about Muslims caught my eye and my interest. And so, I began an informal self-study, reading books like *Reading Lolita in Tehran: A Memoir in Books* (2003), *The Kite Runner* (2003), *A Thousand Splendid Suns* (2007), *Three Cups of Tea: One Man's Mission to Promote Peace...One School at a Time* (2006), *Stones into Schools: Promoting Peace with Books, Not Bombs, in Afghanistan and Pakistan* (2009), *The Complete Persepolis* (2007), *Infidel* (2007), and *Nomad: From Islam to America: A Personal Journey through the Clash of Civilizations* (2010). My reading was fueled by my need to learn more about what it means to be Muslim and to be from countries like Iran, Afghanistan, and Pakistan, which were often in the news due to United States foreign policymakers' involvement with them. My reading was also driven by a need to find a way to connect with and empathize with the Other. I attribute this inclination to the influence of reader response reading practices instilled in me as an elementary and secondary school student in the 1970s and 1980s. This was a time when multicultural literature was encouraged to be read in schools and when teaching to read was largely influenced by such reader response theorists as Louise Rosenblatt (1938, 1978) and the transactional relationship between the reader and text in creating meaning, as well as being trained to read about other peoples and cultures with a sense of empathy and communality. Because of this, I also read to satisfy my need to find ways to connect with and relate to Muslims, to learn what we as

Westerners have done to them politically, economically, and militarily to create such hatred toward us, and to address the guilt I experience in feeling suspicious of and ambivalent in my current feelings about Muslims.

As I read these bestsellers, I believed I was gaining some additional historical and political factual knowledge about countries like Pakistan, Afghanistan, and Iran in a more palatable form than reading newspapers or watching current affairs programs. I felt that I was empathizing with the Muslim characters whose hearts and souls, and blood, sweat, and tears had been presented to me, at times experiencing a cathartic-like emotional reaction to the plot and characters, but I still had an uneasy feeling that the Muslim Other was elusive to me. The enlightenment and empathy I experienced seemed far too simple to acquire. I was suspicious of my own biases and expectations, of which I was not always conscious, that I brought to my reading. I questioned my ingrained, reader response approach to reading that allowed me the excuse to read in a self-reflexive, egotist manner, which gave too much validity to my ignorant feelings and conclusions about the Muslims I encountered in these bestsellers. The processes of critical reading that I brought to my pedagogical practices of teaching reading and my academic readings in doctoral research were discarded in these informal readings, as I reverted to familiar patterns of reading and reacting. I needed more guidance for how to read critically and with more awareness, rather than succumbing to my often, unrealized expectations and biases and psychological needs.

My personal experiences of reading the Other led to this study. Identifying myself as a Westerner, within the historical, political, and cultural forces that have shaped how I view the Muslim Other, I wondered if other U.S. Westerners were struggling with the same questions. I wondered how they were reading and interpreting the Muslim Other through bestselling books in

ways similar to me. Since the dramatic events of September 11, 2001, there has been a heightened interest in Muslims by Westerners, as Kesharvarz's opening statement suggests. Westerners are bombarded by the media with information, images, and notions about Muslims (Abukhattala, 2004). Yet, as Kesharvarz also suggests, Westerners are uncertain how to make sense of what they see represented to them. They bring snippets of incomplete information about Muslims to their understanding and not much historical, political, and cultural context in which to place these contemporary events. In the public discourse, there has been an increase in news reported and discussed regarding Muslims, Islam as a religion, and about predominantly Muslim countries. As Esposito and Mogahed (2007) report, this news tends to focus on religious extremism and global terrorism. In 2010, the 10-year anniversary of the September 11th attacks, the Pew Research Center (2011) reported that events and controversies related to Islam dominated U.S. mainstream media coverage of issues relating to religion. This interest is seen in dramatic portrayals of Muslims on television and in the movies and through an increase in literature being published by or about Muslims. There is also voiced through the public discourse a heightened perception of the threat that Muslims and Islamic countries present to the West, which has fueled United States foreign policy toward countries like Pakistan, Afghanistan and Iraq. These perceptions are often enforced by a negative and simplified "Orientalist" view (Said, 1978, 1981, 1993, 2004), a view that is shaped by a strategically institutionalized aesthetic, intellectual, and psychological perspective and representation of the Muslim Other in Western cultures as a way to legitimize institutionalized racism, colonialism, and imperialism. This view is used to justify Western foreign policy toward predominantly Muslim countries by legitimizing the West's ability to decide what is best politically, economically, and socially for these countries and their peoples. The relationship between the West and predominantly Muslim

countries is often presented by the media and in the public discourse as a “clash of civilizations,” which intellectual and political pundits like Samuel Huntington (1996) portray as a Manichean binary situating the West as civilized, rational, and progressive and the Muslim Other as barbaric, irrational, and backward.¹

Since September 11, 2001, there have also been bestselling texts written by “native informants”—Westernized Muslims from countries including Afghanistan and Iran—and Western experts—Westerners who claim to possess knowledge of and experience with Muslims—that claim to offer an insider view of the Islamic world,² the authors of which assume the role of ambassador of the Muslim Other to Westerners. These bestselling texts are promoted as offering authoritative information on what it means to be Muslim and live in predominantly Muslim countries currently in the news, like Iran, Afghanistan, and Pakistan. The books’ authors are positioned and position themselves as experts on these topics, either as Westernized Muslims or as Western experts on Muslims. Adding to the representations of and discourse on Muslims being presented by these texts and their authors, readers—through their Amazon.com reviews—are publically sharing their interpretations of the books and adding to the discourse generated about what it means to be Muslim. The bestselling literary texts *Reading Lolita in Tehran: A Memoir in Books* (Nafisi, 2003), *The Kite Runner* (Hosseini, 2003), and *Three Cups of Tea: One Man’s Mission to Promote Peace...One School at a Time* (Mortenson and Relin, 2009) have generated significant discourse about what it means to be Muslim and live in Iran, Afghanistan,

¹ A reference to Samuel Huntington’s (1996) *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order*, a text that has been influential in the public political and academic discourse in perpetuating the idea of the West as standing in opposition to the Muslim world, as well as to Communist China.

² A term that is simplistic in and of itself since Islam is a world religion that is practiced in different ways by different cultures and sects, in different countries spanning the world. John L. Esposito & Dalia Mogahed’s *Who Speaks for Islam: What a Billion Muslims Really Think* (2007) provides a helpful beginning overview of the diversity of Islam as interpreted and practiced throughout the world

and Pakistan. Reader reviews of these literary texts suggest that readers are gaining what they believe to be objective knowledge about and are identifying empathetically with the Muslim Other. However, these reviews often reflect interpretations that place unquestioning faith in these texts as offering fact-based knowledge, include Orientalist assumptions about Muslims, and create superficial empathetic identification with Muslim characters. By supporting the notion that the West can know the Muslim Other, this process of interpretation legitimizes Western countries' stance that they know what is best for Muslims and Muslim countries and legitimizes Western foreign policy toward these countries and peoples. It offers a defense for the West's military, political, economic, and cultural interferences in these countries' affairs.

Without recognizing the historical, political, and cultural influences on their reading process and the subjective, individual meaning they create in a one-on-one reading with these texts, Western readers lack the context that gives a more holistic perspective of their readings of the Other. Without this perspective, they are unable to engage in more critically aware, responsible approaches to reading and breaking away from such perceptions and practices. This inability affects formal educational practices and affects both teachers, who often bring this incomplete vision of reading to their teaching (Mastrilli & Sardo-Brown, 2002), and their students, who learn reading practices and approaches to interpreting the Other from their teachers. This affects, in particular, teaching students about the Other through multicultural literature and inadvertently reinforces existing practices of reading and interpreting the Other. Without a critically considered approach to reading the Other, students will be unable to engage in more critical reading practices that allow them to recognize how they are implicated in the past and present injustices of Westerners toward the Muslim Other and to break out of these patterns of interpretation and practice.

In this study, I perform a conceptual analysis of how Western readers read and interpret the Muslim Other, as expressed through the “texts” of their Amazon.com reviews of bestsellers *Reading Lolita in Tehran*, *The Kite Runner*, and *Three Cups of Tea*. Using Edward Said’s postcolonial theoretical concept of Orientalism and employing postcolonial theorists who expand on Said’s concept to craft my theoretical frame through which I analyze these texts, I illuminate the texts’ problematics associated with representations of identity and otherness to show how their reading responses perpetuate negative, colonizing stereotypes of Muslims. I then bring in a second theoretical frame, reader response theory, to reinterpret my first analysis of their reading responses within the context of pedagogical challenges of teaching students to read the Other. In crafting this second theoretical frame I provide an added perspective of a poststructural consideration of the relationship between Self and Other and utilize the work of such theorists as Boler (1994), Burwell, Davis, and Taylor (2008), Felman and Laub (1992), Grobman (2007), Taylor (2007a, 2007b), Todd (2003), and Welch (2000) whose challenges to reveal contextualized reading practices and to present more responsible approaches to reading are developed from cross-disciplinary discussions of reading the Other.

Said’s delineation of Orientalism (1978, 1981, 1993, 2004), and postcolonial theorists Willinsky’s (1998) expansion of this concept, provide a frame through which my analysis reveals reader response limitations of 1) reading to definitively know the Other; 2) perpetuating negative, essentializing notions of the Muslim Other in general, as well as such notions of Islam as a religion and Muslim women; and 3) interpreting superficial similarities between the Western Reader and the read Muslim Other that allow readers to identify and empathize with the Other. Aubry’s (2009) study of readers’ emotional and empathetic responses to *The Kite Runner* provides theoretical concepts for interpreting this final reading tendency. Individual readers,

often unaware of the Orientalist lens through which they read, do not critically examine Western discourse about and foreign policy action toward predominantly Muslim countries and their peoples. This absence affects formal educational practices and affects both teachers, who often bring this incomplete vision of reading to their teaching (Mastrilli & Sardo-Brown, 2002), and their students, who learn to approach reading through their teachers. Without a critically considered approach to reading the Other, particularly in the context of teaching multicultural literature, students will be unable to engage in more critical reading practices that allow them to recognize how they are implicated in the past and present injustices of Westerners toward the Muslim Other and to break out of these patterns of interpretation and practice.

I then reinterpret these responses using concepts from reader response theory— including concepts—such as Stanley Fish’s (1980a, 1980b) interpretive community, Hans Robert Jauss’s (1982) horizons of expectations, and Louise Rosenblatt’s (1994, 1995) transactional theory of reading—to explore the pedagogical challenges of reading the Other, including 1) recognizing the subjective process of reading to understand the Other; 2) recognizing the historical, political, and cultural situatedness of the author, text, and reader; 3) reading for sameness and strangeness; and 4) reading with a sense of responsibility to the Other. Reading to understand draws specifically on Rosenblatt’s distinctions between efferent and aesthetic stances of reading. Reading with a sense of situatedness and a relationship with the Other that emphasizes sameness and strangeness is developed using Fish’s and Jauss’s terms and from connections among approaches presented by Burwell, Davis, and Taylor (2008), Grobman (2007), and Taylor (2007a; 2007b). Reading with a sense of responsibility to the Other draws from related concepts of Boler (1994), Felman and Laub (1992), Todd (2003), and Welch (2000).

In this study, I explore the pedagogical implications of reading the Other. I challenge the way in which reading the Other is currently approached in teaching multicultural education in the elementary and secondary classroom, specifically in teaching multicultural literature. I suggest different approaches to teaching multicultural literature that support more critically aware and responsible processes of reading and the need for this to be included in both K-12 and pre-service approaches to reading the Other. I look at this issue specifically, addressing how the Muslim Other is taught since September 11th, and generally, how students are taught to read and interpret the Other in multicultural education. As other theorists discussed here have done, I present in this study an extension of Said's classic concept of Orientalism, specifically to a close study of the reading process and discuss the opportunities and limitations of Said's presentation of Orientalism as a guide for readers in pedagogical contexts, including pre-service teacher training and in a K-12 multicultural literature classroom.

As Kesharvarz's opening statement suggests, Westerners struggle to understand what it means to be Muslim and to understand the current political relationships Western countries have with predominantly Muslim countries. In their responses to bestselling books by and about Muslims, reader reviews present their interpreted answers to these questions. Yet, these reviews also reveal interpretations that are shaped by readers' political, historical, and cultural lenses, of which they are unaware and with learned practices of reading the Other that do not challenge readers to critically considered interpretations of their relationships with the Other. These reviews suggest that Western readers are reading the Other but seeing themselves as they project their expectations, biases, and values onto the Muslim characters about whom they read. In the next chapter, I present in more depth the conceptual framework of this study, the theories through which the reader reviews are analyzed, the methodological justification for this as an

interpretive study, and the justifications made for choosing the texts (bestselling books, Amazon.com reviews) included in this study.

2.0 METHODODOLOGICAL, CONCEPTUAL, AND THEORETICAL UNDERPINNINGS

...knowledge for knowledge's sake is sickness. (Minh-ha, 1989, p. 1)

In this chapter, I present the explanation and justification for this research as a conceptual analysis grounded in interpretivism. The chapter includes the decisions made regarding the methodology, theoretical underpinnings of the conceptual framework, and process of analysis and interpretation. In order to understand what “interpretation” means, one must first understand the difference between knowing and understanding.

2.1 THE ROLE OF THE RESEARCHER AND METHODOLOGICAL CONSIDERATIONS

The geoidentity question ”Where is here?” – which in Matthew Arnold’s “Stanzas from the Grande Chartreuse” takes the form “And what am I, that I am here?” (1895, l.66) (Willinsky, 1998, p. 9)

This section presents a background to the interpretivist epistemological perspective I use as the basis for the methodology and process of analysis and interpretation in this study. I discuss how my own struggle to resist needing to know and engaging instead in an ongoing process of seeking to understand the Muslim Other has shaped my role as researcher. I discuss how interpretivism, as the epistemological grounding for this study, has led to my use of hermeneutics

as a methodology and how it has shaped the textual analysis I use, which is based on the analysis process used in literary studies and related reading theory. Finally, in this section, I describe the process of hermeneutic conceptual analysis I perform in this study.

Although the terms are often used interchangeably, a distinction can be made between claiming to know and seeking to understand. It is a fundamental difference in the epistemology informing each of these pursuits. Seeking to know is grounded in objectivism, while understanding is grounded in interpretivism (Crotty, 1998). Seeking to know, or claiming that one knows, suggests a confidence that there is a truth, or fact, existing outside one's self that can be pursued, discovered, named, classified, and possessed. When one knows a truth, there is a sense of completion to the action; the truth has been obtained, and one can move on to seek another truth or build onto the recently acquired truth. Seeking to understand, or claiming to understand, involves grasping the meaning of something through inference, through belief. There is a chasm to bridge between one's self and the object, individual, or event that is attempting to be understood. The process of coming to understand may involve a sense of what one's limitations are and why one is not able to immediately understand. These limitations may be due to one's current beliefs, experiences, world view, or intellectual or emotional abilities. The process of gaining understanding—bridging the chasm—involves grasping initially for a characteristic or concept that one recognizes. It involves a process of subconscious and conscious decisions to compromise, take a leap of faith, and find ways to empathize, as one seeks to comprehend the significance, explanation, or reasonableness of something or someone with which one is faced. I ground this study in this epistemological perspective that the pursuit of truth discounts the historical, political, and cultural situated differences of the one pursuing truth and the object, person, or event attempting to be known. I analysis how an awareness of this

situated subjectivity provides readers with a more authentic, critically considered, and responsible approach to seeking to understand the Other.

In this interpretivist study, I locate and analyze the meaning making created by Westerners about texts by or about Muslims. I interpret and analyze how this meaning is created, interpreting and analyzing the meaning making of the authors, who attempt to translate Muslim cultures and peoples to Westerners, through their published literary texts and readers who present their interpretations of the Muslim Other through their Amazon.com reviews. I explore this meaning making within the context of the text-reader relationship that is developed in the reading process, the larger meaning that Westerners have been and continue to create about Muslims present in contemporary discourse. I put forward the analysis that readers as Westerners are creating this meaning with a limited awareness of how their individual beliefs, judgments, or historical, political, and cultural circumstances shape their interpretations of Muslims. I also discuss how the study itself is a process of my decisions, as an individual and researcher, of the textual representations that have been considered, included, interpreted, and analyzed in this study, working specifically in the tradition of hermeneutics in the field of literary analysis. Finally, I propose how meanings of the Muslim Other might be created in more self-aware ways that are more informed, and what those implications might be in pedagogical practice.

2.1.1 Finding Hermeneutics and Finding Myself

The shaping of this study arose from my desire to empirically know what I was missing in my knowledge of Muslims that was being shaped by seeing them in heightened news coverage since September 11 and in cartoonish portrayals of Muslim terrorists in movies and on television shows. Drawing on my background in English and the critical theory that shaped my

undergraduate and graduate training, I subscribed to the idea of subjectivity in interpretation and the elements of power in knowledge. But, I still felt a burning desire to know the truth, of what it meant to be Muslim. I wanted facts; I wanted data. And, as I read these bestselling books about Muslims, I kept rejecting the more subjective notion of understanding and struggled to find a way that I could know. That need to know contradicted the very grounding of my study in postcolonialism, reader response, and the now-instinctive way I approach textual or literary analysis as one whose background is in English. And so, I turned to hermeneutics, which methodologically grounds the tradition of literary analysis, for guidance.

Hermeneutics is an interpretive way of knowing, a methodology; it guides research inquiry. Hermeneutics involves specifically the act of interpreting meaning that is created from the act of reading. In its process of inquiry and interpretative analysis, it is inherently a qualitative pursuit. Thomas A. Schwandt (1999) explains that “qualitative inquiry aims at understanding what others are doing and saying” (p. 451), differentiating between the epistemological pursuit of knowing, found with more traditional empirical methods of social research, and the pursuit of understanding, with interpretivist research. He distinguishes this type of inquiry from more traditional empiricist methods of social research by explaining the distinction between knowing (“How do you know that?”) and understanding (“What do you make of that?”) (p. 452). Schwandt expands on this distinction, explaining how the desire of understanding is incompatible with measurable, proportional truth. Rather, it is that which is found through interpretation. The phenomenology of understanding (Gadamer, 2004) and hermeneutics (as influenced by Heidegger, 1962) provide the epistemological underpinnings of interpretivist research. While Schwandt does not require truth be found through empirical science, he recognizes that truth found through interpretation is still held accountable to the

standards of lucidity, coherence of argument, and providing insight. Eisner (2002), as well, talks about the less empirical research approaches that include “the ability to compose qualitative relationships that satisfy some purpose (p. 8) and to “teach students to act and to judge in the absence of rule, to rely on feel, to pay attention to nuance, to act and appraise the consequences of one’s choices and to revise and then to make other choices” (p. 9). This process of decision making is, as Eisner quotes Dewey, “flexible purposing,” which may “capitaliz[e] on the emergent features appearing within a field of relationships” (p. 10). This is a form of study that allows for “exploration and discovery” (p. 11), which is seen in the hermeneutical play between the whole and the parts as allowing a developing understanding and interpretation on the part of the researcher. But, also like Schwandt, he sees this process as not happening randomly, but rather due to a researcher’s innate or instinctual ability to find – using Nelson Goodman’s (1978) term – “rightness of fit.” Eisner explains this, saying “one knows one is right because one feels the relationships” (p. 9).

Piantanida and Garman (1999) point out that “crafting research procedures cannot be done in an epistemological vacuum...The logic of justification is the student’s rationale for how the results or truth claims...of the inquiry will be generated and supported” (p. 105). As well, Eisner (1997) advocates that “the availability of qualitative research methods in the fullness of their possibilities offers researchers opportunities to select a way of working that fits their interests, is congruent with what they wish to study, plays to their strengths, exploits their aptitudes, and gives them a chance to find a place in the sun” (p. 265). Based on my own grounding in English and literary analysis, I present here an interpretivist study employing a humanities-based method of hermeneutical textual, or literary, conceptual analysis (Ceroni, 1995). This process of analysis includes my interpretation of the connections among informal

discussions of these bestsellers, in the form of on-line Amazon.com reader reviews, and the theories framing this study, from postcolonial theory, reader response theory, and pedagogical theories about reading the Other. Within the textual analysis of the reader reviews, I draw from and trace some of their common themes in order to theorize how Western readers are reacting to the Muslim Other in their readings and how they might read more critically. This study is led by my research questions and involves a process of analysis and interpretation that develops as my questions and interpretations influence how I engage with and interpret the theoretical discussions and the reviews, and how these interpretations then cause me to reshape my questions and analysis. It allows me in my analysis and interpretation to continually flow mentally between the parts (the texts) and the whole (conceptual and theoretical frame) of the study.

My epistemological perspective, as presented in this study, is that definitive truth is elusive and that one interprets those representations that others choose to present. These representations shape one's knowledge, and yet are also tempered and altered by one's experiences, ideas, and ways of seeing the world. Understanding develops from a hermeneutical dialogue (Gadamer, 2004) between outside representations and one's own "horizons of understanding or expectations" (Gadamer, 2004; Jauss, 1982). This dialogue, however, does not exist in a political, historical, or cultural vacuum, and these representations are significantly shaped by hegemonic discourses and ideologies, particularly when we have accepted them subconsciously or uncritically. For this reason, dialogue, in the particular instance of this study, is assumed to be contextualized within Western colonialist discourse, or Orientalism (Said, 1978).

2.1.2 Hermeneutics and Literary Textual Analysis

The practice of textual analysis examines the act of reading and interpreting texts (broadly defined), particularly in literary studies and related reading theory, and is a part of the tradition of hermeneutics. Crotty (2003) cites Straw's (1990) explanation of hermeneutics as "an activity related to all criticism in an attempt to make meaning out of the act of reading" (p. 105). Originally, to the Ancient Greeks, hermeneutics was the practice of studying literature, and later in the Judeo-Christian tradition, it was the practice of discovering the true meaning of religious texts. Hermeneutics has been associated with the "science or art of interpretation" (Grondin, 1994, p. 1). The beginning of the nineteenth century brought the beginning of modern hermeneutics when Friedrich Ast (1778-1841), Friedrich Schleiermacher (1768-1834), and Wilhelm Dilthey (1833-1911) extended hermeneutics beyond the interpretation of biblical texts to find application in the human sciences as a way to examine human understanding. This was influential to early and middle 20th Century formalist approaches to textual analysis, which reached their zenith with the predominance of New Criticism in literary studies, an approach still strongly influential in how reading and analysis is taught in formal education.

Gadamerian hermeneutics has directly influenced the creation of reader response theory and reception studies. Hammersley (2006) defines hermeneutics as

the study of how we understand the communications, actions and products of other human beings, but it also implies a particular set of views about what such understanding involves, one that stresses the role of inner life experience, culture and/or imagination on the part of the interpreter. (p. 133)

In terms of how this translates into social research methods, Hammersley notes that hermeneutics, by its very epistemological grounding, "distrusts approaches that employ highly

structured elicitation devices” (p. 134). In social science, as well, the hermeneutical tradition of textual analysis has found a place to dwell. Scott (2006) defines textual analysis as manifest in social research as “a method of analyzing the contents of documents that uses qualitative procedures for assessing the significance of particular ideas or meanings in the document” (p. 297). He further defines it as rooted in the hermeneutical tradition of textual interpretations and sees its most recent manifestations focused on procedures used in semiotics.

Ceroni (1995) uses the methodologies associated with literary criticism as grounding for her creation of “inner views storied” – her narrative interpretation of interviews she conducts in her research – and in her subsequent textual interpretation of these inner views storied. As Ceroni does in her study, my methodology draws from a hermeneutic tradition as it is employed in humanities-based textual literary analysis and interpretation. Smith (1991) supports researchers use of literary analysis as “an inquiry rooted in hermeneutics which values the inherent creativity of interpretation, the pivotal role of language in human understanding and the interplay of part and whole in the process of interpretation” (p. 190). Returning to the notion of “understanding,” Ceroni draws on Smith (1991) to argue that literary criticism as a process of interpretation is best evaluated as strong methodological practice by “the degree to which it can show understanding of what is being investigated, rather than to “the degree to which it follows a specified methodological agenda” (p. 201).

2.1.3 Process of Hermeneutic Conceptual Analysis

The process of conceptual analysis in this study is a hermeneutic process. The theories I draw from to build a frame for my analysis (Aubry, 2009; Boler, 1994; Burwell, Davis, & Taylor, 2008; Felman & Laub, 1992; Fish, 1976; Grobman, 2007; Said, 1978, 1981, 1993, 2004; Spivak,

1990, 1994, 1999; Taylor, 2007a, 2007b; Todd, 2003; Welch, 2000) inform how I, as the researcher, interpret the reviews, which then informs how I choose to discuss the literature and the reviews within the study. Also implicit in any process involving interpretation is the role of the researcher's subjectivity in decision making along the way. The end result (the research product) is based on my need to understand rather than producing and offering my audience a generalizable truth. Each step of the research process involves interplay between my interests and interpretations as a researcher with what I interpret from the text, the themes, and ideas I then pursue based on what I perceive the texts will support in terms of analysis. I present to my audience a study in which I do not attempt to present objectivist truth claims but present my research product as one subjective, situated interpretation of engagement with a number of interpretative texts and theoretical discourses. My goal is to offer to my audience a way for them to make meaning with and beyond my created text in the hope of more clearly understanding and extending for themselves the theoretical and pedagogical implications of how Westerners are reading and interpreting the Muslim Other.

The process of arriving at the themes I explore and develop in this study grew initially out of my questions, as researcher, of how Westerners read the Muslim Other. I draw from two distinct theoretical frames—postcolonialism and reader response theory—to conduct two separate stages of analysis. The meaning I produce in my first round of analysis inform my second round of analysis and allow my findings to be focused upon theoretical and practical aspects of pedagogy. Said's concept of Orientalism provides a primary theoretical frame for my reading of these reviews and the ways in which Western readers, often subconsciously, read with an Orientalist lens. Reader response theory provides the secondary theoretical frame as I interpret the roles of the reader, the text, and their contexts as creating meaning about the texts. As I read,

I interpret ways in which the reviews reveal Orientalist interpretations of Muslim characters and countries and the problematics produced by this approach to reading. Reader response theory also provides a way to interpret the problematics of such a reading approach as readers read with a taken-for-granted, objectivist orientation, without realizing how their historical, political, and cultural situatedness as readers and the situatedness of the texts and authors influences their subjective process of meaning making. Analyzing the texts of these reviews leads me to identify unanticipated themes and perspectives to this reading approach.

Following my initial reading of the reviews, I turn then to pedagogical theorists writing about the process of reading the Other and explore ways of reading the Other that may provide more critically aware readings. Some of the theorists from whom I draw base their discussions specifically in a postcolonial analysis of reading Muslims. Other theorists, however, approach reading the Other from a more encompassing definition of Other as those marginalized by a society. What becomes evident to me are the similarities in theorists' discussions of more critically considered approaches to reading and viewing one's relationship with the Other, whether they are writing about social justice work in the United States between Caucasian and African Americans or about reading the testimonies of Holocaust survivors. I articulate the common concepts I interpret in these pedagogical theories and perform a subsequent reading of the reviews informed by my analytic findings of the postcolonial reading. This second reading leads me to interpret and analyze how current reading practices may be challenged and extended in ways that are more critically aware and more oriented toward the readers' responsibility to the Other.

From these multiple readings, I produce interpretive writing in which I interpret the current practices of reading and more critically conceived approaches to reading the Muslim

Other grouped by theme or concept. Finally, I consider how these interpretive writings reflect the overall direction of my analysis and how it connects with the greater problem that has shaped my need to pursue this study and the implications of it for pedagogy in Western approaches to the Other.

2.2 CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK AND DISCUSSION OF THEORETICAL UNDERPINNINGS

In this study, I analyze the reader response texts of *Reading Lolita in Tehran*, *The Kite Runner*, and *Three Cups of Tea* to examine how Westerners are reading about and interpreting the Muslim Other. This conceptual analysis is interpreted through the primary lens of Said's postcolonial concept of Orientalism and by other postcolonial theorists who expand on this concept. I analyze and highlight the problematic of the responses that arise from Western readers being unaware of the Orientalist lens through which they read, a lens that was created and culturally institutionalized as a way to legitimize Western political, economic, and cultural hegemony over predominantly Muslim countries and their peoples. I then reinterpret these responses using reader response theory—specifically Stanley Fish's concept of interpretive theory, Hans Robert Jauss' term "horizon of expectations;" and Louise Rosenblatt's transactional theory of reading—to explore the challenges of teaching to read the Other, as discussed across disciplines.

In my initial analysis of these texts using Said's Orientalism, I interpret and analyze three problematics in this reading process. The first problematic is reading to definitively know the Muslim Other. In this discussion I draw from Said's (1978, 1981, 1993, 2004) and Willinsky's

(1998) analysis of this motivation as a major motivating force in colonialism and imperialism. This problematic is introduced in the context of reader reviews presenting their motivations for reading the bestselling books. I also incorporate in this theme a discussion of how this belief to know generalizable truth about the Other is supported by a belief in the claimed expertise of the author and, in some cases, the reader interpreting the bestselling books. This belief in an author's or reader's expertise will be explored using Spivak's (1999) discussion of the native informant as a starting point to an analysis of responses that connect the author as expert, or reviewer as expert, and the ability to present truth claims about the Other.

The second problematic with this reading approach is the tendency of readers to perpetuate, or be unable to challenge, Orientalist representations of Muslims. These reviews reveal that readers are often unaware of how Orientalism has strongly influenced the way the West views Muslims and predominantly Muslim countries. This problematic will be discussed drawing from Said's delineation of the characteristics of Orientalist representations of the Muslim Other, in contrast to the Western Self, and Willinsky's (1998) extension of this concept. Viswanathan's (1989) discussion of the Self-Other relationship guides my assumptions of how the Western Self is affected by Said's concept. I explore this problematic in the analysis of responses that present representations of the Other that are essentializing and representations that emphasize such characteristics as Muslims expressing violence and extreme emotion, and the inability to govern or care for themselves without Western intervention. Reader reviews' representations of the Muslim woman and Islam as a religion, which are examples of prevalent themes in Western public discourse, will also be analyzed in light of readers' efforts to interpret without a sense of how their interpretations are contextualized within an Orientalist discourse.

The third problematic discussed is the tendency of readers to interpret superficial similarities between themselves and the Muslim Other. Aubry (2009) provides the concepts to illustrate this process of readers' experiencing emotional connection with the Muslim characters often resulting in a cathartic-like feeling of identification, interpreting universal themes as indications of shared humanity, and ending the reading experience with a feeling of empathetic identification with the Other and satisfied closure that they have successfully accomplished knowing the Other. It is such a confidence that allows readers to believe they have successfully interpreted the Muslim Other, the problems of countries like Pakistan, Afghanistan, and Iran, and can now evaluate what is the best solution to their problems. Reader reviews that describe this process of reading for empathetic identification will be analyzed. Readers' tendencies to articulate shared values and experiences with the Muslim Other as a way to create a superficial connection will also be explored as an example of imposing Western values and traits on the Other as their own. This tendency to know the Other as similar to one's self will be analyzed as an example of the Orientalizing tendency of the West to believe it is able to best determine solutions to the existing problems of Muslims in countries like Iran, Afghanistan, and Pakistan.

I then reinterpret these responses using reader response theory (Fish, 1980a; 1980b; Jauss, 1982; Rosenblatt, 1994, 1995), which provides an added perspective of a poststructural consideration of the relationship between Self and Other. It is within this frame that I explore pedagogical challenges to moving beyond these problematics to more critical and responsible approaches to reading. The challenges discussed include, first, the concept of reading to understand, which recognizes the subjective process of reading. This discussion draws on Rosenblatt's (1994, 1995) discussion of efferent and aesthetic frames for reading to present an alternative epistemological approach to the objective of reading to know the Other and to

introduce the reader response approach to subjective reading. This analysis occurs in implications of reader reviews that express learning more truth through literary texts and the disconnection readers experience when they believe they are not being presented the truth in these bestsellers.

Secondly, I analyze readers' tendency to read without an awareness of the Orientalist lens that influences their interpretations of the Other, by examining those reviews that suggest readers' awareness of their situatedness as Westerners. The concept of reading with situatedness draws from reader response theories of the role of the readers' situatedness in the interpretive process, including Fish's notion of the interpretive community, Jauss' term "horizons of expectations," and Rosenblatt's transactional theory of reading. While none of them articulate a specific historical, political, and cultural context, like Orientalism, for the Western reader, they emphasize the contextualized role of the reader and the text in creating subjective, rather than objective, meaning.

The third pedagogical challenge explored within these reviews is reading for strangeness and sameness, a stance that emerges from the readers' awareness of their and the text's situatedness. It is this stance that emerges from the Western readers' acknowledgement of the historical, political and cultural differences, and the differences that have arisen between them and the Muslim Other because of colonialism and imperialism. It is this stance that challenges the Western readers' perceived empathetic identification with the Muslim Other. Using Aubry's (2009) concept that readers are interpreting sameness and strangeness in their relationships with the Muslim Other, their reviews are analyzed using this concept to explore the ways in which readers may be moving toward interpreting the Muslim Other with this stance. As a way to extend these interpretations within an understanding of their situatedness, they are analyzed by

drawing on concepts developed by postcolonial pedagogical theorists, including Grobman's (2007) concept of hybridity and Taylor's (Burwell, Davis, & Taylor, 2008; Taylor, 2007a, 2007b) concept of recursive and ethical reading, which is informed by Spivak's (1990, 1994, 1999) call for Westerners to claim their situatedness.

The final pedagogical challenge explored in these reviews is the possibility for how readers may read with a greater sense of responsibility to the Other and how this approach might manifest itself. As readers express a desire to read to know the Other and speculate on ways to help or solve the problems of the Other, they tend to do so through the Orientalist lens of Western hegemony. I explore and develop this possibility by drawing on cross-disciplinary connections among approaches to reading the Other that emphasize developing a more responsible relationship of the Self to the Other, by placing the emphasis on the needs of the Other. I explore these possibilities within the reviews by drawing in my analysis from related concepts of Boler (1994), Felman and Laub (1992), Todd (2003), and Welch (2000). Drawing from Felman and Laub's (1992) discussion of reading as a witness to a testimony, Boler (1994) distinguishes between testimonial and confessional reading practices. Todd (2003) presents an emotional approach that challenges readers' superficial emotional empathy with the Other and replaces it with guilt as a motivating force to be responsible for the Other. Welch (2000) reimagines empathy as one that motivates the Westerner to give up control to the needs of the Other and create a mutually respectful relationship with the Other.

In the following section I lay out, in detail, the larger theoretical frames of postcolonial theory, specifically Said's concept of Orientalism and its extension, and reader response theory, the two of which shape my analytic findings.

2.2.1 A Postcolonial Perspective

Orientalism is more particularly valuable as a sign of European-Atlantic power over the Orient than it is as a veridic discourse about the Orient. (Said, 1978, p. 6)

Americans have scant opportunity to view the Islamic world except reductively, coercively, oppositionally. (Said, 1981, p. 51)

Struggling to understand the Muslim Other is not a new problem for Westerners, as literature professor, postcolonial theorist, and public critic of Western representations of Islam and the Middle East Edward Said has shown. With Edward Said's seminal work *Orientalism* (1978) and subsequent texts, *Covering Islam: How the Media and Experts Determine How We See the Rest of the World* (1981) and *Culture and Imperialism* (1993), he has closely traced the ways Western intellectuals and artists, originally distinguishing themselves as "Orientalists" in the 18th and 19th centuries, interpreted the "Orient," including the Middle East and its Muslims peoples, for their Western cultures. Said traces this history of "Orientalism" as an academic field of study and also shows how the idea has been operationalized by those institutionalizing a strategically aesthetic, intellectual, and psychological Western perspective and representation of the Muslim Middle Eastern Other in a way that has provided Western justification for domination over these colonized peoples (1978). Said also focuses on the way the United States has contributed greatly to the Orientalism project when the US gained predominance as a world power after the Second World War and especially since the end of the Cold War, particularly with national and economic policies involving the Middle East (Said, 1981, 2004).

The scope of traditional Orientalism reflects greatly the way these peoples have been represented as the Other to encourage Western colonial hegemony. As Willinsky (1998) describes, "it was the duty and pleasure of these learned men and women," referring to those engaging in the Orientalist project, "to make the whole of the world coherent for the West by

bringing all we knew of it within the imperial order of things” (p. 11). This has been accomplished in part by corralling, and thus essentializing, characteristics and traits into a classification and representation of all Muslims and those classified collectively as “Middle Eastern peoples,” rather than allowing these diverse peoples the same kinds of complex individual representations reserved for Westerners. The assumption was that different cultures who exist in the region referred to collectively as the Middle East are, in fact, the same and thus, understandable. The assumption was also made that these peoples are all Muslim and they practice their faiths privately and publically in the same way. The creation of an essentialized Oriental Other is inevitable when, as Said traces its history, an academic discipline like Orientalism can be formally institutionalized. Said (1978) says:

To speak of scholarly specialization as a geographical “field” is, in the case of Orientalism, fairly revealing since no one is likely to imagine a field symmetrical to it called Occidentalism...[T]here is no real analogy for taking a fixed, more or less total geographical position towards a wide variety of social, linguistic, political, and historical realities. A classicist, a Romance specialist, even an Americanist focuses on a relatively modest portion of the world, not on a full half of it. But Orientalism is a field with considerable geographical ambition. And since Orientalists have traditionally occupied themselves with things Oriental (a specialist in Islamic law, no less than an expert in Chinese dialects or in Indian religions, is considered an Orientalist by people who call themselves Orientalists). (p. 50)

This passage reflects how representations of the Muslim Other have been created in contrast to the Western Self and in such a way to deny the humanity, defined by individual difference, among those who are classified as such.

As Said notes, no one can imagine a comparable field of Occidentalism being created; the project of Orientalism is, ultimately, a project of cultural hegemony as a way to understand and control the Other. Willinsky (1998) refers to this endeavor as the “will to know,” which was based on “a desire to take hold of the world,” which ultimately, became a part of the “economic and administrative apparatus of imperialism” (p. 26). Today, this trend continues in dealing with the Islamic world as, Said (1994) states,

American or British academic intellectuals speak reductively and, in my view, irresponsibly of something called “Islam.” By using this simple word they seem to regard Islam as a simple object about which grand generalizations spanning a millennium and a half of Muslim history can be made, and about which judgments concerning the compatibility between Islam and democracy, Islam and human rights, Islam and progress are quite unabashedly advanced. (p. 31)

By creating large collective terms or abstract generalities to represent Muslims and to reflect how well the West can define and classify the Muslim Other has legitimized the discourse and resulting foreign policy action by Western countries in these countries but the related claim that the West knows what is best for the Other. Said (1994) sees this belief expressed as Westerners “regard Islam as a simple object about which grand generalizations can be made” (p. 31). Today’s U.S. foreign policy in countries like Iran, Afghanistan, and Pakistan becomes part of the colonializing legacy, a part of “the unbroken, all-embracing Western tutelage of an Oriental country” (Said, 1978, p. 35). What is important to note here is that postcolonialism as a theory is somewhat of a misnomer, the assumption being that we are past the stage of colonialism. Rather, postcolonial theorists, like Said and Spivak, recognize the continued colonialism in the world today in the form of neocolonialist (or imperialist) political and economic endeavors of

Western countries like the United States in other parts of the world. Williams and Chrisman (1994) amend the term postcolonialism, stating

if colonialism is a way of maintaining an unequal international relation of economic and political power (in the same way as Edward Said talks about Orientalism deploying a variety of strategies whose common factor is that they guarantee a position of superiority for the Westerner vis-à-vis the Orient), then no doubt we have not fully transcended the colonial. Perhaps this amounts to saying that we are not yet post-imperialist. (pp. 3-4)

The Muslim Other as a dangerous threat has been a popular representation that has been prevalent since the time of the Crusades and the Muslim invasions of the West during the Middle Ages (Said, 1978). In many ways, representations of Muslims and Middle Easterners take center stage during periods of crisis and color the representations that are created (Said, 1981, 2002). After the Cold War, a new threatening Other was needed to replace the Bad Communist Soviet Other (Coles, 2006; Haque, 2004; Huntington, 1996; Lewis, 2002). This new threat became the Bad Arab or Muslim Terrorist (Singh & Schmidt, 2000) Beginning with the energy crisis of the 1970s, the hostage crisis in Iran and continuing with the Gulf War, the attacks of September 11th, and the continuing “War on Terrorism” in Afghanistan and Iraq, negative representations of the Muslim Other have predominated in the news media (Abukhattala, 2004; Said, 1981), in popular culture (Shaheen, 2001, 2008; Steinberg, 2004), and in the official national rhetoric (Kincheloe, 2004), particularly since September 11 (CAIR, 2004; Haque, 2004; Kellner, 2004; Muscati, 2003). The contemporary U.S. representation of the Muslim Other is that of being a physical threat, as evidenced by the events of September 11th; it has been viewed as an economic threat since the 1970s as the “terrorist oil-supplier” (Said, 1981), and it has been viewed as a political and physical threat to the U.S.’s traditional ally, Israel, as evidenced by the

continual Palestinian terrorist attacks. Contemporary visions of the Other now also have the benefit of instantaneous projection to the U.S. public through media and continually evolving internet capabilities (e.g., YouTube). Since September 11th, Said (2004) reveals that the public discourse in the United States has encouraged the development of a Good U.S. Citizen in contrast to the Bad Muslim Other:

Since September 11th, terror and terrorism have been thrust into the public consciousness with amazing insistence. In the United States, the principal emphasis has been on the distinction between our good and their evil. You are either with us, says George Bush, or against us. We represent a humane culture; they, violence and hatred. We are civilized; they are barbarians...their civilization (Islam) is deeply opposed to ours (the West). (p. 8)

The threat of the Muslim Other has also achieved strength because Orientalist representations present the Other as lacking in recognizable human characteristics. These representations present a seemingly evil and foreign threat to the West because it is lacking in basic humanity. It is an irrational, emotional horde coming to attack us.

Said presents his argument to show that the Muslim Other was, and continues to be, denied humanity, agency, and a voice. It was this denial of basic humanity that allowed Western countries to represent the Other as psychologically, racially, and socially inferior and thus, in need of Western domination. These negative images still prevail and continue to allow Western countries to justify military, economic and socially transforming intervention in the Middle East. The threat this Other seems to pose for Westerners—felt most recently when the U.S. felt invaded on its home soil with the September 11th attacks and continually fueled by the Bush administration and in the media—gives further immediate justification for the need to interfere with and control Middle Eastern peoples. The representations of the Muslim Other then and now

is an “essentialized caricature” (Said, 1981, p. 26) of a type of individual who is presented as ageless and constant, emotional to the point of lacking the rational ability to think and act, characteristics which deny basic human freedoms that the West values for its own peoples. Because this portrayal denies those characteristics to distinguish its humanity from animals, it becomes easier to discount the Other’s humanity and to justify political and cultural Western hegemony over it.

Beyond the individual Muslim Other being denied basic humanity, the visual representations presented through the media often deny the individuality of the human by tending to show crowd and mob scenes rather than individuals voicing their own unique experiences and thoughts. Said (1978) describes:

[I]n newsreels or newsphotos, the Arab is always shown in large numbers. No individuality, no personal characteristics or experiences. Most of the pictures represent mass rage and misery, or irrational (hence hopelessly eccentric) gestures. Lurking behind all of these images is the menace of *jihad*. Consequence: a fear that the Muslims (or Arabs) will take over the world. (p. 287)

2.2.1.1 The Need to Know

The first problematic that is discussed in the reader reviews is readers’ need to know the Muslim Other and the belief that the Muslim Other can be known. As readers approach these texts, they are often unaware of the extent to which centuries of the objective pursuit of knowledge has shaped their need to read these novels. From a postcolonial perspective, there is acknowledged a “politics of knowledge” (Kincheloe, 2004a) involved in how knowledge is created, made available, and privileged in Western public discourse about the Muslim Other. Knowledge about

Muslims, predominantly Muslim countries, and Islam as a faith is produced in the West with “conquest and control as objectives” (p. 9).

The Orientalist tendency to know has existed since this cultural endeavor was formalized as part of the Western agenda of colonization and imperialism. As Said (1979) notes, it is a tendency to work from the specific to the general, beginning with single situations or texts about the Other and generalizing these as truth about the Other. Said (1995) is concerned that Westerners interpret the Muslim Other in essentializing ways, as a way to better control knowledge about the Other, and often, as a result, to legitimize the physical control of them. He refers to this as “power using knowledge to advance the world” (p. 4). In this vision, Said draws strongly on Foucault’s vision of the “mutual implication of power and knowledge” (Williams & Chrisman, 1994, p. 8). Williams and Chrisman articulate this need to know (the need for enlightenment) as originating in the historical Enlightenment’s drive to know and categorize:

In the context of *Orientalism*, Western power, especially the power to enter or examine other countries at will, enables the production of a range of knowledges about other cultures. Such knowledge in turn enables (legitimizes, underwrites) the deployment of Western power in those countries ... Orientalism’s enormous appetite for forms of knowledge ... derives in part from its location within the period of the Enlightenment. The Enlightenment’s universalizing will to knowledge (for better or worse) feeds Orientalism’s will to power. (p. 8)

The history of Western imperialism draws a strong connection between the need to know and name the world and the desire to possess it intellectually and ultimately, physically. The power to name, to categorize, and to ultimately, know “on one’s own terms” is grounded in the colonial assumption that the world was “a tabula rasa that awaited inscription by the West and its

soldiers, administrators, scientists, and educators” (Willinsky, 1998, p. 36). There is, however, a danger of claiming to know the Muslim Other or to know countries like Afghanistan, Iran, or Pakistan after reading one of these bestsellers. Willinsky cautions Western readers that “naming a place is about staking and extending a verbal claim to it. In this imperialist motivation to know, readers ask and respond: ‘Where is here?’ Here is what is named. The un-named is nowhere. To name is the sovereign act” (p. 35). Like Said, Willinsky also takes this catechistic agenda to task, seeing it as a perpetuation of the orientaling of the Muslim Other, and thus, a justification for colonial action. He refers to this desire for knowledge of the Other as “a will to know”(p. 26) that turns the testimony of others into learning experiences in a way that does not happen when we read about the experiences of Western individuals. Willinsky sees this process as egocentric on the part of the Western reader as the “literature is commodified...as it is reduced to a curative object of knowledge” (Taylor, 2007a, quotes from Willinsky, 1998, p. 300) Similar to the ways in which exhibitions of empire were displayed in museums and expositions of the 19th Century, these bestselling novels offer a kind of “native-on-display” which is “both spectacle and object lesson for the [Western] imagination” (p. 56). As well, the act of vicarious travelling that we as readers do in this context gives us the sense also of knowing the Other in relation to ourselves and our place in the world. Willinsky describes this “presumption of knowing” as

the thrill of crossing the line and entering the space of the other, but we see this as a way of knowing ourselves and defining our place as the ones who hovering above this divide, can know of the others and ourselves, as if to encompass the whole world. (p. 78)

The Native Informant or Expert: Part of this need to know is fueled by the colonizing tendency to trust “the native” as an informant conveying the truth about an entire people. The notion that the Other can be known as a monolithic, unchanging entity is part of the belief that

the Other can be easily known, classified, and controlled. The authors of these books who are Muslim and from the countries they represent in their books (Hosseini and Nafisi) are promoted and promote themselves as native informants. Many readers readily adopt this belief as well. While not a native informant, Mortenson is presented as a Westerner who has successfully grasped the concept of the Other, and this belief in his authority is a similar characteristic of reader responses that is explored as well.

The term “native informants” is a label “conventionally used in ethnography to describe indigenous people who provide information about non-western societies to western ethnographers” (Morton, 2007, p. 142). It reflects the Westerner’s belief that Muslims, Afghans, or Iranians can be easily understood by simply finding a representative native informant from which the truth can be obtained and observed. Spivak (1999) describes this vision as a part of the project of “the production of the scientific or disciplinary European knowledge of the culture of others” (p. 67). She warns us of this desire to rely on our view of a native informant “speak[ing] up as an authentic ethnic fully representative of his or her tradition” (p. 60). The native informant “can only *be* read, by definition, for the production of definite descriptions” (p. 49). Beyond the role Hosseini and Nafisi play as native informants, however, readers also believe these authors are like us (as Westerners), in the sense that they now live in the West and are Westernized, appreciating and valuing what we appreciate and value. In this respect, they are Westernized native informants who show us what life is like for Muslims living in Afghanistan and Iran and who validate our Western lives and values as superior and as the solution to these apparently troubled peoples and countries.

There are those who see the role of native informants as more sinister and complicit in furthering the neocolonial, or imperialist, project of the West. For example, Dabashi (2006, June

1) refers to such native informants as “the new breed of comprador intellectuals,” using the term “comprador” meaning “the name of a native servant employed by Europeans, in India and the East, to purchase necessities and keep the household accounts...an intermediary between the house and its native customers” (OED on-line, 2012). Dabashi views individuals who assume this role as being

actively recruited to perform a critical function for the militant ideologues of the US Empire. Their task is to feign authority, authenticity, and native knowledge and thus to inform the US public of the atrocities that are taking place throughout the world, in the region of their native birth in particular, by way of justifying the imperial designs of the US as liberating these nations from the evil of their own designs. (para. 22)

Dabashi presents a scathing assessment of the role of these native informants in the post-September 11th need of U.S. Westerners need to gather more information about and to understand the Muslim Other. While Dabashi has faced criticism for these views and there is a public lack of intellectual consensus on what these authors as expert informants provide, the controversy itself suggests a need for readers to regard such accounts as Nafisi’s, Hosseini’s, Mortenson’s, and even Dabashi’s as single perspectives and to dig deeper into what the historical, political, and cultural contexts are from which these authors speak.

2.2.1.2 Orientalist Representations of the Muslim Other

Said develops his concept of Orientalism by also providing a guide to specific ways in which this institutionalized endeavor created specific characteristics to represent Muslims and a clear relationship between the West and the Muslim world, seen collectively through this lens. The overriding concept developed is that the Muslim Other can be generalized as a singular,

monolithic entity, without the specific nuanced perspectives and differences acknowledge among Westerns. What is seen in one Muslim may be applied to all Muslims. There is much public discourse in Western countries, like the United States, about what constitutes the true (and often negatively viewed) nature of Islam (Berman, 2010; Hirsi Ali, 2010; Lewis, 2002). Said (1994) sees this tendency expressed as Westerners “regard Islam as a simple object about which grand generalizations can be made” (p. 31). The Muslim Other is viewed as violent, irrational, and incapable of governing himself, much less an entire people or country. This perspective justifies the West’s intervention in the affairs of other countries and supports a colonizing perspective of the West’s relationship with the Muslim Other as knowing the Muslim Other, knowing what is best for Muslim countries, and bringing a civilizing intervention on their behalf. The Orientalist perspective supports a relationship built on Western political, economic, social, and cultural hegemony and subsequent exploitation that often would follow.

I also examine specifically an Orientalizing tendency that legitimizes Western intervention in Muslim countries is the representation of Muslim women. The Muslim woman as an object of the voyeuristic Western gaze has been a consistent feature of the Orientalizing project (Jones, 2008, 2011; Kahf, 1999; Lewis, 1996). Jones (2008) notes that the history of the Western imagination of the veiled Muslim woman is long-reaching. As Skalli (2004) recounts, Western countries’ colonizing efforts in earlier centuries used the idea of the Muslim woman as a way to justify and leverage a political, economic, and cultural agenda presenting a seemingly altruistic rhetoric. The veiling and seclusion of women were used as explanation for the inferiority of Muslim culture, and the West justified its intervention in predominantly Muslim countries by promising to educate and liberate Muslim women from the oppression they experienced from their religion and from Muslim men. A more recent image of a Muslim woman

as object of Western gaze is the iconic 1985 *National Geographic* photograph of a young Afghan girl in 1980s war-torn Afghanistan. She becomes known as the “Afghan Girl,” perpetuating the tendency of Orientalism’s fascination with the Muslim woman an “object of fascination and exotic mystery” (Jones, 2008, p. 132) and providing a visual focus for Westerners to justify interventionist action during the Soviet invasion to end Afghan Muslim woman’s subjugation. Interestingly, *National Geographic* presented a recent photograph of the “Afghan Girl,” after September 11, showing her older and aged beyond her chronological years, adding to a new justification for Western intervention in Afghanistan. The Muslim woman has been used as a rallying cry for both Western feminists and the Bush administration in its military campaign in Afghanistan and Iraq (Zine, Taylor, & Davis, 2007). During the Bush administration’s campaign in Afghanistan to find Osama bin Laden, some of the justification, though seemingly unrelated, that was mentioned by the administration, and related stories developed in the media, was the need to bring freedom from oppression to the women of Afghanistan. The same views are expressed with regard to Muslim women in Iran as part of a justification for political and economic intervention with regards to Iran.

From the larger cultural scope that Said brings to this study, Viswanathan (1989) emphasizes the effect of a colonial vision on the individual Westerner, which occurs particularly when Westerners, as often appears to be the case in these reader reviews, interpret subconsciously the Muslim Other and the West’s actions and relationship with Muslim countries through an Orientalist lens. Relevant to this study are the ways in which reading practices, interpretation, and representation have impacted the colonizer and how it proves problematic in allowing readers to interpret these textual representations more critically. Viswanathan, ultimately, envisions reading as “a situated activity,” which accounts for “the political and

historical realities that in fact affect and influence the process of education” (p. 17). However, without acknowledging this, the colonizer falls into the trap of seeing only his or her own Orientalist perceptions of the Other, even when the colonizer believes the facts or truth about the version of the Other that is being presented. Viswanathan discusses how this misperception hurts the colonizer, stating

it is not generally realized how infinitely more binding the tyranny of representation can be on the colonizer than it is on the colonized...How the native actually responds is so far removed from the colonizer’s representational system, his understanding of events, that it enters into the realm of another history of which the latter has no comprehension or even awareness. (p. 12)

The process by which readers learn to know the Other also involves the Western reader classifying or judging the sense of novelty and newness he or she is experiencing while reading about the Other and bases this judgment and comparison on his or her established views, beliefs, and knowledge. Viswanathan sees this as another way for the Western reader to control the novelty of what he or she interprets seeing in the Other without having to really question his or her established perspectives and beliefs. She draws on Said’s (1978) description of this process:

One tends to stop judging things either as completely novel or as completely well-known; a new median category emerges, a category that allows one to see new things, things seen for the first time, as versions of a previously known thing. In essence such a category is not so much a way of receiving new information as it is a method of controlling what seems to be a threat to some established view of things...The threat is muted, familiar values impose themselves, and in the end the mind reduces the pressure upon it by accommodating things to itself as either “original” or “repetitious.” (pp. 58-59)

2.2.1.3 Reading for Easy Empathetic Identification

Aubry (2009) notes in his study that Amazon.com reviewers of *The Kite Runner* “frequently suggest dialectical modes of identification that simultaneously foreground and disavow the alterity of the characters and their culture” (pp. 26–27). Reviewers see the process of reading a book about Muslims as simultaneously reading for enlightenment about the Other and reading for empathetic identification, recognizing the similarities in human experience and story themes as ways to understand and articulate what they have read about the Other. Aubry also describes how the reading experience and process of identification with the text’s characters is “an intensely emotional one” (p. 29). Readers’ emotional reaction to the text also “serves as an instance of cross-cultural continuity” (p. 30), which leads the reader to view the book as reflecting common human experiences, values, and themes and as being universal in its appeal. The emotional empathy readers experience by being drawn in and carried along by the emotional joys, sorrows, fear, and anger of characters provides a cathartic experience and serves to “reinforce their belief in their own humanity through an amplification of their emotional economy and a renewed perception of their capacity for compassion” (Aubry, p. 30).

Aubry (2009) draws on David Damrosch’s (2003) discussion of how readers “exoticize” or “domesticate” foreign fiction. He shares Damrosch’s advocacy for focusing on the universality of a text, or the general relatability of a text, but Aubry, unlike Damrosch, advises caution in this approach. He also notes the benefits of readers focusing on the universal appeal of fiction about the Other. Like Said, he sees the benefits of readers finding ways to connect themselves with the Other:

In claiming that *The Kite Runner* treats themes that underscore our shared humanity, readers are often resisting the onslaught of exoticizing, disparaging conceptions of the Islamic world famously lamented by Edward Said and all the more pervasive now. (p. 27)

Aubry is cautious of a process of reading that allows the Western reader too much freedom in normalizing the text, as the reader interprets and empathizes with it:

The issue is to stay alive to the works' real difference from us without trapping them within their original context or subordinating them entirely to our own immediate moments and needs. An emphasis on universality can be a powerful aid in protecting the work from either of these extremes, so long as this universality isn't created by a process of stripping away much of what is already distinctive about the work. (p. 26)

2.2.2 A Reader Response Perspective

Reader response theory, and its related reception study, provides a second theoretical frame through which I consider reader reviews. After an initial postcolonial analysis provides the problematics of Western readers reading with Orientalist tendencies, I consider these reviews from the perspective of reader response theory and related pedagogical theories about reading the Other. With the perspective created from these related theories I challenge existing reading tendencies and explore alternative approaches that provide greater awareness of Orientalist tendencies and a relationship with the Other that is more responsible and responsive to the Other. Unlike postcolonial theory, which often discounts the individual's ability to overcome the cultural forces shaping his or her interpretations of the world, reader response theory acknowledges the active role that the reader plays with a text in making meaning. This theoretical perspective also offers opportunities for readers to become more critically aware of

the influences on them as individuals that affect their textual interpretations. The related pedagogical theorists whose concepts contribute to exploring alternative approaches to reading the Other also envision opportunities within formal pedagogical approaches to reading for Western readers to consciously alter their reading perspectives and interpretations.

Reader response theory has opened up the opportunity to validate the meaning a reader creates from a text or as interplay of meaning created between the reader and text (and possibly author). A distinguishing characteristic of reader-response criticism is a shift from the traditional emphasis on the importance of the text as containing universal truths that need to be discovered to an emphasis on the effect of the text on the reader, on the meaning-making role of the reader (Guerin, Labor, Morgan, Reesman, & Willingham, 1992) and a new legitimization for the role of the reader in textual analysis in research. The dominant Anglo-American tradition of criticism in the mid-twentieth century, New Criticism, insisted that literary interpretations concentrate solely and objectively on the work of literature being interpreted. This approach was a reaction to an earlier tradition in literary scholarship, which interpreted the meaning of a text by emphasizing authorial biography and literature as the transmission of history. New Criticism emphasized formalist processes of literary analysis as ways to resist the “intentional fallacy” (considering the personal input of the writer) and the “affective fallacy” (considering the emotional effect of the text on the reader). As well as decreasing the role of the author, the role of the reader in the meaning process is nearly non-existent. As a result, Rosenblatt (1994) describes, “the reader is usually cast as a passive recipient” (p. 4).

While there were dissenting theoretical approaches to New Criticism in the earlier part of the twentieth century, like Louise Rosenblatt’s (1994, 1995) emphasis on the importance of the reader, reader-response theory emerged as influential in the 1970s and 1980s. Schweickart and

Flynn (2004) list three main tenets of reader-response criticism: 1) the text is not viewed as containing objective meaning and cannot be interpreted by referencing certain objective textual properties; 2) the reader produces meaning, and meaning is based on the prior experiences, ideological commitments, interpretive strategies, and cognitive, moral, psychological and political interests of the reader; and 3) because of the second tenet, readings by different readers will vary, and there is no single, noncontroversial set of standards to use for settling interpretive disputes (pp. 1-2). Major theorists in this field run the continuum from a traditional centering of interpretation on the text (e.g. Peter Rabinowitz, 1987) to reader as the center (e.g., Stanley Fish, 1980a, 1980b) to varying degrees of interchange somewhere within the middle (e.g., Wolfgang Iser, 1971, 1974, 1978; Hans Robert Jauss, 1982). Richard Beach (1993) recognizes more subtle differences in reader-response theory that draw from five different theoretical perspectives on response: 1) textual, 2) experiential, 3) psychological, 4) social, and 5) cultural. The approach taken in this study examines the text, author, and reader as playing important roles in the way that representations of the Muslim Other are created by U.S. Western readers.

Based on Beach's classification of perspectives (1993), the analysis and discussion in this study draws from Jauss' term "horizons of expectations" (textual), Stanley Fish's concept of the interpretive community (social), and Louise Rosenblatt's transactional theory of reading (experiential). However, because of my interpretation of the influence of Orientalism on the reading experience of the Other, I frame this study with a cultural theory to reading. Beach advocates the overlapping and intersection of these perspectives: "the local – the focus on readers' textual knowledge and experience – is embedded within the global, larger social and cultural contexts" (p. 9)

2.2.2.1 Reading to Understand Rather Than to Know the Other

Reader response theory provides an alternative perspective to the readers' approaches to knowledge to challenge their often objectivist epistemological stance to finding truth in the bestselling books with the consideration of a more poststructuralist, subjectivist stance. While postcolonial theory provides an alternative perspective to interpreting the discourse created by Western readers' reviews about Muslims and the West's relationship with the Muslim world, it does not provide a perspective that challenges this objectivist need to find absolute truth claims. Reader response theory, which acknowledges the subjective role readers play in creating meaning from texts, provides a challenge to the epistemological grounding that supports an Orientalist interpretation. This first reading challenge I explore is the idea of reconceptualizing readers' need to know into awareness of their role in meaning making with the texts. By focusing on the subjectivity readers bring to the reading process, I reconsider the reading act as a need to understand.

The use of the terms "know" and "understand" draws from Schwandt's (1999) distinctions which also provide an explanation for this interpretive study. While Schwandt uses this distinction to differentiate what guides a traditional empiricist method of social research and interpretivist research, the same epistemological distinction can be made between a reading process motivated by a need to know and one motivated by a need to understand. While the need to know derives from a belief that absolute, generalizable truth claims will be discovered in the text, the need to understand acknowledges the subjective role of the reader engaging in the meaning making process. While Schwandt provides the distinction that will be used in this first challenge, Rosenblatt's (1994, 1995) distinctions between efferent and aesthetic reading provide analytic concepts for discussing how readers, as they engage in the mission to find generalizable

truths about the Muslim Other, are failing to consider the subjective and aesthetic nature of these texts as literary. While both reading stances are present in all reading processes, each stance is accorded a differing amount of attention by the reader, depending on whether the reader is engaging in a nonliterary or literary transaction. The efferent stance “is involved primarily with analyzing, abstracting, and accumulating what will be retained after the reading” (Rosenblatt, 1994, p. 184), often occurring in acquiring facts or answers from nonfictional texts. The aesthetic stance “is focused primarily on experiencing what is being evoked, lived through, during the reading” (p. 184) and often occurs from reading more literary texts. While these bestselling novels are more literary in nature, thus emphasizing an aesthetic stance, Western readers approach them with a greater emphasis on an efferent stance. This exploration is an entry for beginning an analysis into readers’ aesthetic responses to these literary texts, even while they insist on the efferent stance they are taking by reading them.

2.2.2.2 Reading with a Situated Awareness

Readers interpret what they read using an Orientalist lens as they perpetuate negative stereotypes of Muslims and a relationship between the West and the Muslim world that encourages Western hegemony. However, they are nearly always unaware of how these tendencies reflect a reading process that is politically and culturally situated. The second challenge that is explored regarding these current reading practices analyzes these reviews using Jauss’ (1982) term “horizons of expectations, Fish’s (1980) concept of the interpretative community, and Rosenblatt’s (1994, 1995) transactional theory of reading as possibilities for the reading process. Jauss uses this term to refer to the system or structure of expectations that an individual brings to her reading of a text (Holub, 1993). Specifically, he is interested in readers’ responses that are constructed by their particular historical contexts. His focus of interest, similar to my focus in this study, is on

collective responses of groups over time, rather than that of individuals. In the context of my study, the reading responses of post-September 11th Westerners, specifically U.S. Westerners, are analyzed. Jauss' emphasis on the historical notion of context can be extended to include the social and cultural contexts that U.S. Westerners bring to their reading of these bestsellers.

Stanley Fish's concept of the interpretive community (1980a) acknowledges that meaning is created from a transaction between the reader and the text. He also acknowledges that the interpretations readers make is also based on the interpretative strategies and conventions used by members of a particular community (Beach, 1993). While Fish does not discuss the particular community of the Westerner, his concept that emphasizes the subjective process of reading offers an approach to challenging an objective perspective of reading to know the truth about the Other, a perspective that articulates the communal Orientalizing lens through which so many Westerners tend to read the Other. Fish bases this notion of the interpretative community as a groups of interpreters drawing on a common "sign system," which he describes as "social constructs that individuals assimilate more or less automatically (or more accurately, that pervade and constitute individual consciousness)" (Tompkins, 1980, p. xxi). Fish's notion that textual meaning making is subjective is distinguished from an objectivist approach to reading as he says "it is in and by that activity [of reading] that meanings—experiential, not positivist—are created" (Fish, 1980a, p. 167). Fish's theory offers a subjectivist epistemological alternative to Western readers' current practices of reading the Other.

Emphasizing subjectivity to an even greater degree is Louise Rosenblatt's (1994, 1995) experiential approach to reading response: her transaction theory of reading. This theory of reading challenges a strictly objectivist approach to reading by distinguishing between two stances of reading: an efferent stance and an aesthetic stance. Like Fish, Rosenblatt also

emphasizes the unique transaction that occurs between an individual reader and a text, again emphasizing a subjective interpretation to reading. She acknowledges that the individual is also shaped uniquely by his or her society, culture, or community. Rosenblatt (1994) explains that

the reader brings to the text his past experience and present personality. Under the magnetism of the ordered symbols of the text, he marshals his resources and crystallizes out from the stuff of memory, thought, and feeling a new order, a new experience, which he sees as the poem. (p. 12)

In this study, I also draw on her emphasis that readers become more aware of what influences their reading practices. She states that “a full understanding of literature requires both a consciousness of the readers’ own angle of refraction and any information that can illuminate the author’s implicit assumptions” (1995, p. 109).

2.2.2.3 Reading for Sameness and Strangeness

Connected to this challenge of reading for situated awareness is a situated perspective of the relationship between the Western reader and the read Muslim Other as one of sameness and strangeness. In my analysis of these reviews as an exploration of reconceiving sameness and strangeness, I use Grobman’s (2007) concept of hybridity and Taylor’s (Burwell, Davis, & Taylor, 2008; Taylor, 2007a, 2007b) concept of recursive and ethical reading, which is informed by Spivak (1990, 1994, 1999).

Grobman (2007) provides an approach that illustrates the need for a reader to recognize his or her situatedness, in connection with that of the author and text, and provides an approach that allows a reader to move more critically between sameness and strangeness in his or her reading interaction with the Muslim Other. Her vision of multicultural hybridity involves an “interpretive practice” that “explore[s] and uncover[s] the historical and cultural assumptions

that inform the work, and readers, if they are to experience the richness of these texts, must be culturally informed” (p. 32). To find a way to critically negotiate sameness and strangeness with the Muslim Other, Grobman looks for an approach that embraces both and allows for movement between both perspectives. She rejects fixed essentialistic identities for the Western Self and Other. She comes to this perspective by acknowledging a failure in multicultural studies in education. She sees it as either engaging in a “politics of difference,” causing readers to become estranged from the Other by emphasizing only difference or engaging in a “politics of equal treatment,” causing readers to engage in a superficial empathetic identification with the Other.

This dichotomy arises from the two trends in multiculturalism—liberal multiculturalism and critical multiculturalism—both of which are lacking in their ability to account for the other’s stance. Liberal multiculturalism focuses on assimilating difference, finding universal similarities, encourages readers to make connections with their own perspectives and experiences as a way to erase, and critics might say appropriate, difference (Grobman, 2007). Critical multiculturalism, based in critical theory, emphasizes specific social, racial, ethnic, and cultural differences similar to identify politics, and critiques power relations that influence how we judge and view these differences and what we hold as societal, racial, ethnic, cultural norms. However, both may be viewed as lacking in their inability to address the presence and influence of the other, opposite perspective. The struggle becomes this:

to embrace multicultural texts as different is to simultaneously reinscribe them on the margins of American literature, yet to ignore difference is to erase it altogether, reinforcing an uncritical and untenable assimilation. (p. xv)

Grobman seeks to strike a balance between equal treatment of the Other and focusing on the politics of difference of the Other. She draws on Iris Marion Young’s (1990, 1995) vision of

“the relational conception of difference.” Young sees difference as relational, as groups interconnect, and as contextual. Essentialized, fixed definitions of Self and Other are discarded. Instead, the relationship and definition of Self and Other are seen as constantly shifting in relation to one another. Rather than being two monolithic, binary entities, Self and Other are broken down into smaller social groups that interact within and across the notions of Self and Other based on other defining notions like gender, political or philosophical similarities, or interests. Grobman draws from this and calls for a hybrid approach that mediates between perspectives of sameness and difference.

The notion of hybridity allows for the acknowledgement of these relational and contextual interactions. It expands beyond the simple essentialized binary of Self and Other to account for shifting cultural, linguistic, economic, political, and aesthetic meetings. Grobman’s notion of hybridity aligns with Bhaba’s (1994) vision of identity moving from a colonial emphasis on “fixity” to a postcolonial emphasis on “hybridity.” He sees the colonial vision of “fixity” in representing cultural, historical, and racial difference as rigid and unchanging, whereas a postcolonial vision of “hybridity” allows for “uncertain spaces [to] open up between traditional centers; in these spaces, postcolonial identity formation begins to occur based...on movement, migration, and negotiation” (Davis, 2008, p. 65). In this way, there is more recognition for changes and shifts in identity that defy the simplistic Orientalist vision of Self and Other.

The impact of this notion of multicultural hybridity, for Grobman (2007), can influence reading and interpretation by moving beyond discussions about essentialized understandings of the role and identify of the author, the text, and the reader’s interpretation. The reader then becomes more critically aware of his or her role as a reader and of the various changing

influences on the text, author, and characters that may, at times, connect with the reader and at times become strange. A critical reader of multicultural texts is one who can flow between the boundaries of similarity and difference, while being “cautious that we not deny or erase difference, but complicate it, and that we do not do so by measuring it against a white norm” (p. 45). A critical reader is comfortable with shifting identities and understanding in reading and receiving the Other through multicultural literature. A critical reader who realizes that reading the Other “can be circuitous and at times fragmented; may be gaps along the way and students may feel displaced as the familiar disassembles around them” (pp. 45-46).

While Grobman’s approach (2007) is helpful, she does not make explicit how a struggling reader may arrive at such perspective. Taylor (2007a, 2007b), recalling the experience of her pre-service teachers reading about the Muslim Other, provides such a detailed process. She discusses the process of reading she engages with her students, showing how she engages them in multiple interpretations of a text, helping them move from their uncritically considered perspectives to those that are more situatedly aware. Unlike Grobman, who seeks to strike a balance between reading for sameness and strangeness, Taylor’s concern is in leading her students away from the easy, uncritical empathetic identification in which they engage to a perspective that recognizes the challenging differences that arise from situated awareness and which requires the reader to be prepared to recognize many perspectives in his or her reading. This process of reading estranges the reader. But unlike Orientalism, which estranges the Westerner from the Muslim Other by exoticizing and essentializing the Other, Taylor’s approach critically estranges the reader from the tendency to normalize and interpret the Other in ways that reflect what is familiar to the reader. Just as Western readers need to actively resist Orientalist interpretations, so too do they need to constantly engage in this process of critical reflexivity and

resist the tendency of generating easy and uncritical empathy for and understanding of the Muslim Other.

While Grobman and Taylor take different approaches to addressing the reader's need to embrace both sameness and strangeness, they both acknowledge that this complicated and simultaneous interplay is occurring in a reader who is situatedly aware of himself or herself, and of the author or text with which the reader interacts. This sense of situatedness creates interplay as readers, in some instances, may feel estranged from the Other, perhaps in recognition of a colonial past. At the same time, a reader may feel a sense of connectedness with a character who shares similar interpersonal experiences with friends and/or family as the reader. This awareness of the nuanced complexity of these feelings causes a reader to constantly question his or her relationship with the Other, engaging in a continual process of critical renewal, rather than accepting his or her own simple answers to these questions. The post-colonial critic, for Spivak, is one who engages in "a constant awareness of the location of the individual and the circumstances of knowledge production" (Williams & Chrisman, 1994, pp. 11-12), whether the individual is the reader, the author, the characters, or the text in general. This awareness also needs to be a constant process of engagement for the Western reader who reads books by and about Muslims in an attempt to better understand them. These readers need to be challenged to "historicize critically the geopolitical locations from which they read, speak and make knowledge claims" (Zine, Taylor, & Davis, 2007, p. 277), particularly regarding the Muslim Other "in the name of who we *read as*, *read about*, and *speak/act on behalf of*" (Zine, Taylor, & Davis, 2007, p. 276). This kind of reading "demands not passive credulity, cultural relativism or particularism, but rigorously researched historicization...an ethical obligation of readers to 'do one's homework' researching multiple situated knowledges" (Taylor, 2007a, pp. 310-311). She

connects this directly with Spivak's vision that a Western reader's "right to criticize" is not granted but "earned" (Spivak, 1990, p. 62). Like Taylor, Spivak sees Western readers not justifying passive reading because of a sense of historical guilt they feel, but rather, to pursue actively and critically an understanding of their cultural, historical, and gender-based position with respect to the Other. The point is not to estrange one's self from emotional involvement with the Other, as is envisioned in Orientalism, but rather to engage in a process of "critical witnessing" (Taylor, 2007a, p. 311).

2.2.2.4 Reading Responsibly

The last challenge explored in an analysis of Western readers' current reading process is reconsidering how Westerners currently interpret the relationship between the West and the Muslim world, from the reconceived perspective of reading sameness and strangeness in the Other with situated awareness. In my analysis, I explore possibilities within these reviews for reconsidering a relationship with the Other that recognizes Western, specifically U.S., implicatedness and guilt (Todd, 2003) in creating the current situations in Iran, Afghanistan, and Pakistan and often negative engagements between Muslim extremists and the West. I also explore a reconceived relationship drawing on Boler's (1994) distinction between testimonial and confessional, which draws on Felman and Laub's (1992) concept of reading as a witness to testimony and Welch's (2000) reconception of a relation with the Other that reconceives empathy as one in which the dominant party (e.g., the Westerner) gives up hegemonic control and works with the Other to create a mutually respectful relationship.

Reading as a Witness to Testimony: Boler (1994) draws on Felman and Laub (1992) and makes a distinction between testimonial and confessional reading practices. For Boler, a confessional reading practice allows readers to read vicariously, but without a sense of

responsibility to the Other, and “bears no consistent commitment to responsibility beyond one’s self” (para. 17). Boler (1994) advocates for testimonial reading in which a reader asks herself: “what is the text asking of me?” The version of empathy that Boler criticizes is one that engages in a confessional reading practice. In this case, the reader reads self-reflexively, reading the Other as a way for individual salvation: “it seeks redemption, or approval, but does not pose itself as...related to others, to history, or necessarily to the social” (para. 27). Rather than making easy connections between the reading Self and the read Other, testimony, and testimonial reading, work to estrange the reader. It refuses simple reversibility and the tendency for the reader to universalize the experiences of the Other. As noted earlier, it also requires the reader to be responsible beyond one’s own self-interest. Boler describes its “demand [for] self-reflexive analysis of structures of feeling as a map of the terrain between history and individual consciousness...a self-consciousness that does not use the other as a catalyst, a substitute for oneself” (para. 29).

The process of viewing a text as testimony involves critical and necessary estranging of the reader and developing in the reader a sense of obligation, as a witness, to the Other who is sharing the testimony. By acting as a witness, readers acknowledge a different perspective, the perspective of the one testifying. For the reader witness, there is an understanding that “texts that testify do not simply report facts, but in different ways, encounter – and make us encounter – strangeness” and allows the reader witness to see the testimony as “quite unfamiliar and estranging” (p. 7). By acting as witness, the reader also provides a more distanced perspective to help the testifier in understanding better the event he or she recounts. Reading as a witness to testimony involves an obligation on the part of the reader to become “a participant and co-owner of the traumatic event” (Felman & Laub, 1992, pp. 57-58) that is recounted in the testimony.

Laub's (Felman & Laub, 1992) experiences as a psychoanalyst presents a new perspective for readers to adopt as witnesses. The reader needs to feel the Other's "victories, defeats and silence, know them from within, so that they can assume the form of testimony" (p. 58). This process of witnessing also includes the reader experiencing vicariously the Other's experiences. The reader "comes to be a participant and co-owner of the traumatic event: through his very listening, he comes to partially experience trauma in himself" (p. 57).

Guilt as a Motivator: In my analysis of readers' emotional reactions to and empathetic interpretations of Muslim characters, I draw on Todd's (2003) concept of guilt, rather than empathy, as a motivator for the Westerner creating a more responsible relationship with the Other. Todd challenges the concept of empathizing with the Other in social justice educational discourse, particularly the belief that through empathy, one can feel with, understand and engage with the Other better. Todd contends that projection by the Self onto the Other becomes interpreted as empathy with the Other. It becomes a process of the Self "[casting] its own inner life onto that of the other; it is as though it sets the other up to be a reflection of part of the self" (p. 54). Todd challenges that empathy, in this form, is not enough and that what is needed is a more sophisticated approach to empathy. Drawing on Levinas' discussion of creating a relationship with the Other (1987), Todd's approach calls for "attentiveness to the alterity, to the 'uniqueness' of the Other in a gesture of responsibility" (p. 48). It is this awareness of alterity, or in the case of this study reading for "sameness and strangeness," that creates an emotional response of guilt by the Self (or Western reader, in my study) and generates in the Self a sense of responsibility to the Other. Maintaining a sense of the Other's strangeness in relation to the Self prevents the empathetic tendency to project onto the Other, and in the context of social justice, allows for the Self's awareness of implicatedness in the Other's condition and being "susceptible

to the call of the Other” (p. 99). Rather than viewing guilt as creating an inability to act, it is viewed as a “moral orientation rather than as a moral obstacle” (p. 100). Just as in Boler’s (1994) and Felman and Laub’s (1991) concept of being a witness to testimony, guilt is a response to the Other’s relating of his or her suffering. It is a responsible and ethical response that asks the following questions: “What can I learn from the Other? How might I respond to the Other’s command? How can I be for the Other?” (p.111).

Empathy Reconceived: In re-analyzing and exploring alternatives to Western readers’ current interpretation of the West’s relationship to the Muslim world and the need for Western intervention to solve its problems, I use Welch’s (2000) re-imagined concept of empathy in the relationship created by the dominant Self with the marginalized Other. In considering the relationship with the Other in a social justice context, she presents an alternative relationship between, what she terms “the white middle class” working with racially marginalized groups facing social injustice. Rather than seeing the Self experiencing empathy, in the social justice movement, she, instead, interprets the current perspective of the Self as experiencing guilt, despair, and fear, daunted by the possibilities for social justice. She explores ways for them to foster risk, empathy, and eventual solidarity with these marginalized groups in a common struggle for social justice (Brown, Brooks, & Gunzenhauser, 2008).

Her view of reconceived empathy, however, avoids the tendency of the Self to project onto the Other or to maintain an Orientalist perspective that emphasizes Western hegemony exercised as what is best for the Other. Welch recognizes this Western proclivity for needing to control, particularly in the context of Western foreign policy both before and after the Cold War and the nuclear arms race. Her vision can then be extended in the context of this study to include Western foreign policy in countries like Iran, Afghanistan, and Pakistan and the need to position

policy in a way that controls the Other. In Welch's scenario, white, liberal, middle class social activists are to risk themselves in the pursuit of social justice if they cannot control the situation. Her concept of reconceived empathy challenges the dominant Self to risk giving up this control and being guided instead by the needs of the Other in a truer form of empathy. Rather than redistributing the power to the Other, this risk of giving up control on the part of the Self creates a mutually respectful relationship with the Other, "a respect-filled communal dialogue with a transclass base" (Townes, 1997, p. 34). In this context, a sense of solidarity has an opportunity to develop, while still respecting the Other's differences. Envisioning empathy that involves the Self giving up control of the relationship, the lives of Self and Other, which are already entwined, allows for the creation of accountability to develop. In the case of the Westerner to the Muslim Other, the Westerner is challenged to be held accountable to the other, responding to the Other's needs rather than projecting what is needed onto the Other.

3.0 BACKGROUND AND JUSTIFICATION OF THE TEXTS, THE CONTEXT, AND THE AUTHORS

What do you know about how people live in Cairo or Beirut or Riyadh? What bearing does such information have upon your life? There are, of course, newspapers to keep responsible Americans up to date when trouble looms, and public television or even the History Channel to inform us about the occasional historic battle or archeological discovery or civil war. What else do we need? The ways that people think and work and suffer and fall in love and make enemies and sometimes make revolutions is the stuff of novels. (Pierpont, 2010, p. 74)

Pierpont's comment suggests that Western readers turn to sources of information, like bestselling literary texts, to give them more than the often dry, two-dimensional portrayals of Muslims presented in the news and on political and history programs. Literary texts like Khaled Hosseini's *The Kite Runner* (2003), Azar Nafisi's *Reading Lolita in Tehran: A Memoir in Books* (2003), and Greg Mortenson and David Oliver Relin's *Three Cups of Tea: One Man's Mission to Promote Peace...One School at a Time* (2006) have attracted Western readers because they promote themselves as offering authoritative information about Muslims and life in predominantly Muslim countries like Afghanistan, Iran, and Pakistan, within often dramatic settings and events, vividly written characters, and colorful and exotic landscapes. They offer the readers an engaging and aesthetically pleasing reading experience that promises to also teach them what they need to know about the geopolitical situations and its Muslim peoples.

These three texts have been named bestselling books by various sources including the *New York Times* and have been featured as trade paperback selections in bookstores including

Barnes & Noble and Borders (when it still existed) and as book club selections. All three books were originally published in English and targeted to a Western, English-speaking audience. Their authors have been featured in the media as experts on issues relating to Muslims and countries including Iran, Afghanistan, and Pakistan. As well, the reviews of these books on on-line sites like Amazon.com have been extensive. As of April 17, 2012, *The Kite Runner* has 2,937 customer reviews posted on Amazon.com, *Three Cups of Tea* has 2,604 reviews, and *Reading Lolita in Tehran* has 421 reviews. In these ways, the books have become a part of Western, particularly U.S., public discourse on how and what Westerners are learning about Muslims and Muslim countries.

This chapter includes justifications for studying literary texts, specifically the bestselling books and the Amazon.com reader reviews selected, and it includes a context of the countries in which the literary texts are set and backgrounds to the literary texts studied and the authors of these texts, in order to situate the historical, political, and cultural contexts that influences Western readers' reading and interpretative processes. The role of the reader will be analyzed in depth in the following chapters. The roles of the bestselling books and their authors will be discussed first, because the text and author create a meaning in anticipation of the reader eventually engaging with the text. The books' publishers are able to promote the books in ways to create and fuel readers' expectations. The authors promote themselves as experts in their books' content matter. As well, readers' situatedness as Westerners is influenced by the relations their countries have with these countries and their peoples.³ In the case of this study, I focus specifically on United States relations and foreign policy with Afghanistan, Iran, and Pakistan.

³ In this instance, the focus will be primarily on U.S. Westerners since the reviews are primarily by readers from the United States.

While the reader will eventually create meaning with the text and the author, these aspects precede and lay the foundations for that process.

3.1 WHY LITERATURE?

Literary works are cultural practices that relate in complex ways to other cultural practices. (Lentricchia & McLaughlin, 1995, p. ix)

The novel exists as a cultural artifact of a life or lives, as a piece of a culture, of cultural context. The researcher stands to gain important insight into the novel and its characters through novel inquiry, but literature provides more: connections to the author's life and the author's relationship to the characters as well as understandings of the reader's life and the novel's connection to the reader. (Otto, 2007, p. 79)

Since September 11, 2001, stories about the Muslim Other has proven successful in the publishing world, as the general public has bought them to the extent that they have become termed bestsellers. Researching this literature and reader responses to these literary texts, in the form of Amazon.com customer reviews, provides a way to understand how Westerners are reading and educating ourselves informally about the Muslim Other.

Crotty (2003) provides a justification for using literature as research data in the social sciences. He sees it as a way for researchers to better understand the perceptions, attitudes, and feelings of those studied. Looking particularly at the different ways to approach the relationship between a reader and a text, Crotty recognizes that “these various modes prove suggestive and evocative as we recognize research data as text – and even before that, as we take human situations and interactions of text” (p. 110). Otto (2007) further justifies the use of literary texts in educational research as cultural artifacts that give the researcher greater insight into culturally contextualizing an author, text, and reader. Further, she notes that literature as a “piece of a

culture” may lead to more “complex understandings of human phenomena” (p. 73). And as Eisner (1997a) states, “humans have used storied forms to inform since humans have been able to communicate” (p. 264). As works of literary artistic devices, imaginative, and aesthetical considerations, novels – and I would include, memoirs – “disclose what facts cannot reveal. Some things can only be known by feel, by innuendo, by implication, by mood” (Eisner quoted in Saks, 1996, p. 413). Otto refers to this use of novels in educational research as “novel inquiry.” Studying the “more” (as Otto uses the term) through the use of literature holds the “promise to uncover varied and distinct ways of coming to know and understand human phenomenon” (p. 78), an epistemological focus shared by Gadamerian hermeneutics and its manifestations in literary theory, such as reader response theory.

3.1.1 Selected Literary Texts

This study examines the relationships between texts and readers and the responses and interpreted meaning that readers create based on this interaction. For this reason, I drew from data that emphasizes the roles that the text, author, and reader play in this process. The texts selected for this study – three bestselling books (one novel, one memoir, and one biography) and the first 100 Amazon.com customer reviews for each of these books, ordered and selected as those voted by readers as “most helpful” – are not meant to be exhaustive in scope, but rather, richly analyzed and interpreted examples of this interaction. Just as a single literary text may provide a rich insight into the experiences and feelings of a human experience, so too, may this selection of texts, through rich and deep analysis, provide insight into the representations of Muslims being presented in such bestselling books and the ways in which we, as Western readers, are responding to them. I have chosen bestsellers that have been on the *New York Times*

Bestsellers' List for a significant period of time, have helped develop their authors into personalities who are considered experts in discussing issues about Muslims, and have been discussed widely in book clubs and in the general discourse. As well, as the researcher, I chose to stop reading after review 100 as I decided that there were several repeating themes that would allow for a critical and nuanced analysis. That said, I experienced, coincidentally, a particularly interesting review for each bestseller that occurred between reviews 90 and 100. This would be a review that would allow me to encapsulate a discussion of a particular thematic phenomenon or to use as an example of a critically conceived response. My decision to stop reading reviews after the 100th review for each bestseller may be explained best in terms of Eisner's (2002) discussion of Nelson Goodman's (1978) term – "rightness of fit," as Eisner says of a decision, "one knows one is right because one feels the relationships" (p. 9).

3.1.2 Defining "Bestseller"

As methodological tools go, the best-seller list may indeed serve researchers' purposes well by providing a logical means to select some sample titles to study. But I would like to address the greater authority and power that these lists have. By looking more closely at those documents that certify a book as a best-seller, one can uncover the ways in which the best-seller list is actively participating in the doings of the book world rather than just passively recording it. (Miller, 2000, p. 289)

As well as providing a justification for using bestselling books as research texts, Miller's statement also speaks to the perceived value this title carries and the popularity and power it accords a book to be influential in our society. This may also be assumed to be the case with the three bestsellers studied here. These include *Reading Lolita in Tehran*, *The Kite Runner*, and *Three Cups of Tea*. Described as bestsellers, the books in this study become appealing to readers looking to learn more about the Muslim Other. Readers trust the popularity associated with a

book. As more readers read and interpret these texts as bestsellers, they become influential in shaping the ways in which Western readers are learning about and perceiving what it means to be Muslim. While the term “bestseller” is unclear in the ways it is used in the publishing business and the methodology behind recording the sales of books, the term is powerful in the public perception of the value of a book. The term “bestseller” is often used in the marketing techniques of publishers and booksellers as a way to entice buyers to buy a particular book. When one picks up a book in Barnes & Noble or virtually leafs through it on Amazon.com, there may be a banner as part of the book’s graphic design on the cover labeling it as a “National Bestseller” or often as a “*New York Times* Bestseller.” A bestseller is given value as a commodity because the term carries the assumption that there is ample demand for the book and that it must, as a result, be worth reading.

The *Oxford English Dictionary (OED)* defines a bestseller as “one of the books having the largest sale of the year or the season; also, a writer of such books” and the *OED* records its first printed use as a term in the United States, in an April 25, 1889 entry in the *Kansas Times & Star*. However, it is the *New York Times* Bestsellers List, which began publishing its lists in October 1931, that has become the most well known and consulted. With the popularity and use of the World Wide Web, web sites like TopBestsellers – an affiliate of Amazon.com – have also begun to publish lists (Miller, 2000). Despite the high regard of the bestseller with reading consumers, many well regarded and consulted bestsellers lists, including the *New York Times’* list, would not stand up to the scrutiny for quantitative accuracy. As Miller notes, the disparity can arise in the way the term “bestseller” is defined and perceived by the individual. However, Miller’s suggestion here is not that existing bestsellers lists are completely inaccurate in measuring the sales of books. The titles appearing on the list are, in fact, selling strongly, but

they may not deserve their rankings, and that there may be other books that are selling as strongly and not appearing on the list for various reasons, which Miller describes.

Despite these shortcomings, the title “bestseller” holds a certain power over the success of a book and the extent to which it allows a book to play a key role in our discourse. As well, as Miller notes, the bestseller lists hold power in academic research, and particularly in a field like cultural studies, in which the popular buying and reading habits of consumers is considered to be a valid and valued research focus. Miller notes the trend in a variety of disciplines – literary critics, historians, sociologists, for example – who explore the significance of bestsellers in general or in a particular genre on the culture itself.

3.2 WHY AMAZON.COM?

The digital evolution began with the creation of Amazon.com, or “Amazon,” in 1995. It signified the transition from large-scale retail bookselling at chains like Barnes & Noble, which had existed in their modern form since the 1950s, to the large-scale, direct-to-consumer warehouse bookseller whose interface happens to be the World Wide Web. (Striphas, 2009, p. 101)

My decision to draw from Amazon.com customer reviews as evidence of reader responses to these bestsellers is based on the power and influence that Amazon.com exerts with consumers and the extent to which its consumers, reading and otherwise, are making on-line purchases on Amazon.com. It is an on-line site for consumers to purchase a wide variety of products, not simply books. Over the last decade, it has also become the behemoth in on-line book selling, the result being, it has helped to put many traditional bricks-and-mortar booksellers out of business and is threatening the traditionally printed book with its electronic reader, the Kindle. A “\$32

billion-a-year organization,” Amazon is able to offer its customers discounts on products because it has been able to avoid paying state sales tax, a strategy around which it has built its business, according to Janet Novak, executive editor for *Forbes* in a National Public Radio interview (Siegal, 2011, March 14). According to a recent *New York Times* (Bosman, 2012, January 29) article, Amazon.com is threatening the success and survivability of the last standing national bricks-and-mortar bookstore, Barnes & Noble, as well as the entire publishing industry. The article describes: “From their perches in Midtown Manhattan, many publishing executives, editors and publicists view Amazon as the enemy – an adversary that, if unchecked, could threaten their industry and their livelihoods” (p. 4). An example of Amazon.com’s success was seen on January 27, 2012, when “Barnes & Noble’s stock closed...at \$11.95, putting the value of the company at \$719 million. Amazon’s shares closed at \$195.37, valuing Mr. Bezos’s company at \$88 billion” (p. 4).

Amazon’s site provides customers (future readers) with buying information including customer (reader) reviews of the product and the ability to search reviews chronologically, using a keyword search mechanism, and by how helpful the reviews have been voted by customers; a variety of buying and price options for a single product based on such factors as different sellers offering different prices, daily deals offered by Amazon.com, and whether or not the product is purchased new or used; and the ability to track a customer’s purchasing profile in order to suggest related products. For those purchasing books, it often entices the customer to “look inside” and view the back cover, copyright page, table of contents page, the first few pages, or randomly selected pages to read. In this way, a customer can almost thumb through a book as she would be able to do in a bricks-and-mortar bookstore. Amazon’s web site (2011) states

confidently: “As we strive to become Earth’s most customer-centric company, we constantly look for new ways to innovate on behalf of our different customers.”

As Burritt (2010) notes, Amazon.com targets advertisements, web page settings, and suggested products to individual customers based on prior searches and purchases. While this information, as well as customer review ratings and purchases, can be used as marketing research, it also places power in the hands of the customer. As well as understanding and marketing to the individual consumer, Amazon.com also empowers the individual, and as highlighted in this study, the individual reader. As well as revolutionizing product marketing that is hyper-targeted to the individual customer (Gardiner, 2002), it offers the reader customer an on-line forum in which to voice her opinion of a book. And beyond this, her opinion in the form of a customer review has the ability to influence other readers to either buy or avoid buying a particular book, and ultimately, to play a role in the financial and popular success of a book. As Burritt (2010) notes:

These interactive features of retail websites afford readers the power to designate value to books, and in this way readers have appropriated the role of publishers, retailers, and other gatekeepers. And beyond book retail websites [like Amazon], online book communities that blog, annotate, and chat about a book collectively amplify the book’s value to readers through this supplementary information. (p. 16)

The difficulty in using Amazon.com customer reviews in research is that

it is impossible to tell much about [Amazon’s] readers themselves. Aside from offering the content of their reviews and an occasional note on geographical location, the reviewers remain largely anonymous. There is no way to confirm either the content or the identity of those who write these reviews. (Gutjahr, 2002, p. 219)

Despite this inability to classify individual reviewers, in my study, I have found these reviews useful in showing how a larger discourse around a book is being shaped based on the influence of on-line forums such as Amazon.com. This discourse is shaped as many readers “are motivated to read and write online reviews not only by a desire to share recommendations with like-minded readers but also by an urge to participate in a public forum dedicated to debating the question of what constitutes good literature” (Aubry, 2009, p. 27).

Another challenge with interpreting Amazon.com reviews is not being able to contextualize readers to attempt to interpret their motivations for writing these reviews. Amazon.com reviews are not always written by readers who read a book and are inspired to spontaneously write a review. Rather, there may be reviews that are “planted,” by those writing on behalf of a book’s publisher to promote the book or by a rival publisher to criticize a book. Teachers may have students write reviews as a part of assignment connected with reading the book for class. Also, Amazon.com has ways to reward top-ranking⁴ reviewers by including by their names in their entries titles, called “badges,” such as “ #1 Reviewer,” “Top 10 Reviewer,” “Top 500 Reviewer,” and “Hall of Fame Reviewer,” Amazon.com also links to pages listing “Top Reviewer Rankings” and “Hall of Fame Reviewers.” Some successful reviewers are then invited to become members of “Vine™ Voice,” which allows them to receive advance access to products for the purpose of writing reviews. of these reviewers, however, are informal “in-house” reviewers for Amazon.com. These writers may have their own agendas, though not

⁴⁴ Readers of Amazon.com reviews are able to vote on-line to indicate “yes” if a review was helpful in their determination to read or purchase a book or “no” if it was not helpful. Reviews can then be sorted by a reader listing them from “most helpful” to “least helpful.” This ranking privileges reviews which are voted predominantly as helpful, but it is flawed. For example, if only two people go on-line to vote a review as helpful, then the review will be ranked according to 100% of the voters finding it helpful. If 50 people vote a review as helpful and 20 vote it as not helpful, it will rank lower.

indicated explicitly, for writing reviews in a particular way to please employees at Amazon.com who determine which reviewers receive these badges and rankings.

As well, the value of studying on-line sites and Amazon.com, in particular, has been established in reader response and reception studies. For example, Rhiannon Burg's study of fans' responses to the HBO television series *Six Feet Under* as posted to two large internet discussion sites, is recognized as "an area new to reception study" (Goldstein & Machor, 2008, p. xx). Aubry (2009) and Paul Gutjahr (2002) both study Amazon.com customer reviews, categorizing them by common characteristics in order to analyze larger reading trends in American society in ways that are also used in this study. Aubry, in particular, examines reviews of *The Kite Runner* and discusses how readers both estrange and domesticate the Other in their readings informs this study.

3.3 THE COUNTRIES

In this study, I present a culturally-based interpretation of reader response using postcolonial theory. For this reason, I consider another player in the text-author-reader relationship, namely the historical, political, and cultural contexts of these players in meaning making. In order to understand the lack of contextual awareness readers bring to these texts, I provide a perspective of the relationships between the West and Iran, Afghanistan, and Pakistan, illustrating how the West has been complicit in the contemporary political, economic, and cultural situations of each of these countries. Specifically, since nearly all of the reviews analyzed in this study are identifiable as being written by individuals from the United States, my focus here is primarily on the relationship the United States has had with these countries.

The relationship the West has now with countries like Iran, Afghanistan, and Pakistan did not become strained suddenly in the last forty years with acts of aggression on the part of their Muslim peoples. Rather, they have been shaped by Western colonialism, imperialism, and nation building and have a level of complexity often unappreciated to Western readers. This relationship between the West and the Muslim Other extends back to the Crusades, a religiously-infused struggle to gain control of Palestine (considered to be the Holy Land by both religions), which lasted more than a hundred years. The next significant period in this relationship began in the late 18th Century with the Napoleonic invasion of Egypt in 1798. It was with this engagement of European colonialism in the Muslim world that “processes were set in motion between East and West that still dominate our contemporary cultural and political perspectives” (Said, 1978, p. 42). In particular, the West-Muslim relationship was re-imagined by Orientalism in ways that justified colonial and imperialist expansion into areas of south west Asia and Africa. In the late 19th and early 20th centuries, an emerging national identity and self-governance endeavors occurred with various Islamic peoples, including in Afghanistan, Iran, and Pakistan (at the time, a British colony along with India). These efforts of self-determination were met with varying degrees of success and resistance by Western powers with a vested interest in these countries. After World War II, with European colonialism waning, the United States and the Soviet Union filled this void with the global polarizing effects of the Cold War, during which these countries were used as chess pieces in a game of imperialist strategic positioning. The rhetoric on the part of the United States government since the end of the Cold War toward these countries has shaped the contemporary relationship of the West—specifically of the United States—and the Muslim Other with its often disingenuous “redolent self-congratulation, its unconcealed triumphalism, its grave proclamations of responsibility” (Said, 1993, p. xv11). It is

such a discourse that, for many Western readers, has become a subconsciously assumed context from which they read and interpret the Muslim Other.

In the last 40 years, Westerners have often developed a heightened interest in learning about Muslims and predominantly Muslim countries as a result of dramatic acts of aggression by Muslims that have shocked Westerners into the need to know more about the Muslim Other. Such events include the kidnapping of Americans and the unfolding hostage crisis in Iran in the 1970's and the bombing on United States' soil by Islamic extremist terrorists spurred to action by al-Qaeda leader Osama Bin Laden in 2001. There is a collective cultural amnesia at work and resulting puzzlement as to how and why these events occurred and the assumption that these countries have been perpetually in states of chaos. For many readers, the solution to such chaos is Western intervention as a way to help these countries and their peoples find civilized and rational approaches to governance and living. Many reader reviews discuss these countries' current political, economic, and social climate and conjecture approaches to alleviating their problems, while being unaware of how the West—and the United States, recently —has been complicit in creating these current chaotic situations.

3.3.1 Afghanistan

The author Khaled Hosseini recalls the September 11, 2001 terrorist acts on the United States and how this event sparked Americans' interest in Afghanistan:

It was the year many Americans first learned where Kabul, the country's capital, was and who the Taliban were. To a great extent, Americans had pictured Afghanistan as a land of cave-dwelling terrorists. (Milvy, 2007, para. 3)

Suffering from something akin to cultural amnesia, many Americans had forgotten, or perhaps did not understand, the role that the United States had played in the events that unfolded in the last few decades, including its support of the Taliban which allowed Osama bin Laden and al-Qaeda to take up safe residence in Afghanistan. They were unaware of the imperialist legacy of Britain and Russia in shaping the political and economic development of the country in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. They were unaware that what the United States was experiencing with the terrorist attacks on September 11th may be considered an example of “blowback.” Originally used internally by the CIA and extended by Chalmers Johnson (2000), “blowback” refers to the unintended consequences of U.S. foreign policy, often covert, in another country. As Kellner (2004) describes: “what the daily press reports as the malign acts of ‘terrorist’ or ‘drug lords’ or ‘rogue states’ or ‘illegal arms merchants’ often turn out to be blowback from earlier operations (p. 31). In the case of Afghanistan, the “blowback” events of September 11th may be traced to U.S. interventionist actions as part of Cold War efforts to position itself strategically in terms of global spheres of influence as countermoves to what U.S. foreign policy and CIA leaders believed to be strategic positioning by the Soviet Union.

However, the use of Afghanistan as a global pawn is not a new phenomenon of this post-World War II period. Since the nineteenth century, Afghanistan has been considered by the West to be a geographically strategic location and became a key component in the “Great Game” of European imperialization in the nineteenth century. According to Robson and Lipson (2002), while never a colony, Afghanistan was strategically located between Britain’s colony in India and Russia’s need for developing a route to the Indian Ocean as a warm water port. As a result, these two countries created political alliances with local powers, resulting in a series of wars the British fought against Afghan Pashtuns, part of the ruling dynasty of the time, as a way to keep

Russia at bay. The modern boundaries were determined based on British and Russian agreement. Continued negotiation with British extended until 1919 when the Afghan ruler Amanullah declared Afghanistan independent from the British, prompting another Anglo-Afghan war, but ending in a peace treaty that recognized the country's independence. Afghanistan, however, willingly continued relations with Russia by creating a treaty of friendship with the new Soviet Union in 1921. In the mid-twentieth century, the Soviet Union became Afghanistan's major aid and trade partner.

According to Kellner (2004), in the late 1970s, Afghanistan became a strategic location for Western countries, now for the United States and Soviet in their Cold War global positioning maneuvers. This resulted from a series of governmental overthrows and civil unrest. In 1977, the Banner and Khalq parties formed the People's Democratic Party, and in 1978, seized control of the government and established Noor Mohammed Taraki as leader. Friction grew between the two groups, sparking rebellions throughout the countryside. Considering the Taraki government to be an ally of the Soviet Union, the CIA began funding Afghan rebels—"mujaheddin"—who were attempting to fight the Soviets using guerrilla warfare tactics. When Taraki was killed by Afghan army officers in 1979, the Soviets invaded and occupied Afghanistan. With the Soviet invasion, the United States viewed this as an opportunity to issue a covert war with the Soviets by increasing funding for the rebels and giving them supplies and weapons, particularly U.S.-made Stingers. Conservative Muslims, viewing the battle against the Soviets as a religious war, or "jihad," also joined the Afghan resistance, including Osama bin Laden, originally from Saudi Arabia, who came to Afghanistan in 1979. As a covert foreign policy project of the Reagan and Bush administrations, the United States also supported Islamic fundamentalist jihadists, who the

United States would later reject publically. Nine years of war ravaged the country until Soviet troops withdrew completely by 1989.

At this time, the United States also withdrew support to Afghanistan, in what Kellner (2004) describes as “one of [the Bush administration’s] most cynical and fateful decisions” (p. 33), rather than helping the country build democracy and a viable government. Factional fighting continued until 1996, when the Taliban restored order and established a government based on extremist interpretations of Islam and Islamic law. At this time, Osama bin Laden was able to seek safe haven in Afghanistan under Taliban leadership. His terrorist organization, al-Qaeda, was able to develop and strengthen in Afghanistan, and in 2001, perpetrated the attacks on New York City and Washington, D.C. (Robson & Lipson, 2002). As an example of blowback, the United States supported rebel groups, like the Taliban, due to the United States’ hope to have the perceived Soviet puppet government of Taraki overthrown and also funding the Taliban, believing the group might bring stability to the region.

The events of September 11, 2001, created an immediate need for Westerners to learn more about Afghanistan and its people. For many U.S. Westerners, in particular, these events appeared to be random and unforeseen. However, the United States has played a role in perpetuating a chaotic state in Afghanistan and by supporting rebel factions in their war against the Soviets. The events of September 11th, seemingly random to U.S. Westerners unaware of their situatedness politically, militarily, and culturally regarding Afghan Muslims, may be viewed as examples of blowback by the Muslim Other. In a similar way, as will be discussed in the next section, the U.S. Iranian hostage crisis may be viewed also as an example of blowback.

3.3.2 Iran

Before the Iranian Revolution and hostage crisis in 1979, many U.S. Westerners did not know much about Iran. They regarded sympathetically the reigns of the shahs, just prior to the revolution, as Western and democratic. Many U.S. Westerners became obsessed with following the events in Iran, of the hostage crisis and the extensive media coverage of the negotiation process, as well as images of the revolution as they unfolded in 1979 through 1981. For many Americans, this was their first extensive introduction to Iran and its citizens. They were shocked by many Iranians' dissatisfaction with their existing government, by strongly expressed anti-American sentiment, and by the resulting establishment of the Islamic Republic. Since September 11th, Western discourse has often conflated Islam with extremism and the Bush Administration in 2002 positioned Iran as one of three countries (along with Iraq and North Korea) that the United States declared "the axis of evil."

However, the events of the 1970s may be viewed within the context of Western intervention in Iran since the sixteenth century and recent United States intervention in the post-World War II period. These events of the 1970s may be interpreted as reactions against centuries of Western colonial and imperialist actions in Iran. As Kincheloe (2004b) writes, understanding the history and dynamics of this relationship of the West and Iran "helps Americans in a post-9/11 landscape appreciate that Islamic anger toward the United States involves more than irrational 'hatred of our freedom' or our support for Israel" (p. 68). By the 1820s, Britain and Russia had divided Iran into spheres of influence, Britain controlling the south and Russia the north. Neither invested in developing their regions into formal colonies until the early twentieth century when oil was discovered. Their interests were primarily economic and both countries prevented native attempts to revolt and establish independent modern economic systems and

self-governance. In 1906, such revolts led to the Constitutional Revolution of 1906, which established a constitution for a representative government. In 1907, however, the British and Russians viewed this new government as conflicting with their geopolitical and economic self-interests in Iran and supported the reestablishment of the absolute monarch, Mohammed Ali Shah, followed by the rule of Mohammad Reza Pahlavi, who ruled until 1979.

The reigns of the shahs, particularly the rule of Mohammad Reza Pahlavi, are viewed by American public discourse as “the quintessential Western modernization success story” (Kincheloe, 2004b, p. 70). However, for many Iranians, this period was a time of “high poverty, little opportunity for the poor, and torture and terror by the shah’s secret police” (p. 70), the latter of which was created by the CIA and trained by U.S. Colonel H. Norman Schwartzkopf. As it had in Afghanistan, the United States became interested in Iran as a Cold War strategic maneuver against the Soviets, as well as an economic opportunity to have access to its oil reserves. It was in the United States’ political and economic interests to support the rule of shahs, as the British and the Russians had been doing. However, in 1950, the British and the United States were both threatened by the election of Muhammed Mossadegh as prime minister. The British were threatened by his election and his submission of a bill to nationalize the oil industry, reducing the percentage of oil profits that Britain had been receiving. The United States were threatened by this and also by Mossadegh’s neutrality in the Cold War and toward communism. The Eisenhower administration approved CIA covert action, with the British, to successfully overthrow Mossadegh and reinstate the shah, a move that not only squelched movement toward greater democratic and economic reform in Iran, but replaced it with a shah who ruled even more harshly and absolutely than before. These events helped to shape the blowback that the West, particularly the United States, would face in the 1970s.

After the coup, the United States perceived this period in Iran as pro-Western. However, to the Islamic world, this act positioned the United States as “the despised Western nation undermining national sovereignty and subverting justice and democracy” (Kincheloe, 2004b, p. 69). Rather than perceiving the United States as saving Iran from communist tyranny, many Iranians perceived United States’ action as preventing them from governing themselves, gaining control over their oil resources, and subjecting them to the Shah’s harsh rule. In this respect, the 1979 revolution, during which both Iranian liberals and religious fundamentalists found a common purpose, may be viewed from an alternative perspective as “revolt against the Western modernist belief in a unilinear history of the Western Enlightenment and Western science bringing light to the world” (p. 73). While the taking of American hostages was an aggressive act, U.S. media coverage showed little of the historical events leading up to this act of aggression and hostility. Rather, “old stereotypes and gross generalizations began to resurface in the Western consciousness” (p. 73). The West’s interference and polarization in Iran generated an extreme political and cultural alternative, specifically Khomeini’s political Shiite alternative to the shah’s secular nationalism. The relationship between the United States, specifically, and Iran has been strained since then. Even during moments of opportunity for reconsidering the troubled relationship between Iran and the United States, like with the 1997 election of the more moderate Sayyid Mohammad Khatami as president, the United States has sustained an Orientalist representation of Iran and its peoples. This was seen when George W. Bush in 2002 called Iran one member of the “axis of evil,” acting to alienate a new generation of Iranians toward the United States and perpetuating a monolithic vision of the Iranian Muslim.

3.3.3 Pakistan

As reported by National Public Radio (NPR) Islamabad Bureau Chief Julie McCarthy, relations between Pakistan and the United States have been difficult for some time (Martin, 2012, June 10a). Recent anti-American sentiment has resulted from furor against the Pakistani doctor who helped the CIA find and kill Osama bin Laden, from recent allegations of fraud regarding the distribution and spending of U.S. aid to Pakistan, and from the use of U.S. drone strikes against perceived terrorist targets. In a follow-up interview (Martin, 2012, June 10b), when asked about Pakistanis' recent anti-American sentiment regarding the aid fraud, U.S. Senator John Kerry warned Pakistanis that continuing to "play a head strategy" against the United States will be akin to the consequences of riding the back of the tiger...that one will find oneself eventually eaten and in the tiger's belly. While Kerry admits that it is in the United States' best interest to foster positive relations with Pakistan, the United States is, like the tiger, in a position of power and can punish Pakistan, if necessary.

The latest relations between Pakistan and the West did not begin, however, when the United States used Pakistan, after September 11th, as a political ally and geographical staging point for its hunt for Osama bin Laden and Al Qaeda in Afghanistan. Rather, the modern history of Western relations in Pakistan dates back to its colonization by the British East India Company, and then by the British Empire, beginning in the 17th Century and lasting until 1947, when British India became two independent states: India and Pakistan. At this time, the United States chose to form a relationship with Pakistan as a way to strategically place itself against the Soviet Union's recent alliance with India. The stated goal of the United States was to "create a reliable ally with strong institutions and a modern, vigorous democracy" (Wright, 2011, para. 1). Despite these goals, however, Pakistan has become, as Wright states, "one of the most anti-American

countries in the world, and a covert sponsor of terrorism” (para. 2). Also, ironically, after September 11th, it became a hiding place for Osama bin Laden for several years during the United States’ search for him.

As Wright (2011) discusses, monetary and military aid has been a major element in the U.S.-Pakistan relationship since World War II. Initially, in 1954, the United States signed a mutual defense agreement with Pakistan, sending monetary and military support as a way to , the United State resumed and increased aid to Pakistan, using the country as a staging ground for its 10-year covert operation of funding Afghan rebels. After the terrorist acts on U.S. soil in 2001, Pakistan became America’s ally in the “war on terror,” mostly due to its proximity to Afghanistan and received aid, much of which was unrestricted. With Pakistan, as with Afghanistan, the motivation by the U.S. for giving aid has been cynically guided by self interest, as the United States lost interest in helping both of these countries after the Soviets left Afghanistan, until the events of September 11th.

As well as the complex monetary relationship between the United States and Pakistan, anti-American sentiment in the country has grown due to the use of U.S. drone strikes against potential al-Qaeda targets in both Afghanistan and Pakistan since September 11th, as a key aspect of the Bush and Obama administrations’ foreign policy strategy. While the United States government views this procedure as necessary in combating militant terrorist organizations, it is viewed by many Pakistanis as a breach of national sovereignty and perceived negatively in light of the civilian deaths it causes. As a result of these drone strikes and current relations with Pakistan, Massod and Mehsud (2012, July 7) cite the Pew Research Center’s recent survey, that shows that 74 percent of Pakistan respondents view the United States as an enemy, compared with 69 percent last year and 64 percent three years ago.

Without an awareness of the historical, political, military, economic, and cultural dynamics that have shaped the West's relationship with these countries, Western readers, and U.S. Western readers in particular, approach events like September 11th with historical amnesia or ignorance as to why they have occurred. As they read bestselling texts like *The Kite Runner*, *Reading Lolita in Tehran*, and *Three Cups of Tea*, they look for information and clarification to explain the Muslim Other to them in light of these events. As they read, they are open to the influence of the books' publishers, authors, and the stories themselves, but they do not have the critical awareness of how situatedness shapes the interpretations of Muslims and the West's relationship with the Muslim world. In this section, I provided a historical, political, economic, and cultural background of the countries and their peoples portrayed in these texts. In the next sections, I provide a similar background of the texts themselves, in terms of how they have been marketed by their publishers and received by the general reading public, and a background of the authors.

3.4 THE TEXTS

3.4.1 The Kite Runner

Khaled Hosseini's *The Kite Runner* (2003) is a bestselling novel and was adapted into a film in 2010 and a graphic novel in 2011. According to Khaled Hosseini's web site (www.khaledhosseini.com), this book spent over five years on the *New York Times* bestseller list and has been published in 55 languages. As stated on publisher Penguin's web site (<http://us.penguin.com/>) of the book, *The Kite Runner* is the first Afghani novel to be

written in English. It was named a *San Francisco Chronicle* Best Book of the Year, an *Entertainment Weekly* Top Ten Fiction Pick of the Year, an *American Library Association* Notable Book, and is the recipient of *The American Place Theatre's* Literature to Life Award. It is a popular summer reading book on many college lists for students about to enter college (Lewin, 2007) and is also a recommended book on the U.S. Army Combined Arms Center's Pre-Deployment Afghanistan Reading List (Potts, 2011). Aubry (2009) notes that the book has attracted positive responses from U.S. readers across the political divide regarding U.S. foreign policy in Afghanistan and regardless of this divergence of opinion, these readers see their views justified in the novel's depiction of Afghanistan and its peoples. Hosseini followed the success of *The Kite Runner* with the success of his second novel, *A Thousand Splendid Suns* (2007). As stated on the publisher Penguin's web site (<http://us.penguin.com>), *A Thousand Splendid Suns* spent 15 weeks at #1 on the *New York Times* bestseller list and remained on the list for 49 weeks.

The Kite Runner is a *bildungsroman*, following the growth and maturation of Amir, a young Pashtun Afghan boy. It follows his personal journey alongside the political and social events unfolding in Afghanistan from the 1970s during the period of the monarchy, the Soviet invasion, the exodus of refugees to Pakistan and the United States, and the rise of the Taliban's rule. The reader experiences these events as they affect Amir's life. He leads a comfortable and affluent life as the son of a wealthy merchant. This changes when he and his father must flee the country and they become poor immigrants, building a new home in the United States. The book follows Amir's eventual path to college, his success as a novelist, and his return to Afghanistan to fulfill a personal promise. Many reader reviews express the belief that by reading this novel,

they have learned more about Afghanistan within the context of this personal and fictional tale than they have from watching or reading the news.

The story also includes Amir's friendship with Hassan, a Hazara Afghan, the son of his father's servant, and as is later discovered, Amir's illegitimate half-brother. Amir betrays Hassan when they are boys, failing to help him when he is brutally raped by another boy, Assef, and then, in an attempt to ease his guilt and shame, accuses Hassan of theft, causing Hassan and his father to leave the employment of Amir's father. Amir's guilt continues throughout the years. When Amir learns of Hassan's and his wife's deaths and that their son (and Amir's nephew) Sohrab is now orphaned, he returns to Afghanistan, now under Taliban rule, to find Sohrab. He must free Sohrab from a Taliban leader, who turns out to be Assef, who paid the orphanage in order to own and employ the boy as his servant and, as the book suggests, to sexually abuse him. In this way, Amir is able to enact the bravery he should have shown to save Hassan. Amir is successful, redeemed from his act of betrayal, and returns with Sohrab to the United States where he and his wife will raise him. It is the relationship between Amir and Hassan and the maturation of Amir as he betrays Hassan, lives with the subsequent guilt of his actions, and eventually takes action to help Hassan's son and achieve redemption that is presented to readers as revealing common human experiences. Many readers readily respond to this theme as such, stating their belief that Amir's development and the theme of betrayal and guilt leading to possible redemption are universally shared by humans.

In the Amazon.com book description, *The Kite Runner* promises to be all things to all people: both a "timely" novel and educative of "the devastating history of Afghanistan over the last thirty years," as well as an "epic tale" with universal themes. The professional reviews listed on Amazon.com's entry for *The Kite Runner* reflect what many readers note in their reviews: that

the book holds educative value and teaches readers the truth about Afghanistan and Afghan people. Amazon.com's in-house review of the hardback edition states that the book "provides an educational and eye-opening account of a country's political turmoil" (Toueg)⁵. Adding to the realistic account the novel provides, the review declares that "one almost forgets that *The Kite Runner* is a novel and not a memoir." The *Publishers Weekly* (2003) review notes the contemporary relevancy of the book, which provides

an incisive, perceptive examination of recent Afghan history and its ramifications in both America and the Middle East...that succeeds in exploring the culture of a previously obscure nation that has been a pivot point in the global politics of the new millennium.

AudioFile's review of the audio version of the book addresses the educative value of this story to Westerners stating explicitly that "Westerners who engage this novel will learn about Afghani society of the recent past." At the same time, readers are promised that they will be able to relate to the characters. The Amazon.com review promises that the characters' "heartbreaking struggles and emotional triumphs resonate with readers." Kristen Huntley's review for *Booklist* states that "the emotional impact of the story will guarantee its longevity." As well, professional reviews list the novel's themes using all-inclusive terms to give them a universal quality. Themes listed include "how childhood choices affect our adult lives" (*Publishers Weekly*); "personal redemption" (Penny Stevens, 2003); and "an intimate account of family and friendship, betrayal and salvation" (*Washington Post Book World*).

⁵ Professional reviews & reader reviews are cited in Amazon.com Reviews section. On-line Amazon.com professional reviews are cited based on the information given on Amazon's web site. At times, they may only be the source ("Publishers Weekly") if no date or author is given. Reader reviews are cited by including the following information: author of review, date of review, and title of review. [e.g., Annie O. "Indian Ocean reader." (2005, December 9). A good read.]

Critics of Hosseini's writing style generally attack what they believe is the heavy-handed melodramatic writing and implausible plot twists presented in the novel. The story is also seen by some as unrealistic in its creation of characters and their experiences. Examples from the Amazon.com customer reviews of the novel illustrate the diverse critiques of Hosseini's writing style. M.J. Mohseni (2004, August 16) claims that the story "turns into a soap opera...an action drama, the kind you see in the movies, with an implausible sequence of events. The story becomes over-dramatized and filled with clichés." Howard Goldowsky (2004, July 26) notes that "some scenes reminded me of a Michael Crichton (*sic*) novel, where the protagonist just barely makes it out of the alligator infested river to find himself face to face with a bear." Timothy Haugh (2007, January 24), on the other hand, found the aspect of child rape "being pivotal as disturbing." Another reviewer sees a lack of believable character development "in favor of mysteries and emotional climaxes that are easily foreseen" (Steve Koss, 2005, April 5). While Ken Margolin (2006, February 2) states that "the emotions of the characters seem sincere," he also says that "Hosseini paints them in loud, raised colors, rather than letting them evolve through the action of the book." Another reviewer (Mark Twain, 2005, July 24) sees the characters as "two-dimensional cartoons," specifically noting the character Assef, who is portrayed as developing from a psychologically disturbed child into a sadistic Taliban leader. Rather than being shocked by this character, the reviewer "could only giggle at how the author had to pile so many evil traits into this one personage that the whole construction simply collapsed into absurdity."

Kesharvarz (2007b) levels the critique that *The Kite Runner*, and books like *Reading Lolita in Tehran*, are examples of "the New Orientalist narrative." She posits that *The Kite Runner* shows more depth than *Reading Lolita in Tehran* in representing Muslim characters, but

that they both promise “eyewitness” accounts without presenting the details and complexities of these peoples and societies. She states that for the reader, “‘to know’ what is going on, which in reality requires a good deal of discussion about the context, becomes relatively easy” (para. 7). As well, she sees these books validating the belief of Westerners, after September 11, 2001, that the peoples are “by and large the monsters that you are afraid of,” while at the same time, still leaving readers with the feeling that these books “do not give them the full picture and [readers] continue to search for more” (para. 7).

3.4.2 Reading Lolita in Tehran

Reading Lolita in Tehran is described as part memoir, part literary criticism (Carkonen, Amazon.com’s in-house review), even part social history (*Publishers Weekly*, 2003). The book’s description promises “a rare glimpse, from the inside, of women’s lives in revolutionary Iran.” According to Nafisi’s web site (<http://azarnafisi.com>), last updated in 2011, *Reading Lolita in Tehran* spent more than 117 weeks on the *New York Times* bestseller list. It has been translated into 32 languages and has won diverse literary awards, including *Booksense*’s 2004 Non-fiction Book of the Year Award, the Frederic W. Ness Book Award, the 2004 Latifeh Yarsheter Book Award, an achievement award from the American Immigration Law Foundation, and the *London Times* “100 Best Books of the Decade,” and it was a finalist for the 2004 PEN/Martha Albrand Award for Memoir. It is considered by many critics as the most representative or popular among a number of books by or about Muslims, particularly Muslim women, being published, marketed and read in North America (Bahramitash, 2007; Dabashi, 2006; Darnzik, 2007; Zine, Taylor, & Davis, 2007).

In her memoir, Nafisi recounts her life during the Iranian revolution and in the subsequently created Islamic Republic before she left in 1997 to move to the United States. She shares her experiences teaching literature at the University of Tehran, her expulsion from the university for refusing to wear a veil, teaching at the University of Allameh Tabatabaiee, and her resignation six years later. In 1995, eight years after she stopped teaching formally at the university, she created an informal, private literature class and handpicked seven of her best and committed, former female students to participate. The book club existed for two years. On her curriculum vitae, she calls this informal class, “private workshops for female students on Human Rights and Culture” (<http://azarnafisi.com>).

Her memoir focuses on themes that Western, particularly U.S. Western, readers interpret as universal, particularly the emancipatory power of education. She describes to her students at their first meeting the criteria of the books she has selected for them to read: “their authors’ faith in the critical and almost magical power of literature” (Nafisi, 2003, p. 18). She recalls each work of literature giving them insight into the conditions of their own lives. Beyond the stated purpose of the class – “to read, discuss and respond to works of fiction” (p. 18) – Nafisi also uses the literature to allow ways for them to discuss what she describes as their repressed lives in Iran. She says:

I formulated certain general questions for them to consider, the most central of which was how these great works of imagination could help us in our present trapped situation as women. We were not looking for blueprints, for an easy solution, but we did hope to find a link between the open spaces the novels provided and the closed ones we were confined to. (p. 19)

When she left the university, her private class became one of the few places she believed she could engage in critical analysis and aesthetic appreciation of literature and in the discussion of it with others. Art and literature for her and her students “became so essential to our lives: they were not a luxury but a necessity” (p. 23). She believes that through the literature, they found what spaces of freedom they could. While she selects *A Thousand and One Nights* as an example of Persian classical literature, the majority of the books she selects and discusses are Western. And, she privileges Western literature, describing it as universal and believing it gives her Iranian students insight into their own historically and religiously contextualized lives.

Some readers react negatively to the book when their reading expectations are not met. Their expectations can include what they perceive a memoir to look like or what they expect from the writing style and story development, and focus of the narrative. Readers, in their reviews, share their disappointment in terms of what they perceive the focus of the text should be and how Nafisi fails to present this focus. Readers are disappointed by Nafisi’s lack of focus on her students’ experiences (S. Taylor, 2004, March 25), her lack of emotional development of the characters (Jessica Ferguson, 2006, April 17), and her emphasis on the literary works she reads with her students (“zalyssa,” 2004, April 5; A. Prasad, 2004, November 5; A Customer, 2004, March 23). Reviewer Stacy Allen (2004, September 21) states “as an adult reader, I don’t want to do homework.” While she is reacting specifically to the assumption she feels Nafisi makes that the reader will be familiar with the works of Western literature she discusses, James Carragher (2004, December 30) questions whether Nafisi could have actually remembered the exact details she is recounting and to what extent “she is creating characters who are nearly as fictional as the ones ... her ‘girls’ meet to discuss once a week in Tehran. In short, as the best fiction does, she is creating – or recreating – a world.” Some reviewers are disappointed with

Nafisi's role as a narrator and character, finding her arrogant and self-involved. Reviewer S. Taylor saw her as "too focused on herself," and A. Prasad finds the emphasis on literary commentary and criticism as "pretentious and distasteful." There has also been much criticism of Nafisi's portrayal of Iran, Iranians, particularly Iranian women. There are accusations that Nafisi's presentation serves a "neo-Orientalist" agenda. Critics see her as presenting an essentialist vision of "Iranian oppression" (Davis, 2007, p. 150) that "overlooks the agency and presence of Iranian women in the social and intellectual domain" (Keshavarz, 2007b). Bahramitash (2007) sees this memoir as one of several popular books by or about Muslim women being published that "reinforce popular stereotypes of Muslims as backward and primitive...[and] that Muslim women are victims of an inherent misogynism in Islamic tradition" (p. 222).

3.4.3 Three Cups of Tea

As of April 18, 2011, *Three Cups of Tea* appeared on the *New York Times* bestseller list for four years after its 2006 publication and became a "global publishing sensation," selling more than three million copies and being translated into 47 languages (Bergen, 2011). It has won awards including the 2007 Kiriyama Prize for nonfiction, the Pacific Northwest Bookseller Association Nonfiction Book of the Year, and was the *TIME* magazine Asia Book of the Year. The book was originally published in hardback with the title *Three Cups of Tea: One Man's Mission to Fight Terrorism and Build Nations*, the subtitle of which co-author Mortenson fought to have changed in the paperback edition to its current subtitle: "One Man's Mission to Promote Peace...One School at a Time." Mortenson has also been published a young adult version and a children's picture book version entitled *Listen to the Wind: The Story of Dr. Greg and Three*

Cups of Tea, both published in 2009. In 2009, Mortenson's *Stones into Schools: Promoting Peace with Books, not Bombs, in Afghanistan and Pakistan* was published, the sequel to *Three Cups of Tea* and another *New York Times* bestseller. The sales of Mortenson's books have helped to raise money and awareness of the efforts of his non-profit organization, the Central Asia Institute (CAI), the mission of which is "to empower communities of Central Asia through literacy and education, especially for girls, promote peace through education and convey the importance of these activities globally" (CAI website: <http://www.ikat.org/>). In 1996, the CAI expanded to include a youth program called Pennies for Peace, which it calls an "international service learning program" with a K-12 curriculum that also encourages children to raise funds to support the CAI's efforts to build schools for children. In *Stones into Schools*, Mortenson points out that *Three Cups of Tea* has attracted readership and support across the U.S. political divide, including Bill Clinton, Laura Bush, Barbara Bush, John Kerry, Mary Bono, and Colin Powell.

Three Cups of Tea has been read and consulted by top U.S. military leaders and has been included on a required reading list for the military (Bumiller, 2010). Its popularity in this arena grew first among military wives—in particular, the wife of Admiral Mike Mullen, the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff during the Bush and Obama administrations—who read the book and recommended that their husbands read it as well. Military leaders like Mullen, General Stanley McChrystal, and General David Petraeus have used the book to explore more effective methods to "translate the theory of counter-insurgency into tribal realities on the ground" in Afghanistan by collaborating with village elders across the country (Bumiller, p. 1). In *Stones into Schools*, Mortenson claims that *Three Cups of Tea* is included on the Joint Forces Staff College Commandant's Professional Reading List, on the list of the Chief of Staff of the Air Force

Professional Reading Program, and is included as a recommended book on the U.S. Army Combined Arms Center's Pre-Deployment Afghanistan Reading List.

Mortenson's relationship with Pakistan and Afghanistan began in 1993 during a failed attempt to climb K2, a mountain in Pakistan. According to the story he and co-author and journalist David Oliver Relin recount in *Three Cups of Tea*, Mortenson managed to find his way down the mountain and into the village of Korphe, where the villagers nursed him back to health. Seeing their poverty and the lack of educational facilities for the village children, Mortenson vowed to return and build them a school. The book recounts his struggles to raise money, his slow but steady success in building schools first in Pakistan and then in Afghanistan, and the development of a core group of Pakistan and Afghan employees who work with him and have shown him how to effectively work with tribal, rural peoples to achieve the goal of building schools in their villages. In 1996, Jean Hoerni, inventor, entrepreneur, and fellow mountain climber, who had funded his initial building of a bridge and school for the Korphe villagers, established the CAI and appointed Mortenson as director. By the writing of *Stones Into Schools*, Mortenson's institute, the CAI, located in his hometown of Bozeman, Montana, claimed to have built and founded 131 schools in Afghanistan and Pakistan and provided education to nearly 58,000 students.

While including descriptions about Muslim characters he meets in Pakistan and Afghanistan, in particular the tribal leader of Korphe who Mortenson views as a mentor and the local members of his CAI team, the main focus of *Three Cups of Tea* is on Mortenson as a protagonist, his successes and failures. In the Amazon.com book description, readers are promised an exciting adventure story in which Mortenson is portrayed as "a real-life Indiana Jones," a "hero" (*People*). The on-line book description and professional reviews emphasize

how Mortenson's experiences reflect universal experiences that individuals face, in particular the power of the individual to make a difference (*Booklist, Bookmarks Magazine*, Tom Brokaw quote on book's back cover) and achieving success from apparent failure (*Publishers Weekly*). *Bookmarks Magazine*, for example, states that the book "should be read for its inspirational value." In terms of providing the Western reader with information about Afghanistan and its peoples, the book represents what Mortenson sees as their state of existence and promises a solution—his solution being to build schools for the people he serves—to the reader's need to know how to improve relations with the Muslim Other and how to curb terrorism. The book description states this explicitly: "As the book moves into the post-9/11 world, Mortenson and Relin argue that the United States must fight Islamic extremism in the region through collaborative efforts to alleviate poverty and improve access to education." The power of a balanced education, especially for girls, is presented as this solution. The reader is also promised to learn, by Mortenson's example, how to interact with and respond to the Muslim Other in Afghanistan and how to become inspired and actively involved in making a difference.

Education, as in *Reading Lolita in Tehran*, appears in *Three Cups of Tea* as a universal value. As with Nafisi's memoir, the importance of education for Muslim females is emphasized as well. Mortenson presents education, particularly for girls, as a way of curbing terrorism. In *Stones Into Schools*, Mortenson's (2009) justification for focusing on girls' education derives from an African proverb he frequently quotes in his memoirs and public appearances, which he heard growing up in Tanzania where his parents were teaching, associated with a Lutheran missionary society. It is: "If you teach a boy, you educate an individual; but if you teach a girl, you educate a community" (p. 13). His justification derives from the belief that female literacy

deters the recruitment of individuals for extremist violence or terrorism in a region, that an educated mother will not endorse violent jihad among her children.

There are reviewers who appreciate journalist and co-author David Oliver Relin's style as contributing to an exciting portrayal of Mortenson and his experiences. One reviewer (James A. Steele, 2006, November 1), in his review, quotes a testimonial from journalist and writer Tom Brokaw included in *Three Cups of Tea*, who believes this book "is one of the most remarkable adventure stories of our time...a thrilling read." Reviewer M. Ellington (2007, May 26), for example, lists the literary elements Relin uses to tell Mortenson's story: "adventure, biography, history, geography, romance, and hair-raising suspense." Reviewer William H. Fuller (2006, August 16) compares the book to one that made an impression on him as a teenager, *The Romantic World of Richard Halliburton*, finding them similar as "captivating tales of a young man's adventurous travels to strange lands that I still know only vicariously through the enchantment of books."

As with *Reading Lolita in Tehran* and *The Kite Runner*, there are those reviewers who are distracted by what they argue to be literary and technical flaws of the writing and characterization. Many readers of *Three Cups of Tea* critique Relin's writing style as melodramatic and irritating or implausible. Ronald Scheer (2006, July 28), for example, questions Relin's "worshipful account of Mortenson's career" as drawing "heavily on 'Parade'-style drama, suspense, and sentiment." Reviewer D. Stuart (2007, December 17) feels that Relin's writing style actually detracts from a worthy, positive view of Mortenson by trying to disclaim others' efforts in the region, like Sir Edmund Hilary's. The reviewer says that Relin's approach "does a disservice (to Mortenson and others) by trying to reserve the pedestal for his subject alone." There are those who also disliked or questioned his characterization of

Mortenson and the local people he helps. Reviewer doc Peterson (2007, November 18), for example, found the detailed descriptions Relin provided of each minor local character to be distracting, feeling that “Relin detracted from the larger issue of what Mortenson was doing by giving a biopic of so many people that, in the end, had only a cursory role in the project.” In a similar manner, another reviewer (Well Read Post Grad, 2008, May 8) feels Relin presents “a circuitous description of small meaningless details,” rather than learning about his work to educate girls.

On April 17, 2011, five years after the original publication of *Three Cups of Tea*, the CBS television news program *60 Minutes* aired a story suggesting that Mortenson had been dishonest in the account he presented in his books of his work in Pakistan and Afghanistan and that he had been misusing funds raised by the CAI. Fellow author Jon Krakauer claimed in the episode that *Three Cups of Tea* “is a beautiful story, and it’s a lie” (Croft, 2011). In the episode, a private watchdog group questioned why the CAI had taken in \$23 million in 2010 but had only issued one audited statement. The accusation made was that the CAI spent more on promoting Mortenson’s domestic “outreach” – the expenses of his book tours – than it did on building schools in Pakistan and Afghanistan. As well, it was stated that Mortenson was receiving speaking fees that were not invested in the CAI. Other claims included a half-dozen CAI board members quitting over these financial matters, nearly half of the CAI-built schools still being empty, an anthropologist claiming that Mortenson’s account of life in the Wakham Corridor were false, and a number of details about Mortenson’s experiences being inaccurate. Also resulting from these accusations was a lawsuit filed against Mortenson and the CAI issued by

Montana Rep. Michele Reinhart, D-Missoula and Rep. Jean Price, D-Great Falls.⁶ The lawsuit accuses him of being involved in a racketeering scheme to “turn him into a false hero, defraud millions of people out of the price of the books and raise millions in donations to the charity” (Volz, 2012, para. 12). The suit seeks reimbursement of the entire sum of money that has been made from his books and calls for investment of this recovered money into another non-profit organization involved with building schools in Pakistan and Afghanistan. At the same time, the Montana attorney general’s office is investigating if the CAI broke any state laws governing non-profit organizations. The results of this story included a flurry of public discourse regarding the matter: some disclaiming Mortenson and his efforts and some still supporting him.

3.5 THE AUTHORS

In the cases of all three of these bestsellers, their authors – Hosseini, Nafisi, and Mortenson – are promoted as experts presenting true accounts of what it means to be Muslim and live in Afghanistan, Iran, or Pakistan. Many of the readers reviewing the books on Amazon.com believe these authors can offer insider knowledge because they are either, in the cases of Hosseini and Nafisi, “native informants” as Westernized Muslims originally from these countries, and in the case of Mortenson, a Western expert with experience working in Pakistan and Afghanistan. The issue of authorial authority tends to be a focal point of response for readers regardless of whether they accept or question this authority, as will be explored in the following chapters.

⁶ Jean Price then dropped out of the suit in July 2011.

3.5.1 Khaled Hosseini

I was surprised to hear that hosseini is the only afghan writer and was glad to find out he's now a doctor in California. (kehroll, 2005, December 5)

Khaled Hosseini is presented to the reader as a native informant , and in many ways, the life of his protagonist Amir mirrors Hosseini's life in terms of their shared affluent lives in monarchical Afghanistan, having both fled to the United States, living life as poor immigrants in California, and finding success as authors. Hosseini was born into a Pashtun family – the dominant ethnic group in Afghanistan – that was also politically and economically well-situated during the rule of the king, Zahir Shah. He was born in Kabul, Afghanistan in 1965 to a father who was a diplomat with the Afghan Foreign Ministry and a mother who was a high school teacher. He lived in Afghanistan until 1973, at which point his family moved to Tehran, Iran, where his father worked for the Afghan embassy and then to Paris in 1976 for his father's embassy position. In 1980, his family was granted political asylum in the United States because of the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, and they moved to San Jose, California. He presents himself, and is presented by his publisher, to the reader as a native informant who also understands and values U.S. Western sensibilities.

Hosseini trained and practiced as a medical doctor in the United States before publishing *The Kite Runner* in 2003. In 2006, he was named as a U.S. goodwill envoy to the United Nations Refugee Agency. Since the success of *The Kite Runner*, Hosseini has become publically known as a philanthropist with the creation of the Khaled Hosseini Foundation, “to provid[e] humanitarian assistance to the people of Afghanistan.” Specifically, it “supports projects which provide shelter to refugee families and economic and education opportunities and healthcare for women and children...[and it] awards scholarships to women pursuing higher education in

Afghanistan” (www.khaledhosseinifoundation.org). As stated on the Foundation’s web site, Hosseini was inspired to start the foundation after a 2007 trip to Afghanistan as a Goodwill Envoy for the United Nations Refugee Agency, when he met repatriated refugee families living on nearly no income under harsh conditions. His foundation’s goal is to help the “most vulnerable groups in Afghanistan – women, children, and refugees.”

3.5.2 Azar Nafisi

...in the post-9/11 period Iranian immigrant women have emerged as important agents in framing how American readers see and interpret not only the history, politics, and culture of Iran but of the greater contemporary Middle East. (Darnzik, 2007, p.1)

Azar Nafisi is a visiting professor and executive director of Cultural Conversations at the Foreign Policy Institute of Johns Hopkins University’s School of Advanced International Studies (SAIS), in Washington, DC. At Johns Hopkins, she is also a professor of aesthetics, culture, and literature and teaches courses on the relationship between culture and politics. She has been consulted by policy makers and human rights organizations on issues relating to Iran. She speaks on national book tours and has been featured as an expert through a variety of media outlets including ABC News, BBC World Service and BBC Television and Radio, C-SPAN, CNN, Charlie Rose, *The Economist*, The Huffington Post, *Le Monde*, *The London Times*, NPR, *The New York Times*, PBS, *The Wall Street Journal*, and *The Washington Post*.

Nafisi markets herself and is marketed by her publisher as an expert on Iran, as a native informant who can give a personal account of having lived through two very different Irans. In her memoir, she recalls her formative years growing up during the Western-supported rules of the Shah and his father. She contrasts this with a vision of a repressive life for all Iranians in the

Islamic Republic. As well, she shares that she was educated in the West. She presents herself as one who has lived in both Iran and the West and who has chosen Western values, in terms of a political vision and values. She positions herself as someone Western readers can trust to describe her experiences and the larger events in the Islamic Republic, in terms we can understand and within the context of our own values and experiences. Nafisi presents herself as a Westernized Iranian who felt irrelevant returning to live in Iran during the Islamic Revolution and subsequent Islamic Republic. The literature she teaches predominantly at the university and later in her private class is English and American literature, and she expresses continually feeling like an outsider in Iran and homesick for an American lifestyle. Sharing an American cultural sensibility, she says, “I was longing to talk to someone who spoke English, preferably with a New York accent, someone who was intelligent and appreciated Gatsby and Haagen-Dazs and knew about Mike Gold’s Lower East Side” (Nafisi, 2003, pp. 106-107). She feels helpless and insignificant in the midst of political groups struggling to assert themselves during the Revolution. She says, “Looking back, I am glad I was not unaware of my special vulnerability; with my small collection of books, I was like an emissary from a land that did not exist, with a stock of dreams, coming to reclaim this land as my home” (p. 89).

Of the three authors presented in this study, it was Nafisi who received publically the most criticism regarding the truthfulness of her account—at least, before the Mortenson controversy—because of her privileged position in the country before the revolution, her seemingly myopic and selfish perspective, and her political agenda. Bahramitash (2007) claims that Nafisi’s class position in the society “overshadows her ability to learn about, let alone give voice to, subaltern women, who comprise the majority of Iranian women” (p. 232). Nafisi is from an upper-class family in Iran. Her father was a mayor of Tehran, her mother was a member

of parliament during the Shah's reign, and she was educated in Switzerland, London, and the United States. While Nafisi admits to "join[ing] the Iranian student movement reluctantly" when she was a doctoral student at the University of Oklahoma, she was quickly disillusioned with life in the Islamic Republic when once again living and teaching there. As a result, Bahramitash sees Nafisi showing little affinity with or understanding of those Iranians of lower classes she encounters. She "shows her own impatience to waste time learning anything about the lives of the less privileged" (p. 232).

Darnzik (2007) notes a trend in critical attack against Iranian women writers in the West. She says that "to an increasing number of critics, the proliferation of books by Iranian women in the West, particularly memoirs, constitutes a pernicious outcome of the U.S. government's invasion of Afghanistan and Iraq" (p. 157). As an Iranian immigrant, Nafisi is coupled with those who have since moved to the West and are characterized as monarchists, or supporters of the Western supported Shah, and supportive of a conservative U.S. foreign policy agenda toward Iran. Nafisi has also faced much criticism of her political agenda due to her position with SAIS. She is viewed with suspicion for serving on the Board of Trustees of Freedom House, an NGO conducting research and advocacy on democracy. Bahramitash notes that *Reading Lolita in Tehran* is highly recommended and promoted by neo-conservatives, like Nafisi's mentor and boss at SAIS, Fouad Ajami, and Bernard Lewis. Bahramitash cites Nafisi's acknowledgements to both of these neo-conservatives. Nafisi is also often labeled by critics as one who presents a Western Orientalist view of Iran, Islam, and women in the Muslim world. In particular, she is seen as perpetuating the view that Muslim Iranians are oppressed victims in need of being saved by Western foreign policy. Dabashi (2006), Hagop Kevorkian professor of Iranian studies and comparative literature at Columbia University, presented harsh criticism against Nafisi that has

caused strong responses in favor of or critiquing Dabashi's stance. Viewing her as an ideological mouthpiece for the Bush administration's imperialist agenda in the Middle East, Dabashi describes Nafisi's role as author and comprador:

The transmutation of Azar Nafisi from a legitimate critic of the atrocities of the Islamic Republic of Iran (against women in particular) into a necessary ideologue in George W Bush's empire-building project is a crucial lesson in how the new breed of comprador intellectuals is being recruited and put to immediate use for the ideological build-up (and the cultural foregrounding) of an otherwise precarious claim to an imperial hegemony. (para. 21)

Gideon Lewis-Kraus (2006, November 30), responding to Dabashi's critique of *Reading Lolita in Tehran*, agrees with Dabashi's skepticism about the book's merit, but sees the failure less as Nafisi's political aim than her literary ability. Lewis-Kraus shares the opinion of many readers who in their Amazon.com reviews expressed feeling estranged from the book because of Nafisi's writing style and the personality she presents of herself. He responds to her self-important tone in the book, which he sees as "more petulant than outraged," and "though Nafisi tries to empathize...with the awful trials of her students and friends, she seems to lack the emotional capacity to rise above her own experience of life in the Islamic republic as a great inconvenience." Darnzik (2007) offers a counterpoint to these attacks and worries about the subtext of such statements about Iranian immigrant women writing about their struggles in Iran. She states that "over and over I observed that when women in Iran wrote of women's struggles they were regularly and lavishly lauded for their bravery; when Iranian immigrant writers wrote successful books on the same themes, they were dismissed as traitors" (p. 158).

3.5.3 Greg Mortenson

Greg Mortenson represents the best of America. He's my hero. And after you read Three Cups of Tea, he'll be your hero, too. (U.S. representative Mary Bono, R-Calif., included in Advance Praise, from the back cover)

We have many politicians and people on this show. We don't have many people on this show we consider a hero. I consider you a hero. (Bob Schieffer, Face the Nation, August 22, 2010)

It's a beautiful story, and it's a lie. (Jon Krakauer, 60 Minutes story on Three Cups of Tea, April 17, 2011)

As of the publication of *Stones Into Schools*, Greg Mortenson had made 680 appearances in more than 270 cities and towns across the United States during a three-year period to promote his book *Three Cups of Tea* and his organization, the Central Asia Institute. He has become a well-known public figure due to the success of his books, his book tours, and for the most part, the positive media exposure he has received. He is also considered by many U.S. Westerners as an expert who can teach them how to view and respond to the needs of the Muslim Other. In *Three Cups of Tea*, he develops this expert status, beginning with his experiences as a boy living with his family for a number of years in Tanzania where his father was a missionary teacher and then through his own work building schools in Pakistan and Afghanistan. He has received a number of awards, including the Citizen Center for Diplomacy National Award for Citizen Diplomacy, the Star of Pakistan medal, the *U.S. News & World Report* America's Top 20 Best Leaders 2009 award, the Premio Gambrinus "Giuseppe Mazzotti" award, a number of honorary degrees and awards from colleges and universities, and has been nominated to receive the Nobel Peace Prize.

As well as using his book as a primer for an approach to counterinsurgency, U.S. military forces in Afghanistan have consulted Mortenson on developing ways to translate the theory of

counterinsurgency into tribal realities on the ground. He has been invited to spoke at military bases and has personally consulted with military leaders Admiral Mike Mullen, General Stanley McChrystal, and General David Petraeus (Bumiller, 2010, p. 12). Mortenson has stated that he has no contractual relationship with and has accepted no money from the Defense Department. Mortenson, in discussing this relationship in *Stones Into Schools* (2009), addresses his own initial concern of “the level of suffering inflicted by the Department of Defense on the Afghan population but also the manner in which these tragedies were described” (p. 240). In justifying his work with the military, he responds to a genuine interest he believes he sees in their desire to best augment U.S. security by “being of service to the Afghan people – and moreover, that the capacity to render this service meaningfully and well is predicated upon listening, understanding, and building relationships” (p. 257). In this, he finds a mutual goal: “In this respect, the goal of enhancing our own security is best achieved by enhancing theirs. And the most critical building block to accomplishing both is education” (p. 257).

Before the April 2011 controversial episode of *60 Minutes* aired, there was not much criticism of Mortenson’s books or the work of the CAI. He had been admired for his work across the political divide. Since the airing of the *60 Minutes* episode, Mortenson has maintained a low profile, partly due, he explains in a letter posted to the CAI web site, to his upcoming heart surgery. The CAI continues to conduct its work, and there are changes in its presentation to the public on the CAI web site. The site’s media and press page includes a mix of stories and press releases supporting Mortenson and the CAI, some published by other sources and some internal releases, interspersed with stories supporting the continued work of CAI. For example, a May 1, 2011 *Los Angeles Times* story quotes Anne Beyersdorfer, the temporary director at the CAI and a public relations consultant who tries to offset the negative image created by the *60 Minutes*

episode. She states that Mortenson “appeared at numerous speaking events for no fee, worked to make sure schools were built, and told the substantial truth in his books about his work” (Murphy, 2011, para. 22).

Public figures considered experts in these countries and issues have voiced their opinions on Mortenson and the scandal. Some of them have critiqued Mortenson’s inability to successfully direct a non-profit organization. Nicholas Kristof, *New York Times* columnist and co-author of *Half the Sky: From Oppression to Opportunity for Women Worldwide* (2009), described Mortenson as “more of a founding visionary than the disciplined C.E.O. necessary to run a \$20 million-a-year charity,” and worried that such a scandal “will leave Americans disillusioned and cynical” (p. #). At the same time, he states his belief that Mortenson is

profoundly right about some big things. He was right about the need for American outreach in the Muslim world...that building schools tends to promote stability more than dropping bombs...about the transformative power of education, especially girls’ education...about the need to listen to local people. (Kristof, 2011, p.A27)

Khaled Hosseini’s critique of Mortenson is similar. He says: “I think in his heart he truly feels a passion for those children and wanted to help them. He’s a humanitarian but a horrible director” (Lutz, 2011, para. 15).

*

As will be explored in the following chapters, Western readers, as they read literary texts about the Muslim Other, often assume that they are obtaining objective, ahistorical truths that can be generalizable to all Muslims. They are unaware of the ways in which the situatedness of the texts, the authors, and themselves as readers influence the interpretations they create as they

interact with the text. This chapter presents a background to the situated and subjective meaning making process that is inherent in reading and interpretation, whether it is valuing a particular text as more valuable than others because it is deemed a “bestseller” or the often subconscious influences that shape readers’ interpretations, from the current relationship their country has with a country being portrayed in a literary text, the political agenda of an author, or the way these texts have been lauded as offering crucial information about Muslims. As I have presented here, readers bring much more context to the reading process than they are often aware. In particular is the role that Western colonialism and imperialism has played in shaping readers’ often negative perspectives of the Muslim Other and predominantly Muslim countries. Without an awareness of their own contextualized reading practices, readers struggle in their attempts to engage in more critical and responsible reading of the Muslim Other, as the next chapter explores.

4.0 READING TO KNOW THE OTHER: A POSTCOLONIAL PERSPECTIVE

I know what you want. You want a story that won't surprise you. That will confirm what you already know. That won't make you see higher or further or differently. You want a flat story. An immobile story. You want dry, yeastless factuality. (Martel, 2001, p. 302)

There is a “politics of knowledge” (Kincheloe, 2004a) at play in how knowledge is created, made available, and privileged. Knowledge is not stable and objective but rather, may be viewed as situational, embedded within the experiences, values, and motivations of those who create and interpret it. As Said (1981) describes, “all knowledge that is about human society...is historical knowledge, and therefore rests upon judgment and interpretation” (p. 154). Regarding Western public discourse about and representations of the Muslim Other from a postcolonial perspective, knowledge about Muslims and the West’s relationship with predominantly Muslim countries has been largely shaped by Orientalism as a political, artistic, and intellectual endeavor to legitimize colonialism and imperialism (Said, 1978, 1981, 1993). It is a situated knowledge that has been used in the service of supporting the hegemonic project of Western intervention in less globally powerful countries, including predominantly Muslim countries like Iran, Afghanistan, and Pakistan. The way in which Westerners, and particularly U.S. Westerners, have often responded to the events of September 11, 2001, however, can be described as a form of amnesia or ignorance. In their efforts to interpret these seemingly random events, they are often unaware of how the past relationship Western countries—and the United States in particular—had with the Muslim world has shaped these events. They do not recognize how their interpretations and

subsequent representations perpetuate existing stereotypes about Muslims and how portrayals of the relationship between the West and Muslim world support the West in a position of global superiority and power over many countries like Iran, Afghanistan, and Pakistan. In the case of postcolonial theory and extensions of Said's argument, knowledge of the Muslim Other is embedded within the historical, political, cultural, and artistic project of Orientalism. Without an awareness of how they are reading the Muslim Other, and how the Other is being presented to them in these texts, Western readers, particularly U.S. Western readers, are at a disadvantage to critically consider and challenge the ways in which their countries address the Muslim world through foreign policy decisions and treat Muslims domestically.

Readers engaging with the bestselling texts *Reading Lolita in Tehran*, *The Kite Runner*, and *Three Cups of Tea*, in this post September 11th world try to understand the events of that day, why many Muslims seem to hate the West, the continual death and destruction associated with U.S. military intervention, and what they are missing from this picture. However, as I explore in this chapter, Westerners, particularly U.S. Westerners, often struggle to place these events in a context, unaware of what this context is. As I analyze here, drawing on Said's concept of Orientalism and related postcolonial theorists as my theoretical frame, readers are, in the interpretations they present in their reviews, often struggling to acquire more data, find concrete answers, and from these, make generalizing assumptions about the Muslim Other within a fog of political, historical, and cultural amnesia or ignorance. As I demonstrate through my analysis, these particular interpretations and perceptions are significant because they reveal how Western readers, despite their endeavor to learn more about Muslims and the West's relationship with the Muslim Other, are frequently perpetuating the Orientalist project. These readers, believing they are learning truths about Muslims are, in fact, perpetuating a situated, politically charged

knowledge that allows current Western imperialist action in Muslim countries to continue unchecked, without Western citizens being aware of how to critique and challenge it.

In this chapter, I explore and interpret through analysis Orientalizing interpretative tendencies of Western readers that occur in their reviews of *Reading Lolita in Tehran*, *The Kite Runner*, and *Three Cups of Tea* and reveal the meanings behind such readings. This reading process often begins with the tendency to read with a colonizing goal to know, name, and classify the Other (Willinsky, 1998). In the case of many of these readers, it begins with the need to acquire more information than the mainstream media is providing. Readers also trust they are gaining knowledge from experts, whether they are “native informants” (Spivak, 1999) or Western experts. Their quest for gaining more and truer knowledge, however, proves to become a debated morass among which expert author or expert reviewer holds the greater truth about Muslims, Iran, Afghanistan, or Pakistan. Readers also tend to interpret Muslims and the relationship between the West and the Muslim world, drawing subconsciously from common Orientalist representations of the Muslim Other (Said, 1978, 1981, 1993). Representations that I explore here include essentializing Muslims by creating negative generalizations of them as barbaric, uncivilized, and irrational, and a perceived relationship between the West and the Muslim world as one that perpetuates Western political, economic, and cultural superiority and power over Muslims, as viewed collectively. I also use my frame to analyze how readers interpret and represent the Muslim woman as a key Orientalist representation used to justify Western intervention in the Muslim world. Part of Western readers’ ability to assume knowledge about the Muslim Other so readily also comes from their tendency to interpret superficial connections with Muslims about whom they read. I reveal and analyze this easy empathetic identification using Aubry’s (2009) model of the connection between emotion and empathy to

show how this tendency provides further justification for claiming knowledge about the Muslim Other and about speculating how to best solve the Other's problems. Finally, I analyze readers' tendencies to interpret, after reading these texts, that they are able to postulate solutions to the problems facing Muslims and Iran, Pakistan, and Afghanistan in the context of Western justification for intervention (Said, 1978).

As Western readers read the Muslim Other through bestselling books, their reviews often reflect varying degrees of absence of critical awareness that their representations are politically and culturally situated within an agenda that supports Western global hegemonic interests. As seen in their reviews, they often search for absolute truth, yet, perpetuate Orientalist misrepresentations of the Other and the uneven power dynamics of the relationship between Western Self and Muslim Other. This confidence in their ability to gain the truth about the Muslim Other, as well as to know what is best for the Muslim Other, is often the end product of their reading process. Without this awareness of what fuels their contextualized readings, they are unable to see the inherent colonizing interest motivating this perspective and to critically challenge colonialized meanings with alterative perspectives.

4.1 READING TO KNOW THE OTHER

The need to know, name, and classify truth derives from an Enlightenment belief that truth may be conquered in order to further the pursuits of human civilization. Within a postcolonial discourse, this Enlightenment need to know becomes associated with a Western colonizing need to know, name, classify, and control or possess the Other (Said, 1978, 1981, 1993; Willinsky, 1998) as a way for Western nations to expand their global political, military, economic, social,

and cultural hegemony. Western readers respond to these books by gaining a false sense of familiarity with the characters' lives, while being given more detailed facts they can add to their arsenal of knowledge about Muslims. Some readers express that they are provided with richer insight into how ordinary Muslims live. They also perceive that they are offered a counterpoint in these texts to the negative despairing message they see reflected in the news. This view is grounded in a perspective, as Willinsky (1998) suggests, that these texts are tutorials, the purpose being to gain a comprehensive inventory of information about the Other. This information they interpret as being provided is the seemingly intimate insight into the lives of the Muslim Other, including detailed information about behaviors, personality traits, and life experiences of the Other that can then be generalized to apply to all Muslims. This almost voyeuristic gaze into the intimate details of these Muslims' lives becomes like the colonial portrayal of the native-on-display, which was created to be "both spectacle and object lesson for the European imagination" (p. 56). Muslims exist for the "fascinated and knowing gaze of the West" (p. 61). Readers' goals in reading are not to gain insight into an alternative perspective of Muslims that might challenge what they already perceive to be the truth but to fulfill the mission of coming to know as much as possible about the Other and master this knowledge.

4.1.1 Searching for an Alternative to the Media

As Said (1981) writes: "the media have...covered Islam: they have portrayed it, characterized it, analyzed it, given instant courses on it, and consequently they have made it 'known'" (p. xi). Writing this in 1981, Said notes the prominent role the media played at that time in creating knowledge about Islam. More than three decades later, the media's role in representing current events has grown exponentially in ways Said may not have imagined. Corporate-owned network

news media, a variety of cable news programs, television and radio political commentators, blogs, Facebook discussions, and Twitter posts are ways in which people worldwide are now inundated with news. As Kincheloe (2004a) describes the powerful role the media plays, particularly in relaying information that shapes the beliefs and attitudes of U.S. Westerners toward Muslims, “the new cultural pedagogy colonizes consciousness via the pleasure of the entertainment media” (p. 10). From a postcolonial perspective, the media’s current portrayal of Muslims is often shaped by existing Orientalist representations of the Muslim Other, by a country’s political, military, and/or economic policy toward certain countries as peoples. The extent to which corporately-owned media controls and disseminates news according to a particular national agenda may be seen as a colonizing process of Western knowledge about particular issues.

Readers, in their reviews, however, respond to these media portrayals by finding them lacking in sufficient information about Muslims, in comparison to the information they interpret gaining from these bestselling texts. News media portrayals leave them unfulfilled, and they express satisfaction from reading these bestselling texts and gaining more richly portrayed details about the Muslims and life in Iran, Afghanistan, or Pakistan. For some *Reading Lolita in Tehran* readers, as articulated in their reviews, this book is perceived as fleshing out more fully the shorter news bytes seen on television or other video-based media. The book “add[s] texture and dimension to [Nafisi’s] native Iran, a portrayal that goes well beyond what one sees on CNN” (Ed Uyeshima, 2005, January 17). A *Three Cups of Tea* reviewer (P. Lambert, 2007, March 3) states that more can be learned from this book about Pakistan and Afghanistan “than all the attempts the media has made.” A *Kite Runner* reviewer comments that “[Hosseini] has illuminated a place and a people in such an accessible way that I listen to the nightly news a little

differently now” (A reader, 2006, November 18). Another reviewer claims that he or she was uninterested in the topic of Afghanistan because of the media’s saturation of this topic, and that his or her view changed upon reading *The Kite Runner*: “when people stated that the setting was Afghanistan, my eyes would glaze over with disinterest. Heck, I hear about Afghanistan every evening on the news. I don’t want to read about it. But then I do...and I’m forever changed for it” (nodice, 2005, December 30). Readers interpret these literary portrayals as providing “texture and dimension” and “accessibil[ity]” into the lives of Muslims and the current situations in Iran, Afghanistan, and Pakistan. Readers’ goals are to uncover the objective truth about these peoples and countries, and these literary texts become tutorials they perceive as being more effective than the news media to accomplish these goals. However, readers do not consider that these texts provide a deceptively easy way to learn about Muslims. These texts supplant the news media as “the new cultural pedagogy” that Kincheloe (2004a) describes and provides them with a more engaging, intimate, and seemingly accessible reading experience in their pursuit to know the Muslim Other. This is also a pursuit, however, that is symptomatic of how the colonizing pursuit to know the Other has also “colonize[d] consciousness” of readers unaware they are engaging in this process. Readers are ready to interpret that they have obtained sufficient information to understand the West’s current geopolitical relations with predominantly Muslim countries by reading a single, entertaining, literary text. They are willing recipients of the messages offered in these texts and by these authors. They are unwilling or unaware that these messages may be politically motivated and that further reading and study of differing perspectives may be needed to grasp a more sophisticated understanding of the Muslim Other.

Some readers, in their reviews, reflect the need to interpret something positive in these literary portrayals. Though they do not deeply consider their motivations for needing to see the

positive—whether this may be resulting from incredulity when faced with lives that seem to be perpetually traumatized or perhaps, a concern that the West is implicated in the chaos and destruction portrayed—some readers look for and intend to find a positive perspective to the media’s portrayal. In a *Reading Lolita in Tehran* review, Dee Lalley (2004, August 19) sees alternative images of Iranians being presented compared to the barrage of chaos presented by the media: “We see images of the Middle East and the covered women and the chaos and we think ‘that’s the way it’s always been,’ but the book shows us that isn’t true.” In this way, this reviewer recognizes the disconnection between the constant negative emotions, destruction, and chaos seen in the media’s portrayal and turns to Nafisi’s text to show what is true. Yet, as this reader turns to Nafisi’s alternative portrayal of Iranian women, he or she interprets Nafisi’s portrayal as possessing the real truth about them, continuing to interpret that there is generalizable truth about the Other to be found. Readers replace unquestioningly these new truth claims offered because it satisfies their need to find something positive in these countries’ and characters’ situations, as the next quotes illustrate. A *Three Cups of Tea* reviewer (silent rebel, 2007, April 17) comments on the positive aspects he or she learned about Pakistan and Afghanistan, which counter the negative aspects seen in the news. The reviewer states that readers “realize that the APPARENTLY volatile regions are not only a mere media projection but also the most beautiful places to visit in the world.” A reviewer of *The Kite Runner* writes that Hosseini “beautifully recreates a world that is 180 degrees from the world we see on the television – Afghanistan before the Soviets invaded, before the Taliban took over...You will never watch news of that region in quite the same way again” (J.D. Evans, 2004, April 17). These reviewers of *The Kite Runner* share a belief that the book conveys the truth about Afghanistan: that there is or was something positive about the country—its beauty, a calmer life,

people with whom the readers can identify or sympathize—rather than the constant destruction, hysteria, and violence portrayed in the media. As readers accumulate knowledge about the Other, it can be interpreted that it is important for some readers to know that there is hope for a positive alternative to the current problems of Muslims in Iran, Afghanistan, or Pakistan. As I explore later in this chapter, this will be manifest in Western readers’ need to postulate solutions to the problems of Muslims. However, as readers insist on finding the positive in these portrayals, they may be struggling to overcome a feeling of guilt that they are complicit in the current conditions of the Muslim Other. However, without an awareness of their situatedness or their complicity in perpetuating the Orientalist project, they are unable to accept and begin to critically consider this needling guilt they may experience. Rather, when this guilt is coupled with a lack of awareness about Orientalism, readers seem willing to accept these texts’ glimpses of hope and beauty amid the despair.

Readers also interpret finding greater truths about the details of Muslims’ lives through these texts’ portrayals of characters’ experiences and the intimate portrayals of their thoughts, hopes, fears, and dreams. By submerging themselves in the stories of individuals, they are able to gain a greater sense of what life for these Muslim characters is like, rather than the fleeting sound byte portrayed on the news or the more complicated analysis presented on extended news programs. However, this admittance into the intimate details of the lives of the Other allows Western readers the colonizing power to gaze voyeuristically at “the native-on-display” (Willinsky, 1998) and interpret the Other. This reading experience leads many of them to interpret that they are experiencing a reality that is truer than what they experience on the news. This is portrayed most extensively with readers’ interpretations of the truths they feel they gain from *The Kite Runner*. As the only work of fiction among the three bestsellers, readers often

respond that what *The Kite Runner* offers them is insight into the personal stories behind the public scenes and events depicted in the news. Their knowledge of Afghan culture, history, and politics is enhanced by reading about the personal lives of individual characters, particularly that of the protagonist Amir. Linda Linguvic (2004, April 2) comments that she “learned about Afghanistan, its people, and its rich traditions. But most of all I learned about one particular young boy [Amir].” These readers are satisfied as they accumulate more facts about the Other and are dissatisfied when more is not provided, particularly intimate, personal details of the lives of Muslims, as in the case of this *Reading Lolita in Tehran* reader review:

I choose [Reading Lolita in Tehran] after reading of "The Kite Runner" last week, a wonderful novel that gives such insight into the character and outlook of Afghanistan's people. I was hoping to learn more about the inner lives of people in the Iran. Unfortunately, this memoir lacks any kind of personal truth or honesty and is filled with smug personal self-congratulation. (J.M. Alterio, 2004)

Readers have been emotionally and imaginatively won over by these literary portrayals of Muslims, and it may be interpreted that the connection readers' feel is what convinces them that the truth is real. They are convinced by the story that is more pleasing to hear. Readers do not address critically why they so confidently assume they can grasp a complete understanding of the Muslim Other from these intimate portrayals and be able to assess the validity of the truth claims met, as this *Reading Lolita in Tehran* reader does. They are unaware that the ability they believe they possess in gazing unabashedly into the intimate lives of these characters and assessing truth is a product of Orientalism's representations of the West's superiority to the Muslim world. They are also unaware that in believing they can so easily learn about the Muslim Other from a single textual portrayal, they are participating in the colonial belief that they, as Westerners, have the

right to gaze upon “the native-on-display” and to create definitions and pass judgments about the character and situation of the Muslim Other.

Reviewers’ comments reflect a belief that these literary texts provide them with a greater truth than the news media of what it means to be Muslim in these troubled countries. While they critique the news media’s portrayal of the Muslim Other, they do not question why the media is providing them with incomplete, consistently negative portrayals. Readers interpret that the news media is not providing them with the complete truth, whereas these literary texts are providing a more detailed truth with an often positive insight into the details of daily lives and individual characters. Many of these reviews express that readers are being introduced to these cultures and peoples often for the first time in a more developed way. They often do not bring to their readings a sense of the countries’ histories—their political and economic past, Western interaction or intervention in these countries, a sense of the culture and their religion as practiced regionally, officially by whichever political entity was in power at a particular time, the differing ethnic and religious groups that interact within these countries. In a sense, many of these readers are blank slates on which these books may write their presented truths. They encounter a more positive recounting of what life is like in these countries for these peoples and they are provided with this information in more detail that they can retain. Without the greater situatedness of the text’s story being recounted to them, they are often determining the truthfulness of the account on how successful they judge their reading process and interpretation of what they have read.

Said (1981) and Kincheloe (2004a) both discuss the manipulative role of the media upon an unsuspecting public. In the case of Kincheloe, the media becomes “the new cultural pedagogy colonizing consciousness via the pleasure of the entertainment media” (p. 10). As Westerners turn to literary texts about Muslims as their preferable source of information, they are

consciously supplanting the literary text as Westerners' source of pleasurable, consumable knowledge. This information, to them, must be true or truer than information gleaned from the news media. However, the appealing aesthetic form of these literary texts seduces them into the belief they are acquiring ahistorical, objective truth. They mistake the aesthetic for something epistemologically objective. This source of information also continues to colonize their collective, cultural consciousness through its engaging, intimate format and the deceptive ease and pleasure with which readers can consume this information. Despite the ease with which readers perceive they are gaining truths about the Other, they are unaware that they are interpreting exactly what they want to see in terms of truth. As well, they are engaging in the colonizing assumption that these texts may be used as tutorials that allow them to gaze voyeuristically on the lives of these natives-on-display, captured in these books and waiting in these books to be known, classified, and possessed down to the intimate details of their lives. Readers' interpretations merely reinforce colonial notions of the Other without a situated awareness of the politics of their acquired knowledge about the Other. Westerners, particularly U.S. Westerners, struggle to engage in a critical understanding of how the Orientalist project has, for the past few centuries, fueled the Western need to know the Other as an entry for colonizing and controlling the Other. I will continue this analysis in the next section by exploring how readers' assumption of these texts as tutorials is also supported by their interpretations of the authors' roles as experts on the Muslim Other.

4.1.2 Trusting the Expert

As readers turn to these literary texts as preferable sources of truth about the Other, they often justify this belief in the authors' abilities to provide them with the truth. These authors are

viewed as either native informants in the case of Hosseini and Nafisi, or as a Western expert, in the case of Mortenson. Hosseini and Nafisi are viewed as native informants, as Muslims who are from Iran and Afghanistan. Just as the books' publishers and authors have promoted the authors as experts, so too do some readers promote themselves as experts in support of or counterargument to the authors. However, this view of native informant and Western expert is part of the Western colonizing need to know the Other. As well as perpetuating the colonizing practice of expert natives informing about the Other, this view perpetuates the notion that the truth about the Muslim Other can be neatly classified based on the account of one native informant. As Willinsky (1998), the "native" plays an educative role for the Westerner by providing what is interpreted as first-hand knowledge about the inherent nature of the Other. It is Spivak (1999), though, who articulates the perceived role of the "native informant" by the Westerner that is reflected in these reviews. The Orientalist assumption is that the native informant can be "fully representative of his or her culture" (p. 60). As well, Dabashi (2006, June 1) sees the more complicit role the native informant plays for the West as "the new breed of comprador intellectuals" (para. 22). Readers seem to be unaware of how their historical, political, and cultural situatedness as Westerners has influenced the way in which they view the Muslim Other, influenced by the Orientalist project. Readers, also, do not often consider these authors' situatedness and how this affects their subjective interpretations of the people and places about whom they write. Considered from a postcolonial perspective, many readers in their reviews do not reflect an awareness that these authors' subjectivity may be influenced by a politics of knowledge that supports or presents a more complicated relationship with Orientalist representations and the Western relationship with these countries.

Readers in their reviews respond positively to the role of the authors, commenting on their experience as making them trustworthy in relating the truth about life in Afghanistan. *Kite Runner* readers in their reviews share that they regard Hosseini as a native informant whose account of life in Afghanistan can be trusted as true. A Customer (2003, June 4) states that “Khaled Hosseini brings us a historical view of his native land.” Another reviewer interprets that “Hosseini could very well see every nook and cranny of his homeland through a child’s eye view” (A reader, 2006, November 18). Reviewer “mdscifi lover” (2004, November 30) says of the novel: “It brought about the humanity from a perspective that we, as American citizens, hear very little about. It’s one that could only be expressed straight from the source.” Reviewer Kelli Oliver-George (2005, August 11) perceives that because the author is Afghan, he “was very good with conveying the nature of the people involved without diminishing them into mere stereotypes. Which of course, he SHOULD be able to do since he is an Afghani himself.” Readers, by stating the role these authors play as native informants, reveal a further confidence in the role of these literary texts as tutorials, written by experts as conveying truth claims. They do not consider authors’ subjectivity or situatedness, much less how they as Westernized Muslims or Westerners might be complicit in perpetuating Orientalist representations of the Muslim Other. Rather, they perpetuate the Western vision that a single native informant can simply, and without bias, convey easily digestible truths about Muslims, in general, and about the Muslim world. They do not challenge how these authors, who have also gained public notoriety as experts on Muslims, are shaping the West’s discourse about and action toward the Muslim Other

It is, rather, also the authors’ positions of straddling the Western and Muslim worlds that lead many readers in their reviews to articulate trust in the authors. While they are able to convey

the truth about being Muslim and from a Muslim country, they have now chosen a Western life and Western values. Because of this decision, readers may view them as even more trustworthy informants, presenting familiar values, having assessed the West as superior to that of the Muslim world. As Dabashi suggests, from a postcolonial stance, they may, for this reason, be viewed cautiously as a compador to the Western master. Some reader reviews of *The Kite Runner* reveal parallels readers are drawing between Hosseini's and Amir's lives: "[it is a] story of a boy growing up in pre Taliban Afghanistan, writing now through a partly American sensibility" (avid reader, 2005, January 5). This reviewer does not consider, however, how possessing an American sensibility may color Hosseini's portrayal of Afghanistan, the historical and political events he represents in his novel, and his view of Western intervention in this country. Recognizing the perspective the authors hold, some readers, in their reviews, perceive that while these authors are familiar with what it means to be Muslim and with the cultures and peoples of Iran, Afghanistan, and Pakistan, these authors' perspectives and values will also be grounded in a Western sensibility, since Mortenson is a Westerner working in Afghanistan and Pakistan and Hosseini and Nafisi have chosen to live in the West, specifically in the United States. Linda Linguvic (2004, January 2) shares statements indicating that Nafisi straddles the role of Westernized and native informant. For example, she states that Nafisi is an Iranian but spent her college years and now lives in the United States. Bobby Newman (2006, June 7) challenges those who claim Nafisi is too Westernized or from too privileged a background to be trusted to give an accurate account. This reviewer notes that Nafisi does not deny her background and privileged history and that the reader cannot deny the "frightening reality" Nafisi presents of life in Iran. In both cases, these readers perceive that Nafisi's situatedness allows her to offer trustworthy, generalizable truths to her readers from an understandable perspective, rather than

considering how her situatedness reveals a subjectively biased view and a complicity in the West's Orientalist vision of the Muslim Other.

To connect readers' reactions to Martel's opening quote, readers do not want to be surprised by what they find. They want to find their values and expectations reflected in the texts. Despite a superficial consideration of the authors' situatedness as Westernized Muslims or Western experts, readers, in their reviews, do not reveal a greater awareness of how the authors' portrayals in these texts may be historically, politically, or culturally situated. Dabashi notes that complicit role the native informant plays in perpetuating an Orientalist agenda of depicting the West as possessing power over the Muslim world. Readers are unable to extend their superficial awareness of author situatedness to considerations of author complicity in perpetuating Orientalism. Rather, readers' notions of author situatedness merely support a continued colonizing motivation to know the Other.

There are also, however, some reviews which reveal readers' skepticism about authors' abilities to convey the truth, which do consider the authors' situatedness and question if these authors are too removed or Westernized to be trusted as informants. However, despite this consideration of the authors' situatedness, these interpretations still occur within an objectivist epistemological perspective of seeing the actual truth about the Muslim Other. *Kite Runner* reviewer richard t. (2006, February 12) questions Hosseini's ability to convey an accurate account of what happened in Afghanistan and questions his status as a native informant since Hosseini has not lived in Afghanistan since he was a child. This reviewer says, "the scenery is a bit thin and the Taliban era in particular is nothing but chaff gleaned from newspaper articles. But that's probably because Hosseini spent twenty-five years out of the country he writes about." As well, richard t. includes a litany of inaccuracies to question Hosseini's credibility by stating,

for example, “nor did INS issue visas overseas, even in the pre-9/11 era,” questioning Hosseini’s claims that his character was able to obtain a visa to come to the United States. There are few readers, however, who express a dislike for the book in ways that reveal critical and more political, historical, and cultural situated readings of the memoir and its author. A *Reading Lolita in Tehran* reader (LLM, 2006, April 5) attacks Nafisi’s role as native informant and her positive portrayal of life in Iran under the Shah’s rule because she had been educated in Western countries during this period. As well, this reader challenges her situated perspective as a member of the elite class, who benefited from the Western-supported Shah’s rule, many of whom then emigrated to the West at some point after the revolution. Yet, this questioning of Nafisi’s situatedness and what that might reveal about her portrayal of the Islamic Republic is not explored in detail. It is simply a way to discredit her truth claims, the assumption being that other more truthful claims will take their place. While these readers begin to engage in more critical considerations of how authors’ situatedness discounts their truth claims, they seem to retain an unstated absolute truth about Muslims against which these unsatisfying claims are made. They also do not engage in how the authors’ Westernization may provide insight into their politicized understandings and representations of Muslims and life in Iran, Afghanistan, and Pakistan.

Mortenson’s positioning as a Western expert and readers’ interpretations of him as such perpetuates the Orientalist portrayal of the Westerner as intervening hero in less globally powerful countries. Readers trust in him as a guide for learning how Westerners should view Muslims and interact with them, specifically how to help them. Mortenson provides a model for successful intervention in these countries. Some reviewers also view him unconditionally and uncritically as a hero. He is compared to Martin Luther King Jr. (M.A. Zaidi, 2007, January 29) and Mother Teresa (M.A. Zaidi). There are reviewers who also state that he should be awarded a

Nobel Peace Prize for his humanitarian work (Katelynn Wolfe, 2007, May 12; J. Powers, 2007, March 12; Linda Albion, 2007, September 30; silent rebel, 2007, April 17; Kerry O. Burns, 2007, April 13; Suhail Butt, 2007, May 4). Reviewer Juste Francois (2007, May 12) compares Mortenson to a saint, describing him as “saintly” and his works as “miracles,” stating also that “God’s presence in Greg Mortenson is transparent and undeniable.” This perspective of Mortenson, which positions him as expert, mentor, and hero, is uncritical and unaware of how this portrayal centers the Western hero and supports colonialism and imperialism.

The focus on the Westerner as hero is not new to the Orientalist tradition, and with the text’s focus on Mortenson as protagonist hero, this literary and colonial device is perpetuated. In the book’s on-line description, Mortenson is compared to fictional colonial film hero of the twentieth century: Indiana Jones. With Mortenson as “a real-life Indiana Jones” in Muslim countries with his “humanitarian campaign to use education to combat terrorism in the Taliban’s backyard,” the book promises as exciting an adventure as the Indiana Jones movies. The comparison, however, still suggests an uneasy admiration of the swashbuckling adventures of the movie hero Indiana Jones, who knew the language and customs of the Other’s cultures he visited, but used it to steal their cultural and religious treasures, often fighting with and running from the films’ villains in a way that showed little regard for the Other’s culture as he disrupted the daily lives of those people, destroying buildings, and wrecking havoc on the town’s open-air food markets. Reviewer J.A. Greenwood (2006, March 19) not only compares the story to “an Indiana Jones-style adventure,” but also claims the story “rival[s] Hemingway’s novels.” It is such views that help to strengthen an Orientalist representation of the West’s relationship with Muslims and predominantly Muslim countries as paternal and altruistic, masking often colonizing and imperialist endeavors as humanitarian acts. This is not to say that Mortenson’s

efforts are not guided by altruistic goals, but it is such an interpretation that perpetuates Western hegemonic representations and practices by supporting the often exploited belief that the West knows what is best for the Muslim Other. It represents the end game of the Orientalist project, which is justification for Western intervention in the Muslim world. Not only does he provide insight into the Muslim Other, the narrative of his life's experiences becomes an instructional manual of sorts for successful Western intervention, as seen with the U.S. military's deference to his approach and expertise in their engagement in Afghanistan.

While many readers initially trust Mortenson, after the *60 Minutes* controversy, they question his truth claims in the book. However, by not engaging with the political, economic, and cultural context of Mortenson's work, they do not know enough about the situation in Pakistan and Afghanistan in which he was involved and do not have solid ground from which they can interpret Mortenson's claims, as opposed to those expressed in the *60 Minutes* episodes. Many of them rely on what seems to be the most convincing account, or what in Mortenson's account, in retrospect, seems implausible. Rather than an awareness of differing perspectives as refuting the reality of a single truth, they react to and struggle with what the actual truth must be, in light of this challenge to Mortenson's claims. Reviewer Padre Pete (2011, April 20) points out particular details of the book that were noted as false and expresses a feeling of personal betrayal as a reader. He says that "I am personally offended to learn that hired guides for an expedition are portrayed in the book AND in photographs as terrorist captors." In a similar way, reviewer Big E. (2011, April 16) shares doubts retrospectively that he or she had when reading the book. To this reviewer, Mortenson "seemed too good to be true. What was particularly suspicious to Big E. is Mortenson's "simplistic solutions to problems that have plagued humanity for centuries." Reviewer Daysleeper (2011, April 18), writing after the controversy, claims to have

been skeptical even before the controversy when Mortenson has claimed to have “single-handedly” solved the problems to build these schools. This reviewer questions other inconsistencies in the book, including how teachers would be recruited to work in schools in tiny, inaccessible villages; how Mortenson knew he was building schools in the right places; and how he was able to be allowed to move to the front of the line to view Mother Teresa’s casket. Readers are offended that they have been presented with facts that are not true. They do not recognize their complicity in supporting these texts as tutorials by reading them with the intention of finding the truth. By focusing on the colonial need to know the Other, readers are perpetuating the notion that these books are meant to be tutorials about Muslims. When faced with allegations that the claims made in *Three Cups of Tea* are not truthful facts, readers are unable to translate their outrage into a larger critique of what these contradictions may mean and how differing opinions about Muslims may be fueled by differing political agendas regarding the Muslim world.

The challenges readers face in addressing seemingly contradictory accounts is to attempt to interpret which account is more accurate. Similar to reviewers reacting to the claims against Mortenson, reviewers themselves offer expert knowledge to contradict authors’ and other reviewers’ claims. *Reading Lolita in Tehran* readers in their reviews identify as Iranian native informants use this identification to support Nafisi’s claims as truth claims. Farnoosh (2008, December 9) identifies herself as one who has had a similar experience to Nafisi, having left Iran to live in the United States. She confirms the atrocities and terror that Nafisi recounts and uses her role to instruct Western readers. In her case, she calls on Western readers to appreciate their freedom. Reviewer Hely (2004, May 2) titles her review as “Experiences of a Persian girl.” However, this reviewer uses her positioning to support the claim that Nafisi’s story is untrue, and

she perpetuates the notion that she, as a native Iranian, can offer her experiences as generalizable for the condition of women in contemporary Iran. As one who attended high school after the revolution, she did not see restrictions in teaching, learning, and literature that Nafisi notes. Hely's justification in writing this review is that she wants "people to read such books with an open-mind and do not believe everything that they read or here (*sic*)." She calls on readers to consider more critically what they read, but she does not provide them with a way to determine what is true and what is not. More importantly, by supporting the notion that absolute truth claims exist regarding Iranian women, she supports the Orientalist view that they can be easily classified and know.

With multiple interpretations of the truth being presented and with many readers focused on finding objective truth, it becomes unclear what the reader can interpret as absolute truth, and this approach to interpreting the Muslim Other fails in providing readers with a way to accommodate multiple claims of truth in their interpretations. In support of the accuracy portrayed in *Three Cups of Tea*, Muhammad Asad Khan (2007, March 9), now living in the United States, claims native informant status by prefacing his verification of the truth of the book with "being from that region." He tells the readers: "I can assure you that his [Mortenson's] understanding and depiction of the people of Pakistan is very accurate and that is in itself a very remarkable achievement." He also acknowledges the extremely negative feelings people from remote Pakistan and Afghanistan have for Westerners, saying "suspicion, hatred for anything western (especially American) is rife, is astounding." Western readers in their reviews also state varied reasons for being an expert and able to judge the truthfulness of these literary texts. For example, *Kite Runner* reviewer Kelli Oliver-George (2005, August 11) claims expertise because she had "a good friend in college who had been an Afghan refugee, but also because so much of

it was based in Pakistan – Peshwar and Islamabad – both of which I spent some time in during the early 90s when I visited the country.” One truth claim counters the next and claiming the truth becomes a matter of presenting more detailed facts or simply having the last word and opportunity to refute the previous claim. By engaging in this pursuit of the most satisfying truth claim, readers are unaware that their faith in acquiring ahistorical generalizable knowledge about Muslims is not an ontological fact. It is, rather, a perpetuation of the colonizing need to know.

Without a more critical awareness of how their situatedness as Westerners places them within an existing discourse and set of representations about the Muslim Other, they cannot begin to recognize how these authors, the texts and themselves, as readers, may be perpetuating the Orientalist project. Without such a critical awareness of the colonizing pursuit to know the Other, they perpetuate a process of naming, classifying, and possessing the Other and struggle to challenge this hegemonic Western practice. As they continue to be colonized by these Orientalist portrayals, Western readers struggle to critique and challenge their countries’ policies toward Muslim countries like Iran, Pakistan, and Afghanistan and domestic policies toward the treatment of Muslims. Within education, Western educators continue to teach content about Muslims as truth claims, rather than challenging the ways in which they and their students, are inclined to interpret them. In the next section, I explore some of the specific truth claims Orientalism makes about the Muslim Other and how readers, unaware of their cultural situatedness within this discourse, often reinforce them in their own interpretations.

4.2 RE-PRESENTING ORIENTALIST REPRESENTATIONS

Any new Western representations of Muslims face the challenge of not only presenting new representations, but also presenting them in ways that address, either directly or indirectly, the existing discourse on Muslims (Zine, 2002). In *Orientalism* (1978), Said describes this phenomenon: “because of Orientalism, the Orient was not (and is not) a free subject of thought or action.” (Zine, 2002, quoting Said, p. 3) Zine adds that “there is no pure space from which to create counter-narratives that capture the complexity which recurrent archetypes obscure and deny” (p. 18). As a result, each new representation presented by Westerners faces the Orientalist discursive hegemony and needs to be actively challenged in order to open up a space for it. Without a clear awareness of what motivates predominant representations of the Muslim Other, including how these may be reinforced or possibly complicated in these bestselling texts, readers will not have the critical awareness needed to interpret, in their reviews, the situations and characters they are experiencing as they read these texts. As a result, they will be unable to engage critically with and to challenge, as citizens, the Western colonizing perception of and relationship with the Muslim world.

Readers are often unaware of how their political, historical, and cultural situatedness influences their interpretations of the Muslim characters about whom they read. Despite readers’ good intentions to learn more about the Other, what often results is a perpetuation of Orientalist representations that tend to present essentialized, unchanging descriptions of the Muslim Other. This occurs as these reviews present general abstract truth claims about the nature of Muslims; of Iran, Afghanistan, and Pakistan and its peoples, culture, and society; and of Muslim women as essentialized and enshrouded, helpless victims. These reviews often present representations of Muslims—or specifically of Afghans, Iranians, and Pakistanis—that emphasize irrationality, lack

of education, or incapability in solving their own problems without Western intervention. Many readers, in their reviews, express a need to help the Other, whether it is a passive concern or an active endeavor. This expression inadvertently emphasizes the power dynamic in the West's relationship with the Muslim Other. The West is represented as being more powerful and capable in determining how best to solve the Other's problems, and thus, able to evaluate the worthiness of the Other and control the Other through interventionist action.

4.2.1 Essentializing the Other

The tendency to generalize Muslims as Said notes, produces the effect of dehumanizing them. This monolithic vision of the Muslim Other is connected to the need to know because it suggests that Muslims are easily described and recognized, that they lack the complexities and nuanced differences of Western individuals. The representations themselves are negatively rendered: Muslims are less civilized and prone to emotional irrationality that makes them incapable of self-governance or capable of violence. They are ultimately incapable of caring for themselves and their communities, and their countries are a physical threat to the West. Many readers in their reviews interpret Muslims using such generalizations. While they are not always negative, as is the case with *Kite Runner* reviewer Nancy J. Hajeski (2006, January 18) who states an essentializing truism about the Afghani character (the Afghani people have always had a reputation as dogged fighters who don't go quietly – their hardscrabble land has honed their endurance and toughness over the centuries”), they may still be viewed as examples of the Orientalizing tendency to present Muslims as an easily understood entity.

These generalizations are presented in declarative statements that do not require reviewers to explain or defend them. A *Kite Runner* review, written by “Prisrob” (2004, May

21), provides an overview of the sensory descriptions provided by the book, including the last description that is left unexplained: “the customs and food and smells of the city...We can imagine we are there, and we can share in the sights, the smells, the utter disregard for human life.” The description “utter disregard for human life” is described as part of the sensory description, but it essentializes the character and moral values of an entire people, assuming that the entire Afghan people and their view toward human life can be encapsulated in a single phrase, as well as separating the humanity from the act. It is not a human being who is engaged in actions that show little regard for other humans; it is an ominous presence in the air, like the smells of an open-air market. Another *Kite Runner* reviewer describes “the desolation of life and the loss of the country to madmen who are running it with only their imagined vulgar needs and wealth in mind that destroys a culture so varied and rich” (Prisrob, 2004, May 21). In this review, it is not clear to which ruling force this description is referring: factions who staged the coup against the monarch, the Soviets, or possibly, the Taliban. As an Orientalist representation, it works more effectively by not being specific. By interpreting the state of the country and its culture in general terms, it creates the perception that irrationality (“madmen”), greed (“vulgar needs and wealth in mind”) and chaos (“destroys”) is a permanent state in this country. It is such a perception that implies that the Afghan people are incapable of self-rule and that Western intervention is justified. Charlie C. Fan (2007, May 21), in his *Kite Runner* review presents a similar interpretation. He finds the book’s portrayal “convincing” and then creates his own essentializing presentation of the state of affairs in Afghanistan, emphasizing irrationality and chaos: “captur[es] the insanity of a region amok with fanaticism and destruction...torn apart by society, burdened by the stigma of hierarchical rank and various factions of a larger (and increasingly violent) power struggle...the Afghan backdrop is convincing and terrifying.”

From these representations, Western readers learn to interpret the Muslim world as a threatening place and many of its peoples as frightening, incompetent, and unworthy of respect. Through such interpretations, readers dehumanize all Muslims, creating an Orientalist representation of the Muslim Other. It is through such interpretations that readers then make the conceptual leap to justify Western intervention in and global hegemony over the Muslim world. Their representations perpetuate neocolonial or neoimperialist action in countries, such as Iran, Afghanistan, and Pakistan. In CGScammell's (2007, October 27) review of *Three Cups of Tea*, the reviewer blames the Pakistani government for the situation in which the rural people portrayed in the book live, stating that the story is "sad because the (*sic*) own government has neglected these people and left them uneducated but overly religious (always a bad combination in poor countries)." This reviewer's portrayal of the Pakistan government as incompetent creates an opportunity to then justify, employing Orientalist logic that Pakistanis are incapable of self-governance. Another *Three Cups of Tea* reader (CSL, 2007, May 12) describes Pakistan and Afghanistan, suggesting they are commonly known for illegal and unethical aspects, extending the solution as intervention: "Pakistan and Afghanistan are both places where here in the western world we think of terrorists, the Taliban and drugs. Yet, these countries are in need of assistance." The faith in such statements as truth claims presents representations of the Muslim Other that perpetuate the colonizing assumption that Muslims can be and are known easily and readily by the West as countries that cannot exist successfully without Western intervention.

The power of Orientalism is seen here in the extent to which it has become so embedded in Western discourse that its representations are interpreted as ahistorical, objective truth, rather than a discourse firmly situated in the West's colonizing and imperialist agenda. Its representations are posited in Western discourse, serving the purpose of creating a through and

convincing argument for Western interventionist action in predominantly Muslim countries. The danger of this is that readers' interpretations of Muslims have become so embedded in Orientalist representations that despite their intentions to learn more about Muslims, they struggle to understand the Muslim Other through an Orientalist lens. Rather than having an opportunity to engage critically in their countries' actions toward Muslims, they merely perpetuate existing discourse and actions, often without even being aware of doing so. The implications of this in education is that educators, in an attempt to teach their students about the Muslim world, may also be merely perpetuating existing representations, rather than engaging their students in critically questioning these representations. Next, I explore how Orientalist representations of the Muslim woman have, in particular, served this function by creating for Westerners a pitiable victim with whom Westerners sympathize and are motivated to intervene to help.

4.2.2 Saving the Muslim Woman

The dominant narrative of the Muslim woman in Western discourse from about the eighteenth century to the present basically states, often in quite sophisticated ways, that the Muslim woman is innately oppressed; it produces Muslim women who affirm this statement by being either submissive nonentities or rebellious renegades – rebellious against their own Islamic world, that is, and conforming to Western gender roles. (Kahf, 1999, p. 177)

A major representation in Orientalism is the Muslim woman as victim of religious dogma (Bahramitash, 2005). While Said, in his original concept of Orientalism, does not develop this as thoroughly, other postcolonial theorists have extended his concept to include this key representation (Bahramitash, 2006; Jones, 2008, 2011; Lewis, 1996; Spivak, 1994, 1999). The Muslim woman is represented as the pitiable victim of the extreme effects of Islam and Muslim cultures, which are portrayed as violent and barbaric. This figure becomes an effective rallying

cry for Western intervention. As Westerners perceive the Muslim woman as a figure worthy of sympathy, their motivation to help her strengthens when they see her presented as living within a culture and among the other Muslims—usually Muslim men—who, as portrayed by Orientalism, uniformly oppress her. This representation provides another justification for Westerners to intervene and one that can be presented as altruistic in motivation. The literary texts, *Reading Lolita in Tehran* and *Three Cups of Tea*, are both marketed and written, adopting Orientalist representations of Muslim women and girls. Western readers, in their reviews, interpret them by creating their own Orientalist representations.

The texts are actively marketed and promised to contain insight into the lives of Muslim women, sparking Western readers' interest in having an opportunity to peek under the veil. This begins with the images portrayed on the covers of *Reading Lolita in Tehran* and *Three Cups of Tea*. The young girls portrayed on the cover of *Reading Lolita in Tehran* are presented out of context, as two young women reading the results of the 2007 election. In the case of the cover art of *Three Cups of Tea*, while these young girls are actively reading, the fact they are reading and being educated is due to a Westerner intervening to build them schools. With these portrayals of women on the cover of the books, reader reviews focus on interpretations of Muslim women. The cover art of *Reading Lolita in Tehran* has raised critical discussion regarding what it portrays about Iranian Muslim women. It features a closely cropped picture of two young veiled Iranian Muslim women with their eyes cast down and their heads slightly bowed. What has been cropped from the picture of these young women is the newspaper they are sharing in order to read the election results for reformist Iranian President Khatami. By cropping the photo and showing simply two young women with eyes and heads cast down, the cover reflects and perpetuates the Orientalist view of Muslim women as passive victims. Keshavarz (2007b)

compares the content of the book to the front cover picture “because it also omits the aspects of the culture that show that Iranian women have agency and are actively improving their lives” (para. 3).

Whereas the cover of *Reading Lolita in Tehran* features young women who seem to be university students, *Three Cups of Tea* features younger girls all in headscarves, possibly between the ages of 8 and 12, each engrossed in reading a book. The assumption here is that these girls are examples of some of the children benefitting from the creation of a CAI school. Reviewer M. Ellington (2007, May 26), while speaking favorably of the picture and the bright future it implies for these girls, yet notes a generalizable “Middle Eastern beauty,” thus perpetuating an Orientalist vision of the Muslim woman that both assumes the right to gaze voyeuristically upon her and to classify her:

The three, young girls pictures are so busy reading that they seem not to even notice the camera photographing them. You can’t see their undoubtedly big, brown eyes, but you get the sense that they are Middle Eastern beauties about to embark on a journey that will change not only their lives, but those of their community and nation, and perhaps the world.

Another reviewer (text vendor, 2011, October 13), who claims to have “spent a lot of time in Pakistan myself,” responds to the cover picture in light of the April 2011 controversy accusing Mortenson of misappropriating CAI donations. The reviewer says that “it’s sad that a photo of Pakistani/Afghan girls on the cover draws us in to buy his hype, and it turns out that he’s just exploiting them to make a buck.” While this reader presents an opportunity to critique the Westerner’s fetish-like fascination with the Muslim woman, he or she does not provide further

explanation as to whether this interpretation is motivated by a critique of the Western Orientalist gaze.

The on-line product description of *Reading Lolita in Tehran* promises “a rare glimpse, from the inside, of women’s lives in revolutionary Iran.” And many readers take away from their readings a vision of how the Islamic Republic, in its laws and rule, contains and controls women. Some readers state that they had their preconceived assumptions confirmed by what they read in the book. Matthew Krichman (2004, November 4), who did not like the book overall, states: “There’s no brilliant insight into Iranian society here. Yeah, it’s an awful place for women. But I knew that a long time ago.” A Customer (2004, April 13) describes a frighteningly repressive world described in Nafisi’s book in which “women can be jailed or even executed for simply allowing a strand of hair to fall free of their shroud.” This reviewer then reveals that “this is a world America is familiar with.” Yet, he or she also describes the characters, in Nafisi’s private literature class, as experiencing “a world of hope and dreams,” making them more sympathetic to Western readers as they seek a better life through Western literature. These reviews assume that Muslim women are generalizable as victims of the Islamic faith, a view that perpetuates the U.S. Western view of Iranian women as victims in a repressive society. Their views also interpret the saving power of Western values through the literature they read and become a justification for the West’s intervention on these women’s behalf.

Many of the representations of Iranian women presented in these reviews perpetuate an Orientalist view of Muslim women as victims and engage in a detailed, dramatic interpretation of Iranian women as prisoners within their veils. Reviewer crazyforgems (2004, December 9) describes how women are “criticized at times for even eating an apple too seductively,” but once they are in the private class with Nafisi, “most shed their scarves and their outer skins” as “the

literature liberated them – and in many cases saved their souls.” Carla F. Kennedy’s (2006, January 3) review supports this interpretation. She describes life for a woman in Iran as “no color, robe like shrouds to hide the body and veils to hide the face, even a woman’s voice could be silenced if society (primarily male society) thought it was too sensual to be heard.” Another review A. Woodley (2005, October 3) responds to the portrayal of one female student who relays her feelings only through eye contact or the lack thereof:

How else are women in Iran supposed to make themselves understood. They are disempowered in so many ways, are given little value and as Nafisi writes of again and again, they are forced to wear shapeless robes so only the smallest part of their faces are showing.

Linda Linguvic (2004, January 2) is not surprised by an example from Nafisi’s book of the disparity of punishments allotted to the women as opposed to the men who attended a raided, unchaperoned, co-ed party. The women were medically checked for virginity and received 25 lashes, while “the young men, of course, were not charged with anything.” It is these kinds of scenes portrayed in the book that cause Bobby Newman (2006, June 7) to ask how “can we deny the realities of the society described?” Such comments as these serve as examples of the Western obsession with gazing upon the Muslim woman and speculating about her, which, in particular, is an obsession with the veiled woman. The Orientalist fetish with the veiled Muslim woman and the tendency to exoticize her perceived imprisonment under the veil, is seen in comments like “shed their scarves and their outer skins” and “forced to wear shapeless robes so only the smallest part of their faces are showing.” The right of the Westerner to gaze unabashedly upon the Muslim woman and speculate on her condition, in ways that suggest a

sexual obsession with her, are seen in comments like “criticized at times for even eating an apple too seductively” and “the women were medically checked for virginity and received 25 lashes.”

Within the negative portrayals of Muslims and Muslim cultures presented by Orientalist representations is the pivotal role of the Muslim woman. Orientalism represents the Muslim Other as uncivilized, violent, and a threat to the West, as justification for the West to become involved in the political, economic, and cultural dynamics of predominantly Muslim countries. Representations of the Muslim woman contribute to this justification in a different way. They provide Westerners with a Muslim figure with whom they can sympathize and connect. This figure provides further justification for Western intervention. However, at the same time that Westerners want to protect and save the Muslim woman, they also possess her as they gaze voyeuristically upon her and exoticize her. They seek to protect her, yet, they are also exploit her as an object of sexual desire and as a pawn for justifying intervention in predominantly Muslim countries. By perceiving the Muslim woman as a sympathetic figure, Westerners justify their need to intervene in these countries on her behalf without questioning the true motivation behind their obsession with her and their need to intervene. They cloak self-interested, imperialist endeavors into predominantly Muslim countries—and into domestic policies toward Muslims in their own countries—in benevolent terms.

Readers’ connection with the figure of the Muslim woman is not the only connection to characters they make in these texts. They also discover characters with whom they relate and empathize, often those who express admiration for Western values or lifestyles, as I explore in the next section. These connections provide them further justification for the West’s ability to know the Muslim Other and to determine what actions should be taken to make the lives of Muslims better.

4.3 READING FOR EASY EMPATHETIC IDENTIFICATION

Western readers both distance themselves through Orientalist representations and actively identify shared values and experiences with the Muslim Other. Connecting emotionally and empathetically with the Other by emphasizing a shared humanity appears, at first, to run counter to the Orientalist binary that is created between the superiority of the West and the inferiority of the Other. However, this shared humanity and the interpretation of the texts' content as revealing universal themes reinforce readers' beliefs that they know the Other and that they know how to solve the Other's problems. Because Orientalism's goal as a project is to justify Western intervention as altruistic, there needs to be a sympathetic victim that exists and that the West wants to save, or at least, appears to want to save, as I illustrated this concept in my previous section on the role of the Muslim woman.

Each of these novels present protagonists who command the sympathy of the reader and themes that readers interpret as being universal and representative of shared human experiences. Both characters and themes are created by authors who are consciously writing for a Western audience, to share Western values and experiences with the reader. These characters are viewed sympathetically by the reader because they are viewed as Westernized Muslims who are trapped in a Muslim world with the typically portrayed Muslim Other, provided with ample Oriental representations. In this section, I use Aubry's (2009) mapping of readers' empathetic identification with Muslim characters and recognition of universal themes and shared humanity as a way to extend Said's concept and explore how identifying empathetically with Muslim characters also serves the colonizing and imperialist goal of Orientalism. I examine specifically themes interpreted as universal, including a shared valuing of Western literature in *Reading Lolita in Tehran* and education in *Three Cups of Tea* and an interpreted human experience of

betrayal and redemption in *The Kite Runner*. The tendency to create a superficial connection is an example of imposing Western values and traits on sympathetic characters as a way to justify Western political and cultural hegemony.

Readers often selectively interpret aspects of characters' lives that connect with their own lives, disregarding the specific, the unfamiliar, and possibly unsettling political, historical, and cultural contexts that shape these characters. Western readers are confidently—and often lacking in critical circumspection—recreating the Muslim Other in their own images, as easily recognizable and familiar, interpreting similar themes and human values and experiences. Aubry (2009) describes that such a reaction to the texts “serves as an instance of cross-cultural continuity” (p. 30). It also serves as justification for Western intervention politically, militarily, economically, and culturally as a response to the needs of the sympathetic Muslim Other, portrayed as yearning for the West's civilizing and democratizing influence on their cultures.

In *Reading Lolita in Tehran* reviews, many readers identify with characters they perceive as being disconnected from the rest of Iranian society because they study and value Western literature and the Western ideals it emphasizes. James Carragher (2004, December 30), for example, characterizes how these characters share the common human need to gain their freedom by “keeping imagination and literary argument alive in Tehran.” The contrast between the characters' values and intentions and the political and religious oppression of their culture is highlighted when this reader states, in general terms, “the human spirit is indomitable and...totalitarian efforts...are always and everywhere doomed to fail.” By resisting their country's rules, they are seen as partaking in a universal human practice in studying literature. To this affect, Elbert D. Porter (2003, July 28) declares that “literature threatens totalitarian powers by teaching the complexity of people, their natures, and their motivations.” However,

some reviews note, it is not just the shared human value of studying literature that is important, but it is their study of Western literature, in particular, that uniquely allows them to develop critical and imaginative freedom of thought. Patricia A. Powell (2003, July 5) observes that “the forbidden fruit that they read was *Lolita*, *Pride and Prejudice*, *Daisy Miller*, and *the Great Gatsby*! They risked so much to do this; they risked imprisonment, beatings, rape, and perhaps execution.” As well, reviewer Snowbrocade (2004, September 9) describes the story presented in the book as a “group of women performing literary rebellion by reading banned western books under an oppressive regime (*sic*).” By connecting with the characters’ love of literature, particularly Western literature, as a shared human value, Western readers interpret that they are subsequently in a position to determine what is best for these Iranian characters because they share a core value system. Believing that they are interpreting a shared human value, however, they are unaware of the situated differences that exist between the Iranian characters and them, as Westerners, that creates a more complicated relationship between the West and Iran, one in which the imposition of Western values and a Western lifestyle has not been a liberating force but has been imposed, as seen during the reign of the shahs, as a way to support British and American colonial endeavors in the country.

Similar to *Reading Lolita in Tehran* readers, *Three Cups of Tea* readers, in their reviews, recognize shared values with Muslims portrayed in the text. They see justification for Western intervention because these characters are looking to Mortenson to save them with the Central Asia Institute’s project of building schools, paying to train local teachers, and help establish education programs. In their reviews, readers interpret shared values of education as a way to overcome poverty and fight terrorism and see the need for Westerners like Mortenson to become involved in such an endeavor. Josephine Briggs (2011, December 3) states, without providing

support for her claim, that “many Pakistanis like the idea of kids going to good schools, to being educated, to taking over the running of their country.” As well, reviewer M. Ellington (2007, May 26) perceives that despite the differences in religion and culture, both Mortenson and the people he helps “believe in the power of a text book to change lives.” These readers see the sympathetically portrayed Pakistanis and Afghans, desiring Western help to receive education as evidence of a universal value. They also interpret that their desire for education is not supported by such entities as the Taliban in Afghanistan or the disorganized Pakistani government, but rather, is shared by the Western world. Reviewer mothermaven (2007, August 13) also sees the potential for what he or she perceives as “a belief that there can be brotherhood existing between those of different beliefs under the shared commitment to education.” Like this reviewer, William V. Yount (2007, July 10) shares his belief in education as being one that is shared by all people for all children. He states, in general terms, that Mortenson’s schools “[leave] behind the seeds of hope for a future in children and in the peace of mutual understanding that is brighter than the present.” Some reviewers also sermonize on the need for Western readers to not take their literature and liberties for granted. In her *Reading Lolita in Tehran* review, Patricia A. Powell (2003, July 5) instructs that “we, in the USA, live such safe, comfortable lives even in the wake of 9/11. Our free public libraries, bookstores...provide easy access to Nabokov, Austen, James, and Fitzgerald, and yet so few of us read them.”

By focusing on shared values and experiences, readers are decontextualizing the specific political, economic, and culture struggles these characters face, different from experiences in the West, and at the same time highlighting the supremacy of the West. This is seen in the way readers emphasize Amir’s experiences in *The Kite Runner*, diluting the specific context in which they occur and generalizing them to be applicable to all humans. Many readers emphasize his

journey from betrayal, to guilt, to redemption as a shared universal experience, despite that it is woven into his situated experiences of life in Afghanistan during the governmental upheavals of the late 1970s and early 1980s, becoming a refugee, transplanting to the United States as part of a local Afghan refugee community, and returning to Afghanistan under Taliban rule to rescue his nephew. Despite Amir's situated experiences, reader Linda Linguvic (2004, April 2), in her review insists that "the real story [of *The Kite Runner*] is a classic drama of sin and redemption, relationships between fathers and sons, and the impact of one very personal act of cowardice." Other readers, in their reviews, emphasize this theme, drawing a connection between the experiences of Amir and the Western reader. Reviewer J. Ullah (2005, December 8) describes the connection readers feel as "Amir's actions make one realize that what we do as a child can haunt us into our adult years and the repercussions can be quite detrimental." Jennifer A. Sutton (2005, December 9) calls Amir's feelings "existential guilt," emphasizing his experience as identifiable to readers. She notes that we "identify (sic) with the characters, insofar as we have all known what it is like to make excuses (rationalize our mistakes), to struggle with our conscience, and to try and redeem ourselves- to continue living even in the face of adversity." She moves the focus from a discussion of Amir's experiences and instead, focuses on the readers' struggles with this theme. By focusing on their own struggles with guilt and redemption, these readers' interpretations also suggest these struggles may apply to their implicated guilt as Westerners regarding the situations of Muslims in countries like Iran, Afghanistan, and Pakistan and with the West's relationship with the Muslim world. While they are unable to recognize the full extent of their complicity as Westerners or to embrace the responsibility that such a feeling of guilt creates, they experience relief when they interpret common connections with the Muslim Other as a way to dismiss their suspicions of guilt.

Aubry (2009) sees such empathetic interpretations as less about making a connection with the Muslim Other and more as a self-focused therapeutic experience in justifying readers' implicated roles as Americans in Western involvement with the Muslim world. Aubry describes the reading of this book as

an act of atonement for those Americans who are troubled by their country's treatment of Muslims abroad and at home...as a vindicating reminder, in the face of criticism, that they are compassionate, good human beings whose politics are fundamentally well intentioned. (p. 36)

While Western readers fail to notice the Orientalist agenda inherent in how they view the Other, they experience uneasiness that they, as Westerners, may somehow be responsible for Muslims' conditions in these countries. Readers also create emotional connections with the Other and assuage their guilt. By connecting emotionally with the Muslim characters, they achieve a feeling of cathartic relief. As Aubry (2009) notes, this reading experience reinforces readers' "belief in their own humanity through an amplification of their emotional economy and a renewed perception of their capacity for compassion" (p. 30). This catharsis allows them to perceive they are experiencing an epiphany of sorts that they have obtained the truth about the Muslim Other. The truth they interpret as obtaining includes those of shared values and experiences, at least with the sympathetic characters. A *Kite Runner* reviewer (maja j., 2007, September 26) describes this cathartic feeling of relief: "At the end, the anguish and heartache in the book finally give way to a sort of calm and contentment...and you feel a glimmer of hope that everything will be made right again...finally." Another reader (nodice, 2005, December 30) also delineates the emotional process experienced while reading about Amir's experiences and decisions. This reader experiences hope at the end of the novel:

I loved Amir and ached for him...But when his cowardice act to watch and not protect Hassan, I felt a sharp pain of disappointment, shock, and disgust...I couldn't see how I could ever feel anything but disappointment and loathing for Amir...I felt personally wounded...Then Sohrab is introduced and he, too steals your heart. ... It ends with hope.

By experiencing a sense of relief, readers dismiss their suspicions of guilt that they may be implicated, as Westerners, in perpetuating the hardships Iranians, Afghans, and Pakistanis face, as portrayed in these literary texts. With this experience, they are also denying a possibility for considering the origins of this guilt and by exploring more fully the responsibility the West has played in creating the current conditions in the Muslim world and in the West-Muslim dynamic. They feel hope that they have discovered solutions for how they as Westerners can help these Muslim countries and their peoples. They are unaware that the interpretations they make that they share similar values and experiences to that of the Muslim Other obscures the power dynamic in play that allows the West to dominate and articulate the Muslim world.

It is by both empathizing with and distancing themselves from the Muslim Other that readers are able to compare the West with the Muslim world in a way that supports the Orientalist vision of Western superiority. Western readers maintain the Orientalist binary vision of the West and the Muslim world by contrasting the West as providing freedom, civilization, and rationality and the Muslim world as offering only violence, chaos, and devastation. Readers often interpret a struggle between what these sympathetic Muslim characters—or those with whom they empathize—value in the West with the realities of the world in which they live. While Western readers and the Muslim Other share the same values, Western readers will interpret their positions as privileged, interpreting that they are freely actualizing these values by living in the West and not being Muslim. This positioning of the West's superiority in contrast to

the Muslim world becomes an explanation for why the West holds what the Muslim world most needs. This contrast is made by readers as well, as they reflect the sameness of shared values and experiences and the strangeness that the Muslim Other cannot share in full realization of these commonalities in their lives. *Reading Lolita in Tehran* reviewer Kristen Falso-Capaldi (2004, July 21) writes that she was “inspired to TRULY appreciate the freedoms we as readers, viewers and thinkers really have in America,” and C. Colt (2003, December 23) comes away from her reading “with a deep appreciation for the fact that, at least for now, we do not live in a militant theocracy in which librarians and book sellers are forced to secretly inform the ruling regime what their citizens are reading.” *Three Cups of Tea* reviews assert this as well by emphasizing the binary vision of the West and the Muslim Other. Jill Malter’s (2006, August 20) emphasizes the different experiences in the pursuit of education: “education is important for everyone, and in these regions, children have had to struggle fiercely to obtain the sort of education that most Westerners would take for granted.” Reviewer Rikelle Brande (2007, June 6) uses this binary vision as a way to justify the need for Western intervention. She states there is free access to education in the United States, and “feel[s] that I am obligated to do what I can to allow all children to have this gift.” Western intervention is couched in altruistic terminology, becoming an “obligation” to help the Muslim Other. Readers, often unaware of how they are setting up this classic Orientalist binary between their powerful roles as Westerners in contrast to the Muslim world, believe that their motivation is altruistic and do not recognize how their interpretations perpetuate this power dynamic.

Readers are unaware of how they, as Westerners, are complicit in creating the often dimly portrayed situations in these countries. They do not perceive, however, from these texts that Western intervention in these countries has caused the often unsympathetic Muslim

characters to hate them. Rather, readers perceive the sympathetic Muslim characters, while not always able to live as fully as they might in the West, looking to Western values and lifestyles as desirable and even as figuratively and literally life-saving. However, readers are also guided in their interpretations by the Orientalist lens through which the West has for centuries colored representations of the Muslim Other. Authors of these literary texts, for example, particularly Hosseini and Nafisi, reflect some of the history of the West's involvement in Afghanistan (supporting the monarchical regime that was overthrown in 1978) and in Iran (supporting the rule of the Shahs) as supporting more prosperous and stable regimes. However, they do not trace the self-interested interventionist action the West has taken in these countries from British and Russian colonial interests in Afghanistan and Iran in the 19th Century, U.S. and Soviet intervention in Afghanistan and Iran in the 20th Century. The knowledge they perceive they have gained allows readers to position themselves by the end of this reading process as knowing what is best needed to help the current situation of Muslims in Iran, Afghanistan, and Pakistan or to help improve the current relationship between the West and the Muslim world. The relief they experience is that the West is not the problem but rather capable of providing the solution to their current situations. As the next section explores, this confident belief that Western solutions are needed in the Muslim world is the intended goal of the Orientalist project. It also allows readers the satisfaction that they have successfully completed their goal of knowing the Other.

4.4 KNOWING WHAT IS BEST FOR THE MUSLIM OTHER

Western colonization of and imperialist intervention in predominantly Muslim countries like Iran, Afghanistan, and Pakistan has been justified by such rhetoric that positions the West as

civilizing, rational, and modernized in comparison to the world of the Muslim Other. This is the goal of the Orientalist project in creating representations of the Muslim Other as incapable of self-rule, irrational, and barbaric. The rhetoric of intervention is presented as a knowledgeable and often altruistic attempt to help the Other, to bring Western civilization to them, and to know what is best for them, when they often do not know themselves. As Said (1978) describes it, this perspective perpetuates “the unbroken, all-embracing Western tutelage of an Oriental country” (p. 40). However, as has been seen in Western, and lately American, intervention in Iran, Afghanistan, and Pakistan, this rhetoric justifies endeavors that are self-interested, which increases the geopolitical stance of a Western country, or enhances their economic gains, while being detrimental to the country which has been intervened. The development of this justification in the general discourse occurs through the process that I have explored in this chapter thus far: the need to know the Other leads to a knowledge already inherent in Western culture: that the Other is inferior and in need of Western help. In his review of *The Kite Runner*, Christopher G. Kenber (2004, December 20) sees this novel as important educative reading for those involved with these endeavors. He says, “this portrait is so valuable that it should be required reading for those who choose to interfere in afghanistan’s (and iraq’s) affairs. (Fat chance, I’m afraid).” Seemingly critical of the West’s involvement in countries like Afghanistan and Iraq, he is still aware that intervention is the standard response. As I have explored, by being written for and marketed to a specifically Western audience, these literary texts create opportunities for readers to engage with and interpret characters and situations in ways that support Orientalist representations of Muslims.

Amazon.com reviews of these texts range from personal calls to action to interpretations that Western, specifically U.S., governments or other organizations intervene in the affairs of

these countries. In many of the cases, however, the assumption is made that expertise regarding what is best for these peoples has been achieved by reading one of these bestselling books and that the Western intervention is needed. In his review, for example, Peter Cofrancisco (2004, April 11) reacts so viscerally to a scene of the mistreatment of a group of Iranian women in *Reading Lolita in Tehran*, he “wanted to hop on a plane and find these thugs and beat the crap out of them.” While the intention expressed in Peter Cofrancisco’s review is rather extreme, it is such sense of outrage that has perpetuated a portrayal of the Muslim woman as a helpless, passive victim and has used her as a pawn in justifying Western action in these predominantly Muslim countries. As well, it reflects the agency and arrogance of a Western assumption of superiority regarding the Muslim world that, after reading this literary text, this reader perceives he is able to pass judgment on and take action in another culture, specifically a Muslim culture. Such an assumption assumes the Orientalist vision that the West has successfully achieved a civilized society and is sharing this vision with the Muslim world, rather than enacting self-interested politically and economically motivated mandates that do not always consider the best interests of these countries’ peoples. Readers’ interpretations of these books is that they offer solutions to the ongoing situations is expressed with relief or exuberance, particularly in the case of *Three Cups of Tea*. Many readers depend on Mortenson as a fellow Westerner to show them how to interact with and help Muslims. Their faith in his approach is often conveyed with confident, declarative statements in their reviews, assumed as truth and therefore, not elaborated upon or explained. For example, *Three Cups of Tea* reviewer Teresa Jordan (2007, March 30) makes the strong claim, using all caps to express it, that this book offers “THE FIRST VIABLE SOLUTION I HAVE SEEN TO SOLVING THE CONFLICTS WE ARE FACING.” Also, employing the email use of caps to emphasize a point, another reviewer assumes the truth behind

Mortenson's approach and declares: "THIS is what our country should be doing" (Gloria, 2007, September 18). This reader perceives, in the case of the United States, at least, that Western countries have solved these problems for themselves and are able to share this achievement with the Muslim world, perpetuating an Orientalist tendency to generalize the West as the pinnacle of civilization and the Muslim world, collectively, as primitive, incapable of self-governance, and a threat to civilization. With such an interpretation, Westerners do not question Western intervention in the Muslim world, and they also do not challenge the problems of social inequities and the problems of the educational system in their own country.

While some readers may question the political maneuvering of the U.S. government, for example, in Afghanistan or Pakistan, an alternative solution presented still involves a different kind of Western intervention, whether it is more culturally thoughtful intervention or the intervention of a Western humanitarian aid organization. Kerry O. Burns's (2007, April 13) review is an example of this perspective. This reviewer sees current U.S. efforts in Afghanistan and Pakistan as less successful than Mortenson's approaches and sees his approach as giving Westerners a reason to be proud once again as Americans. This reviewer states that Mortenson's "determination, foresight and unwavering commitment in doing more diplomacy than that whole gang in DC...makes you feel proud of our country again when one man can make such a difference." Mary R. Tanner (2007, May 28) also sees Mortenson's approach as an example to the U.S. government's official approach as a way to better make the U.S. "the greatest country." However, she fears that the U.S. government's current destructive approach overshadows the efforts of individuals like Mortenson, which she feels causes non-Americans to view badly U.S. efforts in these parts of the world. She says "instead few see the enrichment provided by the Greg Mortenson's of the world, and most see our government's arrogance." The goal for both of

these reviewers, though, is that the United States will be a strong, proud country again by active intervention in these countries' situations. Yet, what is only rarely interpreted in these reviews is how the West has been complicit in creating the dire conditions in which Iranians, Afghans, and Pakistanis now find themselves.

Western, particularly U.S., readers do not often recognize their situated role as Westerners in helping to create the current situations in Iran, Afghanistan, and Pakistan and the strained relationship between the West and the Muslim world. While some readers may recognize missteps Western governments have taken, their interpreted solution is that more Western intervention is needed. Without recognition of how their interpretations of Muslims are situated within the larger cultural project of Orientalism, they continue to perceive the West as the civilizing force needed to save the Muslim world from itself, rather than as being part of the problem. Western readers do not, for example, often critically question how these countries and these peoples have been geopolitical pawns in political, economic, and military grasps for global power. They are also unaware of how these literary texts present, and they as readers reinterpret and re-present, an Orientalist justification for solutions to be found and implemented by the West.

4.5 CONCLUSION

In reading and posting reviews of these texts, Western readers interpret they are learning more about predominantly Muslim countries and their peoples. They perceive they gain more from these literary texts than they do from the media. They interpret these books as offering them more positive portrayals of Muslims through intimate, personal stories conveyed to them using

pleasing sensory descriptions, engaging plots, and sympathetic protagonists. They evaluate the Muslim world, in general, as often violent, barbaric, and incapable of self-governance. In the midst of this negative portrayal, however, they discover characters that are familiar and sympathetic because of their adherence to and faith in the West and its values. Readers' resulting interpretation is that Western intervention is needed, whether it is the intervention of an individual reader making a donation to Mortenson's CAI or a justification for military, political, or economic intervention in a country's affairs.

Said (1993) describes the Orientalist discourse of the "New World Order" as recognized by "its redolent self-congratulation, its unconcealed triumphalism, its grave proclamations of responsibility" (p. xvii). Western readers of *Reading Lolita in Tehran*, *The Kite Runner*, and *Three Cups of Tea* are seen perpetuating this rhetoric in their proclamations that they have successfully mastered the knowledge they need to understand and successfully intervene to help the Muslim Other. Motivated by a perception that they as Westerners possess the superior ability to simply know, name, and classify the Other, they are unaware of how their confident proclamations are fueled by an Orientalist vision. The result is that the Orientalist project is accomplished as readers re-interpret its discourses and representations of the Muslim Other. Without a critical awareness of how this project plays a central role in their interpretations, Western readers assist in recirculation and reimagining this discourse with the result of perpetuating it and recentering themselves within it. They have learned little about the Other that they were not predisposed to know. They have not explored alternative perspectives to the representations with which they are so familiar. They have not critically considered the injustices that they, as Westerners, are complicit in promoting and perpetuating with their interpretations. Without an awareness, they struggle to participate as citizens in the decisions of their countries'

actions toward predominantly Muslim countries like Iran, Afghanistan, and Pakistan, unable to understand and engage critically in the public discourse about the nature of Islam and the West's relationship with the Muslim world. By assuming that they, as Westerners have the right and ability to know, classify, and make decisions on behalf of the Muslim Other, they perpetuate the currently strained relationship the West has with the Muslim world, unwilling to perceive individual Muslims as complicated and diverse as Westerners perceive themselves to be, unwilling to assume responsibility for the injustices the West has perpetuated on the Muslim world, and unwilling to engage in cooperative, responsive, and respectful relationships with the Muslim Other.

Readers are guided in their interpretations by the Orientalist lens through which the West has for centuries painted representations of the Muslim Other. Authors of these literary texts, for example, particularly Hosseini and Nafisi, reflect some of the history of the West's involvement in Afghanistan (supporting the monarchical regime that is overthrown in 1978) and in Iran (supporting the rule of the Shahs) as supporting more prosperous and stable regimes. However, readers do not trace the self-interested interventionist action the West has taken in these countries, like Iran, Afghanistan, and Pakistan, from British and Russian colonial interests in Afghanistan and Iran in the 19th Century, U.S. and Soviet intervention in Afghanistan and Iran in the 20th Century. The danger in feeling that one can name and know the Other is not just in the West's need to conquer and possess the Other. As Viswanathan (1989) states, this perpetuation misrepresents and hurts both the Other and Westerners through their own continued ignorance. Burwell, Davis, and Taylor (2008) also recognize this danger of assuming to know the Other, stating that "reading for enlightenment and empathetic identification not only misrepresents the Other, but also misrepresents the Self. Just as we assume the Other...has been transparently

revealed to us, we assume that we are transparent to ourselves and capable of full self-knowledge” (p. 71). However, readers’ are complicit in the reading process. In their readings, they engage uncritically in objective approaches to finding the truth without considering what the variety of contradictory accounts can mean. While they are often unaware of the greater influences on their reading processes, like Orientalism’s influence on Western readers’ interpretations, they are engaging in readings that consider both their responses as well as the texts in meaning making. They select and unselect text that supports their views and expectations, making decisions—some conscious and some subconscious—in what meets their reading expectations and needs. This reading approach is often guided by readers’ self-interests, and readers do not consider the texts as situated and these textual portrayals as reflective of the subjective motivations and needs of their authors and characters.

In the previous chapter, postcolonial theory, specifically Said’s concept of Orientalism, provides a frame within which Orientalizing tendencies of Western interpretation and representation are analyzed. However, in this study, I also ask if alternative interpretations are possible from these Orientalizing representations. Not all of the reviews are unilaterally ignorant of the current conditions in countries like Iran, Afghanistan, and Pakistan. Some reviewers are able to apply some degree of awareness of this and contemporary Western action in these countries. Many reviewers want to find connections with Muslims and want to believe that their lives are not as dire as they are portrayed by the mainstream media. Yet, despite these forays into understanding of the greater historical, political, economic, and cultural forces that have shaped current situations for Muslims in these countries and colored negative Western stereotypes of them, readers reveal a tendency to perpetuate familiar patterns of interpreting the Muslim Other. Said also provides opportunities for Westerners to resist these tendencies and engage in more

critical approaches to understanding the basis of these marginalizing stereotypes about Muslims. Yet, by emphasizing generally a more critical approach to reading, the nuanced reading process and decisions, both conscious and subconscious, readers make are not considered.

In the next chapter, I explore the stances and assumptions readers, as revealed in their reviews, are making as they interpret the Muslims and their relationship as Westerners to the Muslim Other. Because postcolonial theory does not provide such a perspective for analyzing these more detailed maneuvers, I will utilize reader response theory and pedagogical concepts regarding reading the Other to analyze readers' interpretations in their reviews that offer starting points for considering alternative approaches to reading that emphasize more critical considerations of the readers' role in meaning making with a text (reading to understand rather than reading to know), readers' situatedness as Westerns (reading with situatedness and for sameness and strangeness), and a reconceived interpretation of the Western readers' relationship with the Muslim Other (a relationship based on responsibility for the Other).

5.0 READING TO UNDERSTAND THE OTHER AND ONE'S SELF: A READER RESPONSE PERSPECTIVE

Said's concept of Orientalism, as explored in the last chapter, provides a historical, political, and cultural context within which Westerners are situated as they read and interpret literary texts about the Muslim Other. In the last chapter, I argued that Western readers often begin their reading process motivated by a need to know the Other. However, they are unaware of how this motivation is based on a colonizing need to name, classify, and possess the Other. I discussed how the interpretations and representations readers present are not the objective, ahistorical truths they perceive them to be, but rather, perpetuations of Orientalist representations. I also explored how reader both distance themselves from and identify with Muslim characters, interpreting shared values and themes. I discussed how, by empathetically identifying with the Other, they interpret that they know the Other and how to solve the Other's problems. However, they are often unaware of this lens through which they essentialize Muslims as irrational, uncivilized, and incapable of self-governance, requiring Western intervention to solve their problems. They are also often unaware of the role the West has played in creating the current problems in countries like Iran, Afghanistan, and Pakistan.

Beyond highlighting this cultural baggage readers often bring to their interpretations of the Muslim Other, Said (1994, 2004) also advocates for readers engaging in a self-conscious process of challenging their Orientalist assumptions (1994, 2004). This occurs, he says, when

readers maintain “a state of constant alertness, of a perpetual willingness not to let half-truths or received ideas steer one along” (Said, 1994, p. 23). Critical reading involves a complex process of unpacking and challenging representations of the Muslim Other that have been shaped by Western readers’ historical, political, social, and cultural situatedness and have been hardwired into their interpretations. As he suggests, this approach begins with a process of self-critique and engages “critical hermeneutic practices that dismantle these racially and religiously degenerative constructs” (Zine, Taylor, & Davis, 2007, p. 274).

In this study, I use Said’s postcolonial critique of Westerners’ current representations of the Muslim Other and his call for a more critical practice to disrupt current reading practices as a means to introduce a perspective that calls for situatedness, awareness and responsibility. However, this critique does not provide a frame for engaging in a detailed analysis of readers’ engagement with these texts. Such an analysis would allow me to examine the specific stances, decisions, and interpretations readers make, from their initial decisions to read these texts to know the Other to the confident, declarative statements they make about Muslims in their reviews. Reader response theory and related pedagogical theories about reading the Other, however, provide an analysis frame in which I can analyze reader reviews to show the stances and maneuvers they make in the reading process. This frame also provides me with a way to explore the opportunities for differing perspectives and interpretations to be introduced to Western readers as a way to engage in Said’s vision of more critical reading. In this chapter, I explore these opportunities for reading more critically within the current reading interpretations of the Muslim Other. This begins when readers are aware of the role they play as readers in co-creating meaning with the text. Their interpretive patterns are shaped by their identities and their membership in groups or communities as Westerners. Without this awareness, their

interpretations with the text are often inauthentic and uncritical as they fail to acknowledge this subjectivity involved in meaning making. A more critically aware reading stance is one that provides them with a way to be more responsible, or ethical, in how they view the Other. I examine current reader reviews for opportunities to explore reading practices that provide readers with a perspective from which they are both critically aware of the implications of their historical, political, and cultural situatedness and aspire to be more accountable to and responsible of the Other.

As seen in the last chapter, many Western readers approach and interpret these texts with an objectivist epistemological perspective of reading to know the Other and express their own interpretations often using generalized truth claims. Using reader response theory, I reconsider this reading stance from a subjective epistemological perspective that allows me to consider the role of the individual reader in creating meaning with the text. In this discussion, I draw from Schwandt's (1999) distinction of understanding as opposed to knowing. I analyze reader reviews using Rosenblatt's (1994, 1995) differentiation between efferent and aesthetic stances of reading to analyze how readers respond to the texts with an aesthetic stance, but interpret it using an efferent stance. I then analyze readers' Orientalizing interpretations and representations of the Other and the West-Muslim relationship by exploring opportunities for readers to engage with an awareness of their own situatedness as Westerners and the situatedness of authors and characters who create the text and represent the Other. This analysis addresses the situated role of readers as members of an "interpretive community" (Fish, 1980a, 1980b), possessing "horizons of expectations" (Jauss, 1982), who bring these and other individual experiences to their "transactions" with these texts (Rosenblatt, 1994, 1995).

Reconsidering readers' tendencies to read for sameness and strangeness as they both Orientalize and empathize with the Muslim Other, I then reconsider this sameness-strangeness stance using Grobman's (2007) concept of hybridity and Taylor's concept of recursive and ethical reading (Burwell, Davis, & Taylor, 2008; Taylor, 2007a, 2007b). It is by reconsidering this stance that readers, as Westerners, are aware of how their Orientalist influenced interpretations of the Muslim Other implicate them in the Western imperialist project of intervention in Iran, Afghanistan, and Pakistan. The difference (or "strangeness") they recognize the power the West holds over these countries and their people and the West's power in influencing political, economic, and cultural change in these countries. This stance has the potential to create in readers a sense of guilt that motivates them to desire to be more responsible to the Other (Todd, 2003). This is a reconceived reading relationship in which readers adopt the role of acting as witness to the Muslim Other's testimony (Boler, 1994; Felman & Laub, 1992), risking a new relationship with the Other that gives up power, engages in ways that are responsible to the Other (Welch, 2000), and responds to what the Muslim Other asks of Western readers. I explore reader reviewers for examples of stances, decisions, and maneuvers that suggest possibilities for this reconsidered critical and responsible reading process to occur. I extend Said's postcolonial critique using reader response theory and related pedagogical theory on reading the Other in order to create opportunities for Westerners to consider ways to engage actively and critically in their reading process. I envision these opportunities being extended to explore the specific challenges in K-12 and pre-service teacher education in addressing students' current interpretations of Muslims and the broader challenges in multicultural education in teaching the Other.

5.1 READING TO UNDERSTAND LITERARY TEXTS

Fiction does not always emphasize facts, but it almost always contains details that bring depth to our perspective and humanize the people depicted in these works (Keshavarz, 2007b, para. 5)

As Keshavarz's statement suggests, fiction is a powerful literary genre because it presents characters and human situations to readers in a way that allows them to emotionally connect, vicariously experience, and deepen their understanding of the lived human experience by delving into a richly portrayed, subjective perspective. However, as Kesharvarz also suggests, there is a danger in assuming that fiction provides a detailed representation of objective facts about life experiences. A literary text in general—whether it is Hosseini's novel, Nafisi's subjective memoir of teaching Western literature, or Mortenson and Relin's account in a literarily written biography—"makes comprehensible the myriad ways in which human beings meet the infinite possibilities that life offers" (Rosenblatt, 1995, p. 6). These accounts do not present a single lived human experience but many examples. While not explicitly stated as such in their reviews, many readers skirt around these edges in their interpretations, suggesting that the texts offer them more insight into a singular Muslim experience in Iran, Afghanistan, or Pakistan. However, many Western readers approach these texts from an objectivist, rather than an interpretivist, stance. More so than news media portrayals, which are presented by readers as fact-based and analytic, the reading experience of these literary texts "has immediacy and emotional persuasiveness" (p. 7) for them. In this section, I explore places in their interpretations for readers to challenge their epistemologically objectivist approach to reading subjectively and aesthetically portrayed texts. I use Schwandt's (1999) distinction between knowing and understanding and Rosenblatt's (1994, 1995) distinction between efferent and aesthetic reading stances to explore these opportunities in

reader reviews. By reconsidering the initial stance they take in their readings, Western readers may then consider more critically the situated roles they, the text, and the author play in this interpretative meaning making process.

Literary texts are successful in reflecting the human experience because they illustrate how varied and contrasting individual experiences can be. Both Keshavarz and Rosenblatt express that these experiences, as presented in a single literary text, cannot be generalized and assumed applicable to all humans. When Western readers assume that these literary texts can be interpreted as presenting generalizable facts about Muslims—or about Iranians, Afghans, Pakistanis, or Muslim women, for example—they are assuming literary texts to be something they are not. The epistemological basis of readers' interpretations is an objectivist perspective that assumes "that meaning, and therefore meaningful reality, exists as such apart from the operation of any consciousness" (Crotty, 2003, p. 8). Many Western readers, in their reviews, however, approach these texts with such an objectivist stance, interpreting the texts as being based in fact, even if, as in the case of *The Kite Runner*, the text is fiction. A blurring of fiction as fact is seen with *Kite Runner* readers that share such interpretations in their reviews as "forgot this was a novel and not a biography" (Melissa Watkins, 2004, December 13) or had to "continually remind myself it was fiction and not a memoir" (Carolyn Rampone, 2005, August 1). The line also becomes blurred in readers' minds regarding how much of the story is based on author Khalid Hosseini's own experiences. Dennis Frampton "debonairbear" (2003, August 31) states his belief that Hosseini "no doubt has drawn heavily on his own life experiences to bring us this story." Many readers are unable to move beyond the stance of interpreting these books as offering objective facts. Rosenblatt notes, however, that a literary text, like these does not attempt to "[reduce] life to its lowest common denominator," but rather acts "to individualize

rather than to generalize” (p. 129). While readers respond to and comment on the personal stories and rich portrayals of the emotional, psychological, and experiential dimensions of individual characters, they struggle to consider their current stance and recognize their reading experience as an individual, subjective one.

Such reading interpretations that comment on the rich portrayals of individual characters or focus on more literary aspects of these texts provide opportunities for readers to become aware of how they are already engaging in more subjective considerations of the texts. By considering how their interpretations of literary texts consider these aspects, they may begin to move away from an objectivist reading stance. As an example, Ron Franscell (2003, June 17), in his review, focuses on how the personal stories of characters Amir and Hassan are woven through the political history of Afghanistan, creating vivid images for him as a reader:

Their intimate story traces across the expansive canvas of history, 40 years in Afghanistan’s tragic evolution, like a kite under a gathering storm. The reader is blown from the last days of Kabul’s monarchy—salad days in which the boys’ lives are occupied with school, welcome snows, American cowboy movies and neighborhood bullies—into the atrocities of the Taliban, which turned the boys’ green playing fields red with blood.

He acknowledges how these richly portrayed individual characters’ are what makes the reading experience for the reader more powerful. While readers are engaging with the text and the characters through the literary quality of these texts, they lose sight of the nature of a literary text as providing a subjective, aesthetic perspective.

Even with a memoir like *Reading Lolita in Tehran* or a biography like *Three Cups of Tea*, readers appear to instinctively assume a stance, in their reviews, that focuses on the literary

aspects of the texts. However, focusing on the literary success or failure of these texts, for readers, is often based on the author's ability to successfully relay unbiased fact. When authors' fictive maneuvers become evident to reviewers, there are some who reject them as lies. A *Reading Lolita in Tehran* reader, for example, dislikes how Nafisi's "documentation reads like a diary" (NY Wellesley, 2004, August 23). The reader's contrast of the words "documentation" and "diary" suggests that he or she expects to receive factual information about Nafisi's life in the Islamic Republic but is concerned that the details given seem to be biased and subjective, like the written details of a personal diary. This reader, expecting objective facts, does not consider that a memoir, by its literary nature, is a subjectively written text. In the case of *Three Cups of Tea*, many readers comment negatively on the literary quality of Relin's writing (Daysleeper, 2011, April 18; doc Peterson, 2007, November 18; Ronald Scheer, 2006, July 28; SK, 2011, July 22), commenting, for example, on his presentation of an "implausible," overly dramatized story (Daysleeper) and his "overdone" writing (doc Peterson) in creating "suspense and sentiment" (Ronald Scheer). This confusion of epistemological stances in readers' interpretations may leave them without a way to interpret the existence of both. However, this confusion also provides them with an opportunity to consider why their interpretations include a literary and aesthetic focus.

Schwandt (1999) and Rosenblatt (1994, 1995) provide terminology for classifying the differing epistemological stances at play in readers' approaches to the texts and as a way for readers to consider the role and place of an individual, subjective interpretation in the reading process. Schwandt (1999) provides a distinction between the epistemological differences of knowing and understanding. Although Schwandt distinguishes between epistemological groundings in research methods, specifically between a traditional empiricist method of social

research and interpretative research, this distinction can also be used to interpret how Western readers approach reading about Muslims from an objective stance, rather than engaging in reading to understand, which acknowledges the subjectivity of the text and the reader's response to the text. Rather than acquiring objective facts about the Other, Western readers may consider how meaning making is occurring between readers' subjective interpretation of the text's subjective portrayal. They are not discovering ahistorical, generalizable facts from these texts but are interpreting, from their own subjective stances, individual human experiences portrayed. In a review of *Reading Lolita in Tehran*, Sharvul (2009, March 16) struggles to understand that some of Nafisi's account may not be true, that Nafisi may have taken creative license and created a character, a mentor she calls her "magician." This reviewer is frustrated that what he or she thought was fact may actually be fiction. This reviewer asks:

if the "magician" was indeed fiction, then how much of the "true stories" Nafisi tells us are indeed factual? I do not doubt that much of what she has written happened in real life, but this flirt with fiction in the book's epilogue was, in my view, unnecessary.

By maintaining an epistemological need to know, this reviewer shuts off an opportunity for engaging in a reading stance that seeks to understand. Such a stance would allow this reader to explore Nafisi's subjectively and fictively created version for greater insight into what mattered and matters to her and insight into her psychological and emotional interpretation of these events. It would also provide an opportunity for this reader to consider his or her own reactions to the portrayal, as a way to gain greater insight into how and why the text resonates with him or her.

Rosenblatt's (1994, 1995) distinction between efferent and aesthetic reading stances provides an opportunity for, specifically, considering the subjective and aesthetic characteristics

of literary texts. Readers are currently assuming an efferent stance in their reading interpretations of the texts and are unaware of how the aesthetic stance has played a role in their interpretations. Rosenblatt's (1995) point, however, is that efferent and aesthetic stances occur in nearly all readings, that they can be seen along a continuum, but the difference lies in the proportions to which they are attended to during a reading. In their reviews, readers are often describing the aesthetic effect these texts have on them, meaning they are commenting on "what [they are] living through during [their] relationship with that particular text" (Rosenblatt, 1994, p. 25). They are also presenting truth claims about what they have interpreted as the general nature and experiences of the Muslim Other or the West's relationship with the Muslim world. They are placing a strong value on their efferent reading, meaning placing a value on what "[remains] *after* the reading—the information [acquired], the logical solution to a problem, the actions [carried] out" (p. 23). Despite recounting their aesthetic experience reading and making meaning with the text, readers emphasize, in their interpretations, the meaning they have made as this generalizable "information" or perhaps a "solution" or "action to be carried out" for the West to solve the Muslim Other's problems. There are some readers whose reviews suggest they are acknowledging the aesthetic stance that Rosenblatt describes in their reading, as seen, for example in Gena M. Lubroso's review (2005, March 16) of *Reading Lolita in Tehran*. She describes her emotional and empathetic response to the book as an interaction with a literary text: "Reading the book is a bit of an adventure. I feel like I'm actually in the author's presence. I fill up with tears after some readings, anger after others. But it seems the author has used and infused the book with literature's soul." She articulates how the text's writing style, events as signs and symbols, character development, and emotional resonance evokes a specific response

in her emotionally, aesthetically, and intellectually, rather than focusing on specific truisms she has obtained from her reading.

By engaging in a greater awareness of how these texts present and how readers' reading stances embrace a subjective interpretation of the Muslim Other or experiences in Muslim countries, readers have a way of understanding how these texts relay individual experiences, rather than objective facts. This is seen in the differences of reader reactions to the *Three Cups of Tea* controversy of April 2011. Readers who maintain an efferent stance to the text struggle to deal with factual discrepancies that arose in the *60 Minutes* episode. They share impulsive emotional reactions and feelings of betrayal, lashing out at Mortenson and Relin as authors and Mortenson as subject. One reviewer (Bookman, 2011, April 17) states "perhaps Mortenson should build a jail for himself and all other liars of his ilk who take millions from honest people for essentially a one man charity." Matt Chessen (2011, April 18) claims expert status "as someone who works in Afghanistan and puts his butt on the line there" as an informed justification to call Mortenson's supposedly fabricated stories "reprehensible." Having connected emotionally and empathetically with Mortenson, readers experience the disappointment and anger of a personal betrayal. Having approached this text as offering a representative and exact account of the Mortenson's experiences in regions of Pakistan and Afghanistan and his efforts to build schools, readers struggle, from their current epistemological stance, to interpret these seemingly false truth claims.

When readers recognize the subjective and aesthetic nature in the presentation of the details in *Three Cups of Tea* and the subjective meanings they, as readers, create with the texts, they are able to engage in developing a more nuanced and critical understanding of the reading and interpretative process. Reviewer Stephen Arthurs (2011, September 28), for example,

focuses on the powerful experience and impressions created by reading the text, specifically created through dramatic and fictive license. He argues

But what if Mortenson had to alter the timing of events and even embellish the events to make for compelling reading. For me, his crime then becomes one of not explaining up front to his readers that some of the details of the story have been fictionalized. He wanted the power of the “true story” to help him get his message out but by not telling readers of the alterations, he lost their trust.

He interprets Mortenson’s motivations for fictionalizing some of the details of his experiences as being the creation of an effective literary narrative. While he is still critical of Mortenson’s misrepresentations of his adventures, this reader can distill where Mortenson’s fault lies. Rather than offering a sweeping indictment of the entire text, this reader critiques Mortenson’s portrayal of his text as non-fiction, while he actively engages in fictive narrative maneuvers. By instead considering the meaning being made by the authors’ and characters’ subjective representations with the reader’s subjective interpretation, readers may approach their objectivist assumptions about the texts more critically, recognizing the subjective that is part of the reading and interpretive process and a greater awareness of the role of the literary text. By being aware of the reading process and the specific stances they are taking, readers may be less likely to generalize these portrayals of personally subjective experiences as general truth about Muslims and also consider contrasting truth claims as different subjective perspectives. This engages them in a more authentic reading experience in which the “evocation” of these texts as “a form of experience in the real world” (Rosenblatt, 1994, p. 32), rather than a scientific, naturalistic accounting of data, which is generalizable as a model.

In this section, I explore how readers may reconsider the objectivist epistemological stance they assume when reading these texts about the Muslim Other. By recognizing the nature of the literary text and the meaning making process between reader and text as subjective and aesthetic in nature, readers engage in an alternative epistemological reading stance as they recognize how these texts are subjectively and aesthetically conceived representations of the Muslim Other and how their interpretations of them are also subjective. Awareness of the subjectivity involved in this interpretive process is also awareness of how meaning is contextualized. As Western readers often claim objective truth claims about Muslims, what is missing in these interpretations is how their situatedness as Westerners and the situatedness of the authors, text, and characters play integral roles in the interpretative process. By readers considering their personal reading stances, it can, as Rosenblatt (1995) articulates, be expanded and “nourish both aesthetic and social sensitivities and can foster the development of critical and self-critical judgment” (p. xvii).

Burwell, Davis, and Taylor (2008) warn that in believing that the text “offers a truth about the world which is complete and objective rather than partial and constructed, [it] thus fools readers into thinking they can ‘know’ the Other and the world/culture/nation from which they write” (p. 48). There is also a concern that what is being interpreted presents an essentialized representation of the Muslim Other and the complexities of individuals are lost. While a postcolonial theoretical frame provides a detailed alternative approach to viewing Western representations of Muslims and the Western relationship with the Muslim world, it risks becoming another absolute truth claim presented about the West and the Muslim Other. As explored in the previous chapter, as readers present competing facts they interpret as absolute truths in the process of claiming to possess knowledge about the Other becomes an exercise in

circular logic as truth claims compete without a consideration of why they exist simultaneously. As literary texts, they do not claim to follow a procedure and commitment to presenting factual data, as work of researched non-fiction would. Readers are then not able to make the conceptual leap that seemingly non-fiction accounts reflect the interpretive decisions of their authors, which are grounded in their own historical, political, and cultural situatedness, and their own situated interpretations as readers engaging with the texts. In the next section, I address how an awareness of subjectivity leads readers to an awareness of how their Orientalist interpretations are situated in their historical, political, and cultural roles as Westerners.

5.2 READING FOR SITUATED AWARENESS

The first thing to be aware of in reading a text produced in an alien culture is its distance, the main condition of its distance (in both time and space) being quite literally, although not exclusively, the presence of the interpreter in his or her time and place. (Said, 1981, p. 158)

As seen in the last section, many readers assume that objective truth about Muslims can be found in these literary texts. However, by reconsidering the objectivist epistemological stance they take in reading these texts, readers may consider how the subjective nature of literary texts and their own subjective interpretations create meaning, rather than uncovering ahistorical facts. It is from their awareness of the role of the subjective in the meaning making process that offers readers a perspective from which they may begin to consider critically their own situatedness as Western readers and challenge the Orientalist representations they reinforce in their interpretations. Their situatedness is due to the historical, political, and cultural identities and allegiances the authors, characters, and readers bring to the interpretive process. As reader response theorist Stanley Fish

states, “there is never a moment when [readers] are not in the grip of some value-system” (Tompkins, 1980, p. xxv). However, as I argued in the last chapter, Western readers are unaware of the underlying Orientalist imperial assumptions that influence their interpretations. They often do not consider how these influences have allowed the West to justify political, economic, and cultural hegemony over Muslim countries. This is the situatedness of which they are unaware. In the last chapter, postcolonial theory provided a frame in which I analyzed these interpretative tendencies. However, it does not provide insight into how Orientalism infuses the specific maneuvers and decisions readers make in the reading process. In this section, I use the reader response concepts of Fish’s (1980a, 1980b) interpretative community, Jauss’s (1982) horizons of expectations, and Rosenblatt’s (1994, 1995) transactional theory of reading as ways to explore reader reviews as providing opportunities for developing reader awareness of their situatedness.

While some readers may voice, in their reviews, an awareness of the dangers of creating negative stereotypes about Muslims, these readers do not contextualize how and why these stereotypes are created by Westerners. Many readers are unaware of how their reading interpretations are shaped by specific cultural sign systems and representations of Muslims. In his *Three Cups of Tea* review, for example, William H. Fuller (2006, August 16) interprets the book’s message as challenging the tendency to generalize about Afghan Muslims. He says that the book “warns of the blindness and self-destructiveness of stereotyping an entire people because of extremism of factions within their culture.” He does not specifically name the Western cultural tendency of making broad, negative generalizations about Muslims or Afghans, nor does he wonder what purpose these representations might serve politically, economically, or culturally for the West. His advice does, however, present an opportunity for critique and to expound on the role situatedness plays in this tendency to stereotype. *A Reading Lolita in Tehran*

reader (Bukkene Bruse, 2004, October 2) also presents a unique, situatedly aware critique that is informed both of Nafisi's situatedness and of Orientalism. Her interpretation draws on this awareness to present an informed postcolonial critique of Nafisi's role as an author. She comments on Nafisi's neoconservative mentors—she calls them “patrons”—Bernard Lewis and Fouad Ajami and draws a parallel to conservatively biased news media by saying that “Ms. Nafisi has little more to teach about Iran or Persian culture than what you get off Fox News” (Bukkene Bruse, 2004, October 2). This reviewer also shares insight into Orientalism's historical representation of Muslim women since the colonial period, stating

Ms. Nafisi's Orientalist bent becomes overt in the last section where she redevelops the canard that all Muslim men are sexually repressed perverts and that Iranians lack the sophisticated Western capacity for romantic love. This is a revision of the Victorian belief.

While this reader's interpretation is the model of a situatedly aware perspective, readers need more than someone else to tell them what to accept as the truth. Rather, they need to be aware of their own reading process. They need to understand how their situatedness infuses their reading expectations and the sign systems that shape their interpretations and the meaning making transaction that occurs between them and the text.

The reader response concepts of Fish's (1980a, 1980b) interpretive community, Jauss' (1982) horizons of expectations, and Rosenblatt's (1994, 1995) transactional theory of reading offer ways for readers to reconsider the role they play as situated readers as they engage in a process of meaning making with the text. The impact of Orientalism on Westerns' interpretations can be seen as creating a specific “interpretive community” (Fish, in Tompkins, 1980) in which these reviews often reflect interpretations that draw from Orientalism as an accepted, though

unacknowledged, sign system. Fish calls such a sign system: “a social constrain[t] that individuals assimilate more or less automatically (or, more accurately, that pervade and constitute individual consciousness), and individuals’ perceptions and judgments are a function of the assumptions shared by the groups he belongs to” (p. xxi). Jauss’s term “horizons of expectations” addresses how readers respond to a given text during a given historic time. In the context of this study, reader reviews of these texts have been shaped by the immediate event of September 11th. For U.S. Western readers, specifically, these images and discourse about Muslims have been prevalent in the culture since the United States began engaging in imperialist interference in countries like Iran, Afghanistan, and Pakistan as part of Cold War strategic maneuvering against the Soviet Union. However, as Said notes, these representations of Muslims have been prevalent in Western culture since colonialism and imperialism became political and economic endeavors of many Western countries. Like Fish, Jauss acknowledges the situatedness of readers’ expectations in reading these texts, as well as in their resulting interpretations. Readers of these specific texts are recognized as bringing expectations to their readings that are shaped by the Orientalist project. It is a rare reviewer like Alexandra E. Jerome (2005, May 17), for example, who, in her review of *Reading Lolita in Tehran*, warns readers of the dangers of interpreting a text without an awareness of situatedness. The reviewer speaks specifically of the historical, political, and cultural situatedness of Nafisi as an author:

This is not a book for people who have no background in the history of the revolution, its aftermath or the dynamic of political Islam. Readers who are unfamiliar with the social dynamic of Islam in this context are in danger of essentializing Muslim women into a monolithic category which ultimately denies other women who are within the perimeters of the regime a voice.

This reviewer is able to articulate the interpretative tendencies of the Western reading community and anticipate their expectations, in terms of the lack of knowledge they tend to bring to their readings of the Other.

Focusing on the “transactional” relationship of reader and text (Rosenblatt, 1994, 1995), however, offers specific opportunities for readers to be aware of the decisions they make as they read and consider how Orientalist interpretations emerge through this process. By focusing on their own reading process, this approach “permits emphasis on the to-and-fro, spiraling, nonlinear, continuously reciprocal influence of reader and text in the making of meaning” (1995, p. xvi). By focusing on the decisions they make along the way, readers become more aware of how they react to the texts. With the concept of Orientalism as a guide, they may examine how and why they are interpreting Muslims as they do. The acknowledgement of the reader’s role and their situatedness creates a process in which readers are aware of how a reader, by

drawing on past linguistic and life experience, links the signs on the page with certain concepts, certain sensuous experiences, certain images of things, people, actions, scenes. The special meanings and, more particularly, the submerged associations that these words and images have for the individual reader. (p. 30)

While there are not many explicit examples of readers, in their reviews, engaging in situated awareness of how they, as Westerners, interpret using an Orientalist lens, there are readers who recognize how, in general, Western readers’ situatedness affects the interpretative process. These interpretative maneuvers, while offering examples of readers’ burgeoning awareness of how they and the texts—and authors and characters—are situated, offer a way for readers to begin considering their reading stance as Westerners. *Reading Lolita in Tehran* reader Erin (2004, April 2), in her review, describes the juxtaposition Nafisi creates in her writing as a

way to both highlight connections between the West and the “Islamic East” as a way to aid Western readers in interpreting her memoir. She explains: “It is ironic that [Nafisi] uses ‘forbidden’ and ‘evil’ Western literature to convey a deeply Islamic and Middle-Eastern experience ... this technique enables Western audiences to better interpret and understand her life during this time period of Iran.” This reviewer interprets the maneuvers Nafisi makes as a writer in order to provide Western readers with a familiar touchstone—Western literature—as a way for them to enter her seemingly exotic world and understand her experiences. In this way, this reviewer is aware of how Nafisi is aware of her readers’ situatedness as Westerners, and manipulates her narrative to provide them with easier entry into a transactional relationship with the text. A *Three Cups of Tea* reader (L.L.L, 2006, April 11) engages in an awareness of his or her own situatedness as a reader and how this shapes the transaction he or she has with the text. This reviewer claims expertise as a Westerner and with experience traveling in Muslim countries, struggles between feeling estranged from and connected with Muslims. His or her awareness results from the reviewer directly experiencing his or her situatedness in relation to Muslims encountered in his or her travels. This reviewer describes him or herself as “a world traveler...and consider myself compassionate to a fault...I had spent some time in the Middle East and North Africa, and...tried to respect the traditions as much as possible.” Even with these experiences, however, the reviewer notes that “after September 11th, [I] possessed a fair degree of anger at Muslims...the point where I actually said that I would never believe Islam is a religion of peace.” The reviewer continues that “this book has reminded me why I loved the regions in the Himalayas and beyond; the simplicity of life, the fierceness and protectiveness toward family and friends...these proud, strong people.” The complexity of this reviewer’s response, along with an awareness of how the historical event of September 11, 2001 affected his

or her view of the Other, shows an awareness on the part of this reviewer of his or her situatedness and how his or her horizons of expectations about Muslims have changed

As seen in the last chapter, readers both estrange themselves from the Muslim Other, interpreting the Other as exotic, barbaric, violent, and threatening, and also empathize with specific Muslim characters they interpret as sharing their Western values and experiences. In these instances, readers are positioning themselves using Orientalism subconsciously as an interpretive guide. They position themselves in regard to those aspects of being Muslim that estrange them and simultaneously positioning themselves with those individual Muslim characters with whom they empathize. While they are often unaware of the decisions they are making in this process, they are engaging actively in a process of interpretation with the text. By becoming aware of how they are engaging with the text in ways that compliment their situated expectations and using sign systems that are familiar to them, they have an opportunity to begin critically considering these maneuvers they make. As I discuss in the next section, while they are not always aware of how this positioning supports an imperialist vision of Western intervention, readers are engaging in a process of situating themselves that may provide opportunities for introducing a different perspective of their relationship of sameness and strangeness with the Muslim Other, as will be explored in the next section.

5.3 SITUATED READING FOR SAMENESS AND STRANGENESS

As I discussed in the last chapter, readers interpret strangeness by exoticizing the general notion of the Muslim Other as one diametrically opposed to the Western character and Western values. At the same time, many readers read for sameness, identifying with characters who are

considered sympathetic because they share Western values and similar experiences and traits. It is for the sake of these sympathetic characters, with whom Western readers identify that, from an Orientalist interpretation, justifies Western intervention, often voiced as the altruistic action of bringing Western values to the Muslim world. It is such an emotional connection made with Muslim characters that prompts a *Kite Runner* reader (Violet Bandong, 2004, October 15) to critique, and yet still advocate for American interventionist policy in Afghanistan, saying “American foreign policy needs to be retooled if we are to continue to wage war against a culture that is in itself unsure of what it is and what it wants to be.”

Readers interpret relationships that consider how the Muslim Other is situated in relation to themselves, but they do not often recognize their own reading process and interpretations as being influenced by their “horizons of expectations,” within a Western interpretative community. They do not recognize their interpretations as the result of a subjective and transactional process of engaging with the text. By reconsidering the situated process of meaning making that occurs between readers and a text, Western readers may engage with the concept of Orientalism, not merely as a way to critique their current reading practices about Muslims, but use this perspective to lead them to a greater understanding of how they read. However, considering the role of meaning making in the context of the West’s relationship with the Other is not merely a neutral consideration, but a politicized one. As readers consider how Orientalism functions to represent Muslims and predominantly Muslim countries in continually negative ways to justify Western global hegemony, this awareness brings with it a different call to action regarding the West’s relationship with the Muslim Other. This relationship begins with a reconsideration of how Western readers perceive their relationship with the Other as one of sameness and strangeness.

Readers tend to perceive both sameness and strangeness in the Muslim Other, and this tendency provides them with an opportunity to reconsider Orientalist representations that essentialize and contrast the identities of the Western Self and the Muslim Other. By reconsidering their tendency to interpret both sameness and strangeness in the Other, readers have an opportunity to recognize how this interpretative process allows them to resist essentializing and monolithic definitions of identity as they perceive Self and Other affecting, altering, and changing each other. Grobman's (2007) concept of hybrid identity provides a way to explore the Self-Other relationship as one that is constantly changing, and flowing continually along a continuum of sameness and strangeness. Grobman's concept provides a way to challenge the tendency of readers to essentialize Muslims and create a monolithic and binary vision of the relationship between the Western Self and the Muslim Other. Rather, she introduces a situatedness that allows for an interpretation of Self and Other that challenges the tendency to identify the West and Other as binary opposites. By considering how Orientalism has shaped Western interpretations of Muslims, how these interpretations have influenced Western colonialism and imperialism, and how Muslims in Iran, Afghanistan, and Pakistan have responded in both hostile and complying ways to these actions, readers may reinterpret the intertwined complexity of how the West and the Muslim world shape, re-shape, and react to each other's identities. The relationship is no longer perceived as the unchanging, monolithic relationship that Orientalism presents but rather, as one that flows across the boundaries of similarity and difference. However, Grobman warns that with such a vision of hybridity, readers must be "cautious that [they] not deny or erase difference, but complicate it, and that [they] do not do so by measuring it against a white norm" (p. 45).

A *Kite Runner* reader (Eileen Riebeck, 2004, July 18) moves toward a more fluid consideration of similarity and difference, recalling how the text “highlights the difference in customs and ethnic mindset between Afghanis and Americans,” specifically in the challenges Baba, the protagonist’s father, faces in adjusting to his reduced economic and social status living as an immigrant in California. This quote considered on its own offers a perspective to consider Baba’s relationship with the United States as more complex than an Orientalist perspective offers. The reviewer does not offer an Orientalist interpretation of the West as the saving force in Baba’s life. She also does not represent the cultural clash between Baba, as a stock Muslim character, adjusting to life in the free and civilizing West. Rather, Baba’s relationship with the West represents a more complicated relationship of sameness and strangeness as Baba “struggles to adjust to the California lifestyle and an existence without the luxuries and honorable status he enjoyed in Afghanistan” (Eileen Riebeck). This reviewer’s movement toward a more complicated notion of sameness and strangeness creates an opportunity for a new reading perspective, one that moves away from Orientalist interpretations that emphasis fixity, or essentializing binary definitions of Self and Other, toward a postcolonial emphasis on hybridity (Bhabha, 1994). A postcolonial vision of “hybridity” allows for “uncertain spaces [to] open up between traditional centers; in these spaces, postcolonial identity formation begins to occur based...on movement, migration, and negotiation” (Davis, 2007, p. 65). A postcolonial perspective also views this relationship as a politicized one. It is one in which the West holds the greater global power and control, and for this reason, there is an inherent difference that the Western reader needs to consider.

In reconsidering a hybrid and dynamic relationship with the Muslim Other, however, Western readers cannot ignore the politicized nature of this historic relationship, particularly how

reading for sameness—or empathetic identification—has allowed Western readers to perpetuate Orientalist representations of the Other and the Other’s need for Western intervention in its affairs. By recognizing the politicization of their tendencies to engage in easy empathetic identification with Muslim characters and how this supports the Orientalist project, readers are challenged to critically estrange themselves from the tendency to normalize and interpret the Other in ways that reflect what is familiar to them, according to Taylor (2007a, 2007b). It also provides opportunities for them to “[form] diverse, unexpected, ambivalent or complex identifications with characters” (Taylor, 2007a, p. 303). In his or her review of *The Kite Runner*, a reader (GS, 2007, June 6) engages in such an interpretation that challenges Western readers to resist this form of easy identification. The reader (GS, 2007, June 6) positions himself or herself in a review as a native informant, saying “I will tell you from personal experience, being from that part of the world...the kind of struggles and despair that many in the West may not even be able to imagine.” While the perspective of this quote can be viewed as an example of an objectivist truth claim satisfying the Western need to know, it also resists that need to know by emphasizing how the situatedly aware role of the Western reader is one that disallows easy empathetic identification. It emphasizes recognition of the strangeness that exists between the Western reader and the Muslim Other. It is not the Orientalist form of strangeness that sets up the Muslim world as solely negative in contrast to the West. However, while this review does not present a positive vision of what Afghans in the novel face (“struggles and despair”), the emphasis is on difficulty Western readers may face in understanding these struggles and emotions. It is an opportunity for the Western reader to humbly approach these texts, respecting the Other’s difficulties and respecting that these difficulties can be easily known and explained. It opens up an opportunity for Western readers to remain open and receiving what the Other

offers, without easily interpreting and consuming what is offered. It provides an opportunity for readiness without the potential satisfaction of knowing.

As Western readers reconsider their situatedness as Westerners engaged in the Orientalizing project of interpreting and representing the Muslim Other, they engage in a reconsideration of the history and political implications of what it means to interpret their relationship with the Muslim Other as one of sameness and strangeness. Pedagogical theorists Grobman (2007) and Taylor (2007a, 2007b) present alternative perspectives of this relationship of sameness and strangeness with the Muslim Other. While Taylor views this approach as “a pedagogy of reading and rereading through social difference,” she also refers to it more specifically, as “a recursive pedagogy that critically historicizes and situates an embodied ethics of reading” (Taylor, 2007a, p. 297). Her use of the term “embodied ethics” suggests a reconsidered relationship with the Muslim Other that, when considered in the historical context of the Orientalist project, calls Western readers to take an ethically responsible position in relation to the Other, as I discuss in the next section.

5.4 READING WITH A SENSE OF RESPONSIBILITY

Said (1994, 2004) encourages Westerners, as a counter to an Orientalist tendency to exoticize the Other, to find connections through shared humanity. He sees this as a way for Westerners to act on behalf of the Muslim Other “on the basis of universal principles: that human beings are entitled to expect decent standards of behavior concerning freedom and justice” (Said, 1994, p. 11). However, a critical consideration of how such an argument has been used as a justification for Western colonial or imperialist intervention suggests a need to emphasize the strangeness, or

difference, in this relationship, advocated by such pedagogical theorists as Taylor (2007a, 2007b) and Todd (2003). This focus on difference recognizes the power the West has held historically in its ability to determine the political, economic, and cultural directions of countries like Iran, Afghanistan, and Pakistan through colonial and imperialist actions. It recognizes the power the West continues to hold in its relationship with the Muslim world. In this section, readers' interpretations of the relationship between the West and the Muslim Other are reconsidered from a critically situated perspective by focusing on the difference that exists between the two parties. This perspective generates a sense of guilt in the Western reader (Todd, 2003) that has the productive potential to encourage a more responsible—or ethically considered (Taylor, 2007a)—approach to the Other. The perspective encourages Western readers to consider their roles as witnesses receiving the testimony of the Muslim Other (Boler, 1994; Felman & Laub, 1991). It is a stance that is created when Western readers accept they are implicated in the current struggles of Muslims and in the often negative relationship of the West and the Muslim world. It allows for a desire to help the Muslim Other, tempered by a sense of guilt (Todd) and a humility and willingness to give up power (Welch, 2000), as readers the testimony of the Other. Rather than determining for themselves how to best intervene in the Muslim world, Western readers wait to receive and respond directly to what the Muslim Other asks of them.

5.4.1 Experiencing Guilt

The stance of reconsidered difference in relation to the Muslim Other allows for a sense of obligation in the Western reader. It is this stance from which the reader, rather than engaging uncritically in reading for empathetic identification, asks “What is this text asking of me?” (Boler, 1994, p. 11) However, as Aubry (2009) argues, Western readers tend to focus less on

making a connection with the Muslim Other and more on reading these texts as a self-focused therapeutic experience in atoning for their implicated role as Americans in Western involvement with the Muslim world. In reading *The Kite Runner*, specifically, this process becomes

an act of atonement for those Americans who are troubled by their country's treatment of Muslims abroad and at home...as a vindicating reminder, in the face of criticism, that they are compassionate, good human beings whose politics are fundamentally well intentioned. (p. 36)

As an example, reviewer "maja j" (2007, September 26) expresses the feelings she experiences at the end of the book: "the anguish and heartache in the book finally gives way to a sort of calm and contentment...and you feel a glimmer of hope that everything will be made right again...finally."

Readers do not often acknowledge that this uneasy feeling may be due to a concern that they are implicated in the current problems of Afghans, Iranians, and Pakistanis and the often bad relations of the West with these countries. However, they often reflect a sense of exuberance or relief (Aubry calls it emotional catharsis"). They interpret from their reading that Westerners are not responsible for the problems of the Muslim Other. A *Kite Runner* reviewer (A reader, 2006, November 18) comments that she and other readers must "feel pretty good about ourselves" by feeling they can now watch news about Afghanistan and feel more informed." They focus on their own ability to empathize with the Other. It becomes a way to "reinforce their belief in their own humanity through an amplification of their emotional economy and a renewed perception of their capacity for compassion" (Aubry, 2009, p. 31). If they are guilt-free, then their concern for the Muslim Other or speculating about how to help the Muslim Other positions them as altruistic in their intention. Through their responses, these reviewers may

“recongize (*sic*) myself, my humanity, in its story” (J. Olcott, 2005, January 2). However, as Todd (2003) states, the presence of empathy is not enough. Empathy, as readers generally interpret it, assumes a vision of “togetherness” (p. 45) in which readers perceive that the Other shares their values, attitudes, and experiences. This form of empathy, however, does not “lead to a better kind of responsivity and, by extension, responsibility” (p. 43). Rather, when readers interpret their experience of empathetic identification with the Muslim Other, they are often projecting onto these texts their own biases and experiences as a way to control their interpretations and the knowledge about Muslims they feel they are acquiring. Readers separate the sympathetic characters from their often negative surroundings and fellow Muslims, accounting for the existence of both within an Orientalist vision. As Todd explains, “controlling the external object through projection means that the other can be tolerated by the ego and can even come to be loved and identified with” (p. 54).

However the act of, instead, experiencing guilt at the end of the reading process comes from an acknowledgment of the reconsidered difference of the Other that resists this tendency of easy identification. Todd refers to this recognition of difference as “an attentiveness to alterity, to the ‘uniqueness’ of the Other...a gesture of responsibility” (p. 48). Todd sees the role of guilt as “fundamental to the process of making reparation and to the formation of responsibility” (p. 95). Guilt is maintained when readers engage in situated awareness of how they, as Westerners, are implicated in the current situations of Muslims in Iran, Afghanistan, and Pakistan; in the reasons why there exists hatred for the West and why there is currently poverty and discord in Afghanistan; and in the rise of terrorist extremist groups. Guilt makes the reader “susceptible to the call of the Other” (p. 99). An opportunity for exploring guilt in reader reviews is seen in A *Reading Lolita in Tehran* reader’s interpretation (Sparkle, 2009, June 18). She shares how the

memoir causes her to consider her relationship with her high school Iranian pen pal. She admits that she regrets she was not a better friend to him as a teenager. It is this regret she experiences that creates an opening for productive guilt and its attentiveness to the needs of the Other to be explored. By reading this book, she is left with a sense of responsibility for her Iranian pen pal, that she could have been a better friend to him, that perhaps she failed him in her duty as his friend. While her worrying about him now is a passive act and she is no longer able to help him directly, her concern for him, her focus on his needs, and her feeling of responsibility for him suggests an opening for her to continue reading as a witness.

Guilt creates a motivation in Western readers to want to respond to the Muslim Other. It creates a reading role for them as witnesses to the Other's testimony, looking now for answers to questions like "How might I respond to the other's command? How can I be for the other?" (Todd, 2003, p. 111). In the next section, I explore opportunities for readers to channel this guilt as an entry for viewing themselves as witnesses to the Other's testimony.

5.4.2 Reading as a Witness to Testimony

As readers experience, acknowledge, and own the guilt that occurs when they recognize their situated role in the Muslim Other's situation, they now assume a reading stance as witnesses, recognizing their responsibility to the Other. However, many readers, while they interpret a vague sense of responsibility to the Other, struggle to contextualize this responsibility within their own implicatedness as Westerners. Boler's (1994) distinction between readers' current reading practice (voyeur to a confession) and a more responsible reading practice (witness to a testimony) provides an opportunity for readers' to reconsider their current practices, incorporating a sense of guilt and responsibility to the Other in their reading approach and

response. In referring to how readers of *The Kite Runner* are drawn into the protagonist Amir's life, a reviewer (maja j., 2007, September 26) states that "we are witness to his horribly selfish and disgraceful behavior, and we are haunted by one atrocity after another." This reviewer uses the word "witness," but it is not clear what this reviewer is experiencing or thinking by witnessing this behavior. Another *Kite Runner* reader (S. Banerjee, 2005, March 16) interprets the message of the text as "inspir[ing] us to be the type of person who jumps into battle to save friends...This book brings to light that moral fiber is about doing the 'right' thing." While it is not clear from this quote if the reader is engaging in an Orientalizing need to intervene in the lives of Muslims, this reviewer can be interpreted as responding to the text's testimony, as being called by an ethical need to respond. While the often contentious differences that exist between the West and the Muslim other cannot be viewed as one between "friends," this reviewer experiences a sense of duty to respond from reading this text. These reviewers are unaware of how they are implicated in creating the situations from which they want to save these characters. They are also unaware of how to assume a role as readers to receive the needs of the Other.

Readers continue to engage in empathetic identification with the Other, which as Todd (2003) describes, causes readers to project their own needs onto the Other, rather than being receptive to the Other's demands of them. They are using reading practices that are self-focused ("confessional reading practices") rather than reading with a sense of receptivity and responsibility to the Other ("testimonial reading practices") (Boler, 1994). As readers read for easy empathetic identification, they approach the texts as confessional readings, which "bears no consistent commitment to responsibility beyond one's self" (para. 17). This reading approach is similar to Aubry's (2009) discussion of readers interpreting their emotional and empathetic connections with the texts as a self-focused therapeutic process. The confessional reading

practice asks “how can I respond to my own needs?” rather than the guilt-motivated question “how can I be for the other?” (Todd, 2003, p. 111). This confessional reading practice is seen as readers express, in their reviews, confessional interpretations about their personal edification and the experiential effects of these texts on them. A *Kite Runner* reader (nodice, 2005, December 30) shares the effect of the text on him or her, that originally, “I don’t want to read about [Afghanistan]. But then I do...and I’m forever changed by it.” Kristen Falso-Capaldi (2004, July 21) in her *Reading Lolita in Tehran* review confesses to her emotional reaction: “I fill up with tears after some readings, anger after others.” *Three Cups of Tea* readers often share their relief and inspiration in finding a way to help Muslims in Pakistan and Afghanistan. An example of this is Mary R. Tanner’s (2007, May 28) comment that this text speaks “to all of us to never give up thinking we each don’t and can’t make a difference ourselves.”

When readers approach the texts with a motivation to be more responsible to the Other, asking “what is the text asking of me?” (Boler, 1994, para. 11), they view the text as the Other’s testimony, viewing their reading role as being a witness to this testimony. Taylor (2007a) uses the term “witness” in the context of readers’ sense of implicatedness and guilt, positing themselves to “read as a witness ethically and actively implicated by the testimonial call of the text” (p. 310). By adopting this stance, readers are attentive to the Other’s “victories, defeats and silence, know them from within, so that they can assume the form of testimony” (Felman & Laub, 1992, p. 58). According to Felman and Laub, a testimony is an incomplete, subjective memory. It offers the interpretation of someone who has lived through an event, often a traumatic event. It is an attempt for this individual to understand and come to terms with a lived event by recounting it in a testimony. It does not offer “a completed statement, a totalizable account of those events” (p. 5). A testimony requires of the listener, or reader, to be present as a

witness to it, rather than to satisfy his or her own need to know in the reading. Rather than forming a false sense of connectedness with the Other, or an alleviation of guilt and sense of satisfaction that a reader now knows the Other, the reader is there as witness for the Other, to hear the Other's testimony with humility and responsibility. Felman and Laub (1992) says:

The specific task of the literary testimony is...to open up in that belated witness, which the reader now historically becomes, the imaginative capability of perceiving history – what is happening to others – in one's *own* body with the power of sight (of insight) usually afforded only by one's own immediate physical involvement.” (p. 108)

Three Cups of Tea reader reviews offer opportunities for exploring the stance of reading as a witness. While readers still interpret a need for Western intervention to solve the problems of rural Pakistanis and Afghans with whom Mortenson works, they also emphasize the importance of Mortenson's method of listening to the needs of the Other and responding. Reviewer Julia (2007, May 29) states that Mortenson's “open mind and spirit enabled him to listen to people to find out what they want, and earn their trust.” Another reviewer (mothermaven, 2007, August 13) sees Mortenson as having “the patience to have those three cups of tea which transforms him from a stranger to a friend and finally family. So often Western efforts barely finish the first cup of tea.” In both of these reviews, the readers admire Mortenson's efforts because he responds directly to the needs of those he works to help. He respects and engages in their cultural practices as a way to build trust and to better learn how to respond in ways that will respect their needs.

The role of reading as a witness to the Other's testimony involves readers being attentive and responsive to what the Muslim Other calls on them to do. Within a situated awareness of the West-Muslim relationship, this responsiveness to action is not guided by colonizing and

imperialist intentions masked by altruistic justifications. It is based in a sense of implicated guilt. It involves Western readers taking this stance with a willingness to give up their control of the interpretive process and the superior power position that Orientalism has afforded them.

5.4.3 Empathy Reconceived

Without an awareness of how Western readers are implicated in the lives and situations of the Muslim Other and without acknowledging and owning the sense of guilt and responsibility this entails, empathy is an empty gesture. As Todd (2003) notes about pedagogy, I would argue that the mere presence of empathy is not enough in the reading process. *Reading Lolita in Tehran* reviewer Kristen Falso-Capaldi (2004, July 21), looks specifically at the role of empathy in reading, stating that “the essence of the novel...[is] the ability of the reader to empathize with the characters and relate to ANY text on a personal level.” While she acknowledges how empathy plays a powerful role in allowing a reader to empathetically identify with characters different from him or herself, her statement presents, without critical consideration, an Orientalist binary between the bad life in Iran and the good life in America. She states that she was “inspired to learn more about Iran and to TRULY appreciate the freedoms we as readers, viewers and thinkers really have in America.” However, even as this reader empathizes with the characters, she also asserts that life in the West is superior to life in Iran. Despite their seemingly good intentions in reading about the Other, Western readers cannot give up their and sense of superiority as Westerners even as they empathize willingly with the Other. They claim they are freeing themselves to experience vicariously the lives and emotions of the characters they read, but they often do so in ways that do not alter or challenge their existing views and values and do not reduce their perceived superior stance in relation to the Muslim Other.

Westerns readers are unwilling to sacrifice the power they command over the Muslim Other. They are often unwilling to acknowledge the guilt they share and responsibility they owe the Muslim Other. However, by acknowledging their duty freely and willingly to the Other and making themselves willingly responsive to the needs of the Other, they may reconsider empathy in a way that challenges Orientalism to its very core. Welch's (2000) discussion of white, liberal, middle class activists can be related to the stance that seemingly well-intentioned Western readers take in wanting to read more about Muslims. Welch describes that they hold firm to their "need to control the process of reform and change and the need to see immediate results to [their] efforts" (Brown, Brooks, & Gunzenhauser, 2008, p. 79). By claiming to know and empathize with the Muslim Other, readers are engaging in a need to control representations of the Other in ways that do not radically alter their vision of themselves, the Other, and their relationship. What they discover about the Other is always safely contained within their existing understanding, biases, and experiences, and it often confirms their existing beliefs. If they feel they are learning something surprising and new, it does not alter or shake their existing world view. For example, by realizing that many Muslim characters seem to share their values and life experiences, they are pleasantly surprised to learn that these visions are different than what is portrayed in the news. However, it confirms ultimately their own values and life experiences as being dominant or privileged. It is this need for control that does not allow them to open up to the unknown possibilities of new representations and ideas about the Other being present, to the possibility of critique for their own lifestyles and Western culture and values, to the daunting notion that their world views have been shaken and that the unknown is the norm.

Just as Welch (2000) calls on the white, liberal, middle class activist to give up the power and control they possess in relationships with the marginalized Other, so too do many Western

readers address their own situatedness and the power relations they hold with the Other in terms of Western cultural dominance over the Other and their power of reading and interpreting the Other on their own terms. So too, do Western readers, when they recognize how they have been reading the Other have the opportunity to create a new relationship with the Other, one that creates a mutually respectful relationship with the Other, “a respect-filled communal dialogue with a transclass base” (Townes, 1997, p. 34). This begins when readers give up their need to control, open themselves up to new opportunities for seeing the Other and seeing themselves, even if this means encountering unpleasant revelations of how the West has treated Muslims in different countries, even if it challenges their familiar views of themselves and Muslims. It opens a place for the Westerner to risk giving up control of interpretation and representation of the Other, despite the ways in which this may lead to understandings of how the Western reader is implicated in the colonial, Orientalist project. The most explicit examples of a reconceived notion of power and control is articulated by *Three Cups of Tea* readers who interpret Mortenson’s model of working with the Other as one that humbly looks to the Other’s needs and values and working with individuals who can guide him in practices that respect the local cultures. One reviewer (D. Stuart, 2007, December 17) shares his or her respect for Mortenson’s approach in “developing negotiation and trust-building,” including the willingness to let go of some of his control, seen in “the degree of responsibility he willingly puts in the hands of the community he assists.” Another reviewer (A. Prasad, 2006, September 28) sees Mortenson’s approach as successful because it encourages mutual understanding and dialogue. This reviewer interprets the key to connecting with the Other is “reaching out to understand each other as human beings...[as] the only way to achieve lasting change.”

Despite the differences between Self and Other that are revealed and the collective guilt of the West in its relations to the Muslim Other, it opens up a more authentic relationship to occur. The Western reader no longer assumes easy empathy with a created, mirror-like Other, but a sense of solidarity that develops in spite of differences. This solidarity comes from the reader recognizing that “the lives of [Self and Other] are so intertwined that each is accountable to the other” (Welch, 2000, p. 133). But, in this case, the responsibility falls on the Western reader to act as witness to the Other. Rather than the easy redemption the reader allows him or herself by connecting emotionally with the Other, the reader is given the opportunity to seek repentance from the Other. As Welch describes, this act comes from respect for the Other, that “it is possible to admit fault, to examine social patterns that perpetuate racism and sexism, and to begin the careful work of making amends, of building egalitarian social structures” (Welch, 2000, p. 174). The act of reading does not absolve the reader of his or her guilt but rather, creates in him or her a sense of accountability to the Other that is not easily overcome by donating money to Greg Mortenson’s Central Asia Institute or by experiencing vicariously Amir’s making amends to Hassan by saving his son.

5.5 CONCLUSION

A postcolonial consideration of reader reviews of *Reading Lolita in Tehran*, *The Kite Runner*, and *Three Cups of Tea* reveals the Orientalist project that shapes the interpretations of Western readers and prevents them from exploring more critically considered and responsible reading practices. However, it offers readers this counter-narrative in a way that, to them, may simply be interpreted as more truth claims they can either challenge or choose to accept as objective truth.

It provides them with a new list of facts to be memorized, digested, and regurgitated. It does not give them ownership of their role as readers. It does not provide them with an understanding of how they make meaning with the texts and how each stance, maneuver, and decision they make in this process is shaped by the subjective understandings they bring as individuals and the horizons of expectations they bring as Westerners. Reader response theories about the role of the reader and pedagogical theories about reading the Other present moments in the reading process where Western readers have opportunities to critically consider and disrupt reading practices that perpetuate these Orientalist interpretations.

As seen in their reviews, Western readers have opportunities to examine their approaches to reading more critically and take counter stances as they read and interpret the Muslim Other as they recognize the subjectivity involved in the interpretative process of literary texts. They also recognize how subjective interpretations occur within their situated roles as Westerners, influenced by the sign system and expectations influenced by Orientalism. As they engage in situatedly aware reading interpretations, they become aware of their implicatedness in the current state of affairs in Afghanistan, Iran, and Pakistan. They are aware of how the United States both secretly and publically pursued self-interested political, economic, and military policies in these countries as part of Cold War strategic maneuvers against the Soviet Union. They are aware of how these actions, in all three countries, has had a negative effect in Afghanistan and Iran, by supporting coups of seemingly Soviet-supported governments, funding the Taliban in Afghanistan, supporting the Pahlavi monarchical rule in Iran, despite its frequent subversion of free expression and popular political action (Kincheloe, 2004b), and in the case of Pakistan, helping to create a country that “is one of the most anti-American countries in the world, and a covert sponsor of terrorism” (Wright, 2011). This sense of situatedness reveals the motivations

behind an Orientalist representation of the relationship of the West to the Muslim world, and provides a context for how the terrorist attacks on September 11th and the hatred expressed toward Westerners are often examples of “blowback” in which the West is implicated. This sense of situatedness challenges the Orientalizing notions of sameness and strangeness and creates a relationship in which the Westerner acknowledges the differences that exist in light of this Western exploitation of the easy assumptions made about the Other. It presents an opportunity for Westerners to recognize and accept their implicated role in perpetuating negative representations of Muslims in ways that have led to injustice in other countries and at home.

However, rather than interpreting these new approaches to solving the Other’s problems as a way to justify further Western intervention and to assuage their guilt, they acknowledge and own this guilt. From this perspective, readers develop a responsible stance toward the Other. It is a humble and an expectant stance from which readers do not engage in false perceptions of empathy, nor do they project their own expectations and values onto the Other. Rather, they ask “what is the Other asking of me?” They may assume the role of witness to the testimony of the Other. By waiting for the Other’s command, Western readers give up the power and control that Orientalism affords them in the historical West-Muslim relationship. They may open themselves up to this opportunity for authentic dialogue to create, with the Other, a mutually respectful relationship.

By understanding their roles as readers, Westerners are not simply engaging in a personal or pedagogical exercise of understanding how they read and interpret literature. They are able to distinguish rhetoric that justifies actions that threaten human rights and self-determination in the name of continued imperialism. As democratic citizens, they are able to then “imagine the human consequences of political and economic alternatives and [thinking] rationally about

emotionally charged issues,” (Rosenblatt, 1995, p. xv), particularly the policies and actions their governments are taking in predominantly Muslim countries and with Muslim citizens domestically. As global citizens, they have the opportunity to engage in reparative actions toward the Muslim world, as Said (2004) suggests, to speak truth to power and “present alternative narratives and other perspectives on history than those provided by combatants on behalf of official memory and national identity and mission” (p. 141). However, in order for these actions to be truly reparative, they must originate from a more communal dialogue and mutually responsible engagement with the Other.

6.0 CONCLUSION

In this concluding chapter, I present the findings of my study. I argue that Said's concept of Orientalism can be extended to pedagogical considerations of how Westerners read and interpret the Other. I work toward a critical postcolonial pedagogy that expands current approaches in multicultural education of teaching the Other—and specifically approaches to teaching students about the Muslim Other—to include more critically responsive approaches to perspective taking and interpreting the Other. I also conclude with a discussion of the limitations of my study and the potential these limitations create for future research.

For centuries, the West has created knowledge about the inherent nature of the Muslim Other as being potentially dangerous and incapable of self-governance, as a way to justify its self-interested endeavors in the altruistic guise of helping the struggling Other (Said, 1978, 1993). Orientalism as a Western cultural discourse has shaped the ways in which Westerners have come to know and engage with the Muslim Other. Said's concept provides a way for me, in this study, to analyze Western readers' current practices of reading and interpreting the Other. As I argue, Western readers approach literary texts by and about Muslims with unease that the representations they are offered currently in the public discourse, especially by the media, do not give them a satisfactory understanding of alternative perspectives of what has motivated current hatred and distrust against Westerners in countries like Iran and Pakistan, why the United States was attacked on September 11, 2001, and why American interventionist endeavors in countries

like Afghanistan and Iraq often appear ineffectual and unceasing. As they read and interpret these texts, Westerners, particularly U.S. Westerners, are often unaware of how their situatedness as readers and the situatedness of the texts influence the meanings created from this reader-text transaction. They are unaware of the influence of Orientalism in shaping their interpretations and as a result, often struggle to transcend them. Without an awareness of how Orientalist representations shape Western visions of and approaches to the Muslim world, Westerners struggle to understand and challenge their governments' foreign policies toward countries like Iran, Afghanistan, and Pakistan and domestic policy toward their own Muslim citizens. They struggle to engage critically in considering how these policies and practices have been and continue to perpetrate injustices on Muslim peoples and how such actions have assisted in creating civil and governmental discord and aided in the strengthening of extremist terrorist groups in these countries.

In this study, I assert the potential role of the Western reader in challenging and disrupting this prevailing Western discourse about the Muslim Other. In his work, Edward Said recognizes the central role of the reader in this process. He also advocates for readers to engage more critically and with greater awareness of how Orientalizing Western discourse shapes the process of interpreting and representing Muslims and the relationship of the West and the Muslim world. However, as my analysis reveals, Said's critique of Western tendencies to Orientalize the Other and his call for an alternative critical approach to interpreting and representing the Other do not provide opportunities for Western readers to consider how their role as readers shapes this process through the specific stances, maneuvers, and decisions they make in the reading process. His theory does not provide specific ways in which Western readers can consider critically the historical and geopolitical situatedness that shapes the expectations

they bring and the maneuvers they make in their reading and interpretive process. Rather, I find a way to extend Said's concept of Orientalism, through the use of reader response theory and related pedagogical theory on reading the Other, to consider the specific role of the reader and provide theoretical considerations of how Orientalism is reinforced or may be disrupted throughout the reading process. I find these opportunities for disruption to occur as readers reconsider the objectivist epistemological stance they take in reading to know the Other, consider how their situatedness influences their tendency to interpret and represent the Muslim Other through an Orientalist lens, reconsider their tendency to connect empathetically with the Other, and challenge their need to dispel their sense of guilt by looking for easy solutions to the problems presented in these texts.

By considering the role of the reader in the process of making meaning about the Muslim Other, I also work toward a postcolonial-infused approach to teach students about the Other, specifically in the context of the current struggles faced in K-12 and pre-service teacher education regarding reading and interpreting multicultural literature. I consider the findings of this study in terms of the potential for extending Said's postcolonial concept of Orientalism in ways that allow Westerners to engage more actively and critically in how they read. I explore how an extended concept of Orientalism provides ways to reconsider obstacles faced with student reading responses to multicultural literature—whether at the K-12 level or in pre-service teacher education—as they tend to empathize with the Other in ways that are more self-focused rather than critically aware of their situatedness as Westerners, their complicity in the current conditions of Muslims in countries like Iran, Afghanistan, and Pakistan, and responsive to the needs and demands of the Muslim Other. I contextualize this finding within both the broader challenges in multicultural education, as well as more specific pedagogical possibilities offered

to addressing students' current perceptions of and attitudes toward Muslims. Finally, I address the limitations of this study, particularly in terms of the methodological approaches and decisions made regarding the analyzed texts and explore opportunities for future research to explore the concepts developed here.

6.1 RECONSIDERING AND EXTENDING ORIENTALISM

Said's concept of Orientalism challenges Western readers to become critically aware and engaged in more situated and responsible readings of the Other, but his approach does not provide ways to translate his recommendations into pedagogical approaches to reading. To make that move, I recommend employing reader response and the work of pedagogical theorists who examine the reading expectations and stances of Westerners engaging with the Other through literary texts. My elaboration and extension of Said's concept challenges readers to develop an awareness of situatedness of the expectations, stances, and decisions they make in their reading and interpretative processes. Because Western readers are often unaware of their situatedness, they remain ignorant of, and are equally tyrannized by, the Orientalist influences shaping their interpretations. This includes how Orientalism perpetuates their need to know, classify, and possess the Muslim Other; to engage in negative, essentializing representations of the Other; and to perpetuate an interpretation of the West-Muslim relationship that justifies Western intervention on the Muslim Other's behalf. Readers are often unable to recognize that their readings are the result of their subjective interpretations, as members of a Western interpretative community of readers, bringing their horizons of expectations shaped by Orientalism to the transactional process of meaning making they engage with the text. Their consciousness is

colonized by Orientalist representations and discourse, and they are unaware and unable to extract themselves from them to consider and challenge the subjective, political, economic, and cultural motivations of this project.

The reader response concepts used to frame my analysis provide ways for readers to reorient how they consider their roles as readers by challenging readers' assumptions that they are extracting objective truth from the texts. Using reader response theory, I present a challenge to traditional text-based approaches to reading by providing a perspective for readers to reconsider the key role they play in the process of meaning making. By simply presenting the concept of Orientalism to readers who are still reading from a text-centered approach, this concept may become, to them, merely another truth claim to be either rejected in light of competing truth claims or unquestioningly memorized and catheticized. Their acceptance of this concept, from this perspective, becomes a passive process of accepting a new truth that exists outside themselves as readers. It does not engage them in a self-critical and active process of learning to recognize, reconsider, and move beyond the detailed maneuvers and stances they take in the interpretative process. Before the concept of Orientalism can be introduced to readers, reader response theory provides a way to challenge readers to confront the epistemological disconnection they face as they read for objective knowledge, even while, contradictorily, engaging with the aesthetic and subjective nature of literary texts. It provides them with a way to challenge their faith in objective truth and allows them ways to account for and accept the notion of differing perspectives as not merely contradictory truth claims, but explorations of situatedness. Developing such a stance readies them for challenging their existing interpretations of Muslims from the standpoint of situatedness and considering differing perspectives, rather than essentialized monolithic representations of Muslims that Orientalism presents.

Said puts forth the general call to read more critically, and Spivak (1990) states that Western readers' need to earn the right to criticize. Extending this thinking through the use of reader response theory and pedagogical theory on reading the Other, I argue that readers also need to be equipped with an understanding of how and why they read and interpret the Muslim Other as they do. The pedagogical concept of reading the Other that I formulate as a result of my analysis challenges readers to engage throughout the reading process in specific ways to disrupt current interpretations of the Other. Using this approach, I challenge readers to pursue actively and critically an understanding of their cultural and historical position with respect to the Other. The point is not to estrange one's self from emotional involvement with the Other, as is envisioned in Orientalism, but rather to engage in a process of "critical witnessing," (Taylor, 2007a, p. 311), remembering who one is reading on behalf of and making one's self open to the needs of the Other. Using this approach, readers can be challenged to reconsider the ways they interpret their relationships with the Muslim Other, consider the emotional reactions they experience while reading, and be aware of how these reactions shape the reading stances they take and how they interpret notions of sameness and strangeness with the Other in ways that either confirm or challenge Orientalist notions.

As I find, Said's concept can be extended and incorporated into pedagogy, which results in challenging readers to become actively aware and engaged in specific maneuvers they make in the reading process. In particular, I find this critical consideration of the reading process provides ways in which both K-12 teachers and students may consider their approaches to reading the Other in the specific context of teaching about the West's relationship with the Muslim world, a particular need since the events of September 11th and also in the more general challenges faced by reading the Other in multicultural literature.

6.2 EXTENDING MULTICULTURAL EDUCATION

Based on my analysis of how Westerners tend to read and interpret the Muslim Other, I also challenge Western K-12 educators to both confront their own reading and interpretative process and to explore ways of challenging their students to do the same. The extended notion of Said's theory I develop in this study provides a roadmap for addressing current approaches to teaching reading and interpretation in multicultural education, in the specific approaches to teaching students about Muslims and the West's relationship with the Muslim world, and generally, in teaching multicultural literature.

Based on my analysis, I find a need for more discussion to occur regarding how educators struggle with their own understanding of Muslims and how this becomes translated in the classroom. Studies show that educational resources dealing specifically with September 11th and the West's relationship with Muslims tend to address developing greater content knowledge on Muslims (Nasir & Al-Amin, 2006; Sarroub, 2005; Speck, 1997), addressing methods of classroom instruction (Haque, 2004; Sabry & Bruna, 2007; Sarroub, 2005; Speck, 1997), and redeveloping institutional practices (Coles, 2004; Nasir & Al-Amin, 2006; Peek, 2003; Sabry & Bruna, 2007; Sarroub, 2005). However, the pedagogical discussion about teaching students about September 11th and about Muslims do not address ways for educators, much less their students, to critically examine why they and their societies perpetuate negative perspectives of Muslims and opportunities for developing alternative perspectives to this dominant discourse. Non-Muslim, pre-service and current educators struggle in teaching their students about Muslims because they struggle with their own lack of knowledge about Muslims (Burwell, Davis & Taylor, 2008; Mastrilli & Sardo-Brown, 2002. ; Taylor, 2007a, 2007b). . These approaches present positive, generalizable truths about Muslims to counter the predominantly negative truths

presented in Western public discourse. By attempting to present counter truth claims, these approaches tend to perpetuate the colonizing need to know. As I argue in this study, a needed alternate approach questions this tendency and, rather, embraces the subjective nature of interpretation, acknowledges the implicated role of Western readers in perpetuating the Orientalist project, and humbly explores ways to understand and interact with the Other that are responsive to the Other's needs and reparative of past injustices.

The tendency in pedagogical approaches to multicultural literature, in general, is to encourage readers to empathize with the characters and situations presented in the texts. This tendency, as Todd (2003) notes, engages “a privileging of a certain idea of togetherness” (p. 45). By encouraging Western readers to perceive an empathetic connection with the Muslim Other, these readers are subconsciously denying the hegemonic hold the West has had economically, politically, and culturally over the Muslim world for centuries and masking the Orientalist intentions in creating a seemingly benevolent appearance to the West's relationship with the Muslim Other. However, as revealed by my analysis, the process of identifying with the Other becomes a stance from which readers project their own values and identities onto the Other, simplifying the situated, historical, political, and cultural experiences that separate them. This problem, known as perspective taking, encourages readers to consider adopting alternative perspectives while reading—taking on the perspective of a character, for example— as a way to better understand different value and identity stances. This is a problem that has been noted in pedagogical discourse on multicultural literature (Appleman, 2009; Lewis, 2000; Spector, 2007; Thein & Sloan, 2012) and also as a tendency of pre-service teachers as they engage with texts about the Muslim Other in formal pedagogical settings (Boler, 1994; Burwell, Taylor, & Davis, 2008; Taylor, 2007a; Taylor 2007b).

I provide my approach as a way to address these struggles expressed in the pedagogical discourse by approaching this issue of perspective taking and addressing situatedness from Said's postcolonial perspective. By introducing a postcolonial perspective to the issue of perspective taking and creating opportunities in the reading process for readers to reconsider their reading and interpretive stances and maneuvers, readers have the opportunity to engage in more authentic and informed ways as they interpret these readings. My recommended approach to critical reading also presents a stance of implicatedness from which readers may take responsibility for the ways in which they, as Westerners, have perpetuated such representations of Muslims. Rather than finding ways to placate their guilt, readers embrace it and accept the needs of the Other, without attempting to normalize them into their own world view. Readers have the opportunity to take suggestions and demands the Other offers and engage in further dialogue with Muslims about how and what action would be appropriate.

Such a pedagogical approach adds to the efforts of expanding the pedagogical discourse on K-12 multicultural education to include issues of critical literacy and ethical approaches to reading (Booth, 1988; Encisco, 2007; Phelan, 2004; Thein, 2005; Thein & Sloan, 2012), which attempt to extend the discourse of multicultural education to include critical considerations of the Self-Other relationship to be more ethical and equitable to those socially marginalized as the Other. The concept of multiculturalism itself is flawed in its acknowledgement of difference, whether it manifests itself as "boutique multiculturalism" or "strong multiculturalism" (Fish, 1997). A boutique multiculturalist recognizes the legitimacy of other cultures but abandons this position when some key value of the Other's culture challenges one's own culture. Strong multiculturalism tends to value difference for difference's sake and does not provide an approach to deal with encountering differences in the Other's culture that run counter to one's own. As I

reveal through my analysis, however, by drawing on concepts of fluid and relational identity and difference with the Other, readers can extend the notion of difference to consider a more critical and responsible relationship with the Other. By recognizing their own subjectivity, or situated interpretations, readers may recognize the fluidity and changing nature of their identity as Westerners and the identity of the Muslim Other. They may also, however, recognize the extent to which the Western Self and Muslim Other in this relationship influence each other's identity. By recognizing the symbiotic nature of this relationship, Western readers may become aware of how wholesale, uncritical adoption of the Orientalist worldview has granted them the power to marginalize, manipulate, conquer and oppress the Other. Western readers may also acknowledge how they are implicated in this marginalizing process and how they have a duty to be receptive and responsive to the Other's needs.

By advocating for reading with a sense of responsibility to the Other, I envision an approach that is infused with a critical pedagogical approach that allows readers to consider not simply how to interpret the Other, but how their new interpretation may lead to critique and thoughtfully considered action. The possibility for creating a critical postcolonial pedagogy provides opportunities for addressing issues of Western readers' responsibility to respond to the needs of the Muslim Other on a larger scale by addressing global inequities and injustices that Western countries have perpetrated on predominantly Western countries. I recommend multiple ways to reconsider, specifically, the relationship between the Western Self and the Muslim Other by bringing a postcolonial sense of accountability and responsibility when engaging with those who have been marginalized and dominated by Western representations and by political, economic, and cultural actions. Different from other instances of social marginalization of the Other, I argue that misrepresentations and injustices enacted on the Other are still largely

unrecognized in Western countries, particularly in the United States. As seen in public discourse about Muslims, and confirmed by reader reviews, Westerners, especially U.S. Westerners, continue to perpetuate a colonial and imperialist discourse in their representations of Muslims and repressive, imperialist action in predominantly Muslim countries.

Given my analysis of reader's reviews of literary texts by and about Muslims, I recommend that educators reconsider empathy in ways that disrupt how it is used to perpetuate the existing hegemony of the Western Self in the relationship. In the context of a more critically considered approach to multicultural literature in general and teaching students about Muslims specifically, I advocate for an approach that complicates the role of empathy, the view of which is often that if one perceives that one is emotionally and experientially connecting with the Other, one can know the Other better, which Todd (2003) argues is, in actuality, an egotistic endeavor serving the results of the Self, rather than engaging in responsibility for the Other. As I argue, a reconsidered approach to empathy encourages a mutually responsible relationship between Self and Other working together for social justice. However, this cannot occur until the Self recognizes and acknowledges the difference that exists with the Other in terms of Western hegemonic control over how the Self and Other are represented and how their relationship is defined. In order for a more equal and responsible dynamic to exist between the Western Self and Muslim Other, Westerners need to actively acknowledge the role of the West in creating the current conditions of the discord between the West and the Muslim world.

Within his classic concept of Orientalism, Said critiques in detail Westerners' representations of the Muslim Other, presenting an end goal: a more critically responsible approach to reading the Other. I argue for creating a charted pedagogical course that allows readers to guide themselves along this path, observant of the stances, maneuvers, and decisions

they make in their reading and interpretative process. I advocate that educators offer opportunities for readers to disrupt their current reading processes and engage in more critically aware decisions to recognize their own situatedness, challenge their assumptions of empathy and their perceptions of the West-Muslim relationship, to own their guilt, and to be receptive to the needs of the Other. It is such a pedagogical approach that creates opportunities to develop readers who are capable of understanding and shaping more ethically responsive and critically considered approaches to reading and interpreting Western discourse and action regarding the Muslim Other.

6.3 LIMITATIONS AND OPPORTUNITIES FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Shaped by an interpretivist theoretical perspective (which expressly defies the dominant, post-positivist paradigm and its epistemological certainties), this study is shaped largely by my interests, my reading and interpretive stances, and the maneuvers and decisions I enact as I read and interpret theoretical, pedagogical, literary, and reader texts. These decisions create a defined path of inquiry as I shape my analysis and argument. As a result, my approach also leaves other possible paths of inquiry not followed and provides opportunities for further questioning, critical consideration, and research pursuits regarding approaches to reading and interpreting the Muslim Other. Rather than approaching my study with the intent to obtain generalizable facts about reading and interpreting the Other, readers may consider my study within the reading process for which I advocate: one individual's subjective and situated interpretation, providing a richly portrayed experience from which the reader is welcome to make further meaning. In this section,

I explore some limitations that arise by following this particular path of inquiry and consider opportunities for further research.

One limitation is the study's lack of exhaustive "data"—the selected literary texts and reader reviews—considered. As well, given the nature of Amazon.com reader reviews being posted at various times since the book's publication, I did not have an opportunity to question or follow-up with readers to gain further insight into their demographical profile, reactions and beliefs. In both instances, I relied on my own interpretations to analyze and make meaning from the reviews and to determine which recurrent concepts I found to be prevalent enough in the reviews to give me a rich sense of how to interpret the comments. However, despite these limitations, the texts provided a broad representation of concepts to develop and a sufficient reiteration of concepts in several reviews to yield justification for analyzing them as trends. There were also limitations to using Amazon.com customer reviews because little is known about the reviewer's demographic information. Reviewers are given the option to share such information, and it is limited to the reviewer's name, which may or may not reveal gender; geographic location, which does not always tell the reader if the reviewer is a Westerner or a Muslim; and whatever personal details and experiences the reviewer chooses to share in his or her review. Also, as noted by Streitfeld (2011) and others, there is a proclivity of "fake" reviews being written and posted on web sites like Amazon.com. This might manifest itself in the form of positive reviews written by individuals employed by a publisher or an author's personal friend or relative, to help boost sales of or create buzz about a book, or negative reviews written by rival publishers or authors. However, despite these limitations, these reviews, collectively, create an on-line discourse among reading customers about the books, and by extension, about the Muslim characters and settings.

As I explore in this study, the pursuit of reading to know and verifying truth claims with new truth claims becomes a fruitless and eternal pursuit of discovering the greater truth. Pursuing the truthfulness of these reviews, as a similar endeavor, follows a similar objectivist epistemological pursuit. Rather, collectively, these reviews are part of the public discourse about these texts and add to the representations being created about the Muslim Other, regardless of who writes them and why. These reviews also create a consumer discourse about the value of these texts to Western readers as both educative and entertaining. Further research in this regard could examine these reviews, examining how these reviews as customer-based recommendations create a discourse that unites both marketing and sales of these books with a perpetuation of the Orientalism project. By expressing readers' recommendations of these texts, readers are able, through their on-line reviews, to notify publishers about what kinds of stories they want to read or expect to read about the Muslim Other, and in this way, drive the market for books about the Other and the portrayals of Muslims in these books.

As a Western researcher, I recognize the limitations of my ability to understand the Muslim Other. Moving from a stance of needing to know to one of seeking to understand in educational research is a challenge in a field in which quantitative research approaches often emphasize hard facts and generalizable findings. Yet, as revealed in this study, the need to know is an approach that Western readers are inclined to pursue even in informal reading practices. This study, as well as presenting a perspective on reader stance and the need to know, also creates a challenge to future research about Muslims, to challenge the assumptions that Muslims can be known, named, and classified through research. However, seeking to understand, as opposed to knowing Muslims as the research subject is not enough. There is a need to also be aware of one's situatedness as a researcher in relation to the situatedness of the Muslim subjects

researched. This situatedness includes an awareness of the power the researcher holds in interpreting and representing findings about one's subjects. Western researchers run the Orientalist risk of either speaking for and creating new ways to define, classify, and possess a knowledge of the Muslim Other, or the risk of focusing on our own selves in relation to the Muslim Other. Without an awareness of the responsibility of the researcher as witness to the Other, researchers studying Muslims risk using the Other as a vehicle for projecting the researcher's own philosophical and psychological issues on the Other. Similar to Western readers posting Amazon.com reviews, I challenge researchers to also engage in a process of critical awareness of how they read and interpret the Muslim Other.

In this study, I attempt to bring together discourses occurring across different disciplines as a way to bring together those who are presenting a broader theoretical interpretation of political, historical, social, and cultural phenomenon (e.g., postcolonial studies) with those who are addressing educator practitioner questions regarding how best to teach multicultural literature or how to teach Western students about Muslims. I also present a challenge for more cross-disciplinary research in the future so theorists and practitioners will share the unique perspectives they bring to a collective discourse about how we as Westerners approach the Muslim Other. In this study, I attempt to break the disciplinary discourse boundaries of English and education to connect related discussions and distill the elements of a shared approach to a more critical reading practice. While critical reading is a generally accepted educational standard, this is often fostered in ahistorical ways that do not address and challenge the larger political, historical, economic, social, and cultural forces at play. The hope is that by uniting theory and practice in the context of reading and interpreting the Muslim Other, this will offer an opportunity for critical reading that involves awareness of situatedness and the reader's responsibility to the

Other. As well, while I discuss the direct implications of this research in the areas of reading and literary studies pedagogy (see Chapter Five), the topic of this study has implications for research and pedagogy in disciplines including social studies, history, communications and journalism and political science, business, and international policy and relations. Research that employs critical theory like postcolonial theory tends to emphasize the connection of Orientalism to Western discourse and action. However, Western representations of and discourse about the Muslim Other is still a neglected focus in other disciplines, as well as in Western U.S. public discourse. In building a critical awareness in Western citizens, it is also important for this critical discussion to carry over into other disciplines, in particular those fields that train and educate those pursuing careers that shape Western public discourse and action regarding the Muslim world.

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Said's (1978) faith in "the determining imprint of individual[s]" (p. 23) shapes his belief that humans have the ability to understand their societal discourse and to make a conscious decision to support or to publically critique it. It is also my faith in the ability of humans to reflect critically on those discourses and practices that perpetuate injustice and oppression on others—in this case, specifically on the Muslim Other—and work in responsible ways to alter them. As does Said (1994), I support a more authentic pursuit based on the belief "that all human beings are entitled to expect decent standards of behavior concerning freedom and justice from worldly powers or nations, and that deliberate or inadvertent violations of these standards need to be testified and fought against courageously" (pp. 11-12). I extend his call to action to pedagogical practice, whether engaging pre-service teachers in critical and responsible considerations of their own reading practices as they prepare to engage students in similar

interpretive practices; considering new approaches in engaging students with multicultural texts in language arts, English, and reading pedagogy; or in the context of more critically considered pedagogy by reconsidering relationships with the Other that encourage Western humility, mutual respect, and common purpose.

I recommend the need for more cross-disciplinary collaboration across fields including literary studies, educational foundations, and pre-service teacher instruction. Rather than working at cross purposes, these fields inform each other in ways that encourage the enactment of praxis. Reader response and pedagogical theories of the nature and construction of the Other provide opportunities for enacting Said's vision of creating an informed Western citizenry that possesses the ability to speak truth to power and approaches the Muslim Other in ways that challenge the continuing global discord and oppression infused by marginalizing Orientalist representations and actions.

APPENDIX A:

AMAZON READER REVIEWS CITED

APPENDIX A

AMAZON READER REVIEWS CITED

all reviews cited are posted to www.amazon.com

A.1 READING LOLITA IN TEHRAN REVIEWS

(retrieved from http://www.amazon.com/Reading-Lolita-Tehran-Memoir-Books/dp/product-description/0812979303/ref=dp_proddesc_0?ie=UTF8&n=283155&s=books)

A. (2004, July 7). A literary tour-de-force.

A Customer. (2003, April 25). Complex and moving!

A Customer. (2003, June 14). A tale of thousands of days and nights.

A Customer. (2004, March 23). Disappointing.

A Customer. (2004, January 18). An important, complex work (wished for fiction, though).

A Customer. (2004, April 13). Interesting but lacking accessibility.

A Customer (2004, July 14). Very insightful and informative.

A. Prasad. (2004, November 5). Disappointing.

A reader. (2005, October 8). hateful writing – don't waste your time.

A. Woodley "Patroness, Janeites, the Austen list." (2005, October 3). A level of Pathos in the writing I found annoying, overall good but not great.

Adam Shah. (2004, September 28). Excellent treatment of the subject.

Alexandra E. Jerome "Mideastchica" (2005, May 17). Same show, new audience.

Beth Biester "Beth Biester." (2005, November 24). Only made it to page 90.

Bobby Newman. (2006, June 7). Real life memoir of the threat to freedom.

Bukkene Bruse. (2004, October 2). Not the best place to learn about Iran.

C. Colt "It Just Doesn't Matter." (2003, December 23). A stunning example of the power of words over force.

Carkonen, S. (n.d.) Review, out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

Carla F. Kennedy. (2006, January 3). Not what I expected.

crazyforgems. (2004, December 9). Smart women saved by literature.

David A. Baer. (2005, July 25). sumptuous and dark writing.

dbh62 "dbh62." (2004, November 9). Be warned – this book is not for everyone.

Dee Lalley "Dee." (2004, August 19). An important book.

E. Lynch "scribbler." (2005, October 30). The literature course I never had (but wish I did).

E.M. Otis, (2005, June 15). It was just OK.

Ed Uyeshima. (2005, January 17). Dreaming of the ideal world through literature in Iran.

Elbert D. Porter "giggle3." (2003, July 28). Literature vs. weapons of mass deception.

Elizabeth Talerman. (2008, June 8). A women's (sic) jorney (sic) through war, totalitarianism and great works of fiction.

Erin. (2004, April 2). A life through literature.

Farnoosh "ProlificLiving." (2008, December 9). Moving, haunting, disturbing, and extremely well written.

Frost77. (2005, December 20). A fascinating look at life in Iran.

Gena M. Lumbroso. (2005, March 16). As great a work as the authors she taught.

Goldie “BookLover.” (2005, February 28). Very disappointing [sic].

H. Schneider “Einsiedler.” (2008, July 1). Absolutely not politically correct.

Hely. (2004, May 2). Experiences of a Persian girl.

J.M. Alterio. (2004, September 1). Disappointing lack of personal honesty.

James Carragher. (2004, December 30). For the optimist in you.

Jessica Ferguson “threelittlebirds.” (2006, April 17). I must be missing something.

Kristen Falso-Capaldi. (2004, July 21). An enlightening read for all readers and teachers.

LLM. (2006, April 5). Annoying and patronizing.

Linda Linguvic. (2004, January 2). Teaching literature in Iran during the revolution and beyond.

Matthew Krichman. (2004, November 4). Overrated.

NY Wellesley “book lover.” (2004, August 23). disjointed and oddly impersonal.

Patricia A. Powell. (2003, July 5). a glimpse of Upsilamba!

Peter Cofrancesco. (2004, April 11). Insightful but too fractious.

Publishers Weekly. (2003). Review, out of print or unavailable edition of this title. Reed Business Information, Inc.

Ronald Scheer “rockysquirrel.” (2003, July 21). sex with a man you loath.

S. Taylor “st27.” (2004, March 25). Too many agendas.

Sharvul. (2009, March 16). Good book with an unnecessary epilogue.

Snowbrocade. (2004, September 9). Excellent idea – unimaginative execution.

Sontag, S. (n.d.). Review.

Sparkle. (2009, June 18). The recent election in Iran makes it the perfect time to read this book.

Stacy Allen. (2004, September 21). Read only if you understand what this book really is.
“zalyssa.” (2004, April 5). Reading Lolita in confusion.

A.2 THE KITE RUNNER REVIEWS

(retrieved from http://www.amazon.com/The-Kite-Runner-Khaled-Hosseini/dp/product-description/1594480001/ref=dp_proddesc_0?ie=UTF8&n=283155&s=books)

A Customer. (2003, June 4). WOW!

A reader. (2006, November 18). Beautiful beginning, but turns into a melodrama.

AudioFile. (n.d.) Review.

avid reader “Doc M.” (2005, January 5). Engrossing and brilliant.

Carolyn Rampone “Carolyn D’Amico Rampone.” (2005, August 1). Overwhelmingly powerful!

Charlie C. Fan. (2007, May 21). To be fair.

Christopher G. Kenber “chris kenber.” (2004, December 20). Afghani reality therapy.

Dennis Frampton “debonairbear.” (2003, August 31). It’s a story of Paradise...lost.

Eileen Rieback. (2004, July 18). Wonderful and timely story.

GS. (2007, June 6). Critics aside... A much needed voice for the Afghan people.

Howard Goldowsky “ChessWriter.” (2004, July 26). Good reading, but not great writing.

Huntley, K. (n.d.) *Booklist*. Review, hardcover edition. American Library Association.

J. Olcott “Love2Read.” (2005, January 2). Love2Read.

J. Ullah. (2005, December 8). A beautiful book! Makes one think about life and its repercussions...

J.D. Evans “gr8scribe.” (2004, April 17). Afghanistan: What it used to be.

Jennifer A. Sutton. (2005, December 9). good read.

kehroll. (2005, December 5). a great first novel.

Kelli Oliver-George. (2005, August 11). This book blew me away.

Ken Margolin. (2006, February 2). Earnest writing, contrived emotions.

Linda Linguvic. (2004, April 2). Afghanistan is the setting. The story is fine classic drama.

M.J. Mohseni. (2004, August 16). Overrated and second-rate.

maja j. (2007, September 26). Heartwrenching.

Mark Twain “aleksandrsergeevich.” (2005, July 24). If you like soap operas...

mdscifi lover. (2004, November 30). A beautiful piece of writing.

Nancy J. Hajeski. (2006, January 18). Engaging, gutwrenching and ultimately uplifting.

nodice. (2005, December 30). Amir and Hassan. The sultans of Kabul.

Prisrob “pris.” (2004, May 21). Afghanistan, the Taliban, and family love.

Publishers Weekly. (2003). Review. hardcover edition.

richard t. “richard t.” (2006, February 12). Good first novel.

Ron Franscell, Author of ‘Sourtoe Cocktail Club.’ (2003, June 17). Your heart will soar.

S. Banerjee “Renaissance Man.” (2005, March 16). Guilt and redemption set against a lost
 utopia: Afghanistan.

Steve Koss. (2005, April 5). A genial read, but predictable and overplotted.

Stevens, P. (2003). *School Library Journal*. Review, hardcover edition. Reed Business
 Information, Inc.

Toueg, G. (n.d.) Review, hardcover edition. Amazon.com review.

Violet Bandong “Candyband.” (2004, October 15). Hassan lives.

Washington Post Book World. (n.d.). Review.

A.3 THREE CUPS OF TEA REVIEWS

(retrieved from http://www.amazon.com/Three-Cups-Tea-Mission-Peace/dp/product-description/1606862170/ref=dp_proddesc_0?ie=UTF8&n=283155&s=books&qid=1335098509&sr=8-1)

A. Prasad. (2006, September 28). Put so simply...

Amazon.com. (n.d.). Book description.

Big E. (2011, April 16). One million cups of bull.

Bono, M. (n.d.). Review.

Bookman "Henry." (2011, April 17). Build a jail.

Bookmarks Magazine (2004). Review, paperback edition. Philips & Nelson Media, Inc.

Brokaw, T. (n.d.) Review.

Bush, V. (n.d.) *Booklist*. Review, alternative hardcover edition. American Library Association.

CSL. (2007, May 12). Perhaps war is not the answer – perhaps we could build schools.

CGScammell. (2007, October 27). Beautiful story of devotion and loyalty.

D. Stuart "Researcher at Kudos." (2007, December 17). Great story that doesn't need Relin's spin doctor treatment.

Daysleeper. (2011, April 18). It doesn't add up, and now (sadly) there's proof.

doc Peterson. (2007, November 18). An inspiring story, told poorly.

Gloria. (2007, September 18). MOST IMPORTANT BOOK I'VE READ IN YEARS.

J. Powers. (2007, March 12). Inspiring.

J.A. Greenwood "SoonerThought.com." (2006, March 19). Failed climber fights terrorism with the open hand of friendship.

Jill I. Shtulman. (2008, March 7). Uplifting true story told in worshipful manner.

Jill Malter. (2006, August 20). Captivating.

Josephine Briggs "prolific reader." (2011, December 3). A quest to provide education for kids.

Julia. (2007, May 29). inspiring.

Juste Francois. (2007 May 12). Greg Mortenson..."not one of us.

Katelynn Wolfe "Bibliophile." (2007, May 12). A lesson in altruism.

Kerry O. Burns. (2007, April 13). Nobel Peace Prize candidate!

L.L.L. (2006, April 11). What an incredible story.

Linda Albion “bisongal.” (2007, September 30). A true inspiration.

M. Ellington. (2007, May 26). Three Cups of Tea.

M.A. Zaidi “Ali Zaidi.” (2007, January 29). Dr. Greg stands at the summit of humanity.

Mary R. Tanner. (2007, May 28). Heartwarming, inspiring.

Matt Chessen “mattlesnake.” (2011, April 18). Greg is a con artiste?

mothermaven “webjaw diva.” (2007, August 13). A book that remains with you.

Muhammad Asad Khan. (2007, March 9). One school at a time.....

P. Lambert. (2007, March 3). One of the best!

Padre Pete (2011, April 20). Fake.

People. (n.d.). Review.

Publishers Weekly. (Mar.) Review, alternate hardcover edition. Reed Business Information.

Rikelle Brande. (2007, June 6). A fabulous, must-read book!

Ronald Scheer “rockysquirrel.” (2006, July 28). One man against an ocean of need...

SK. (2011, July 22). Not even one star worthy – sorry Greg Mortenson, but Relin was not the
deserving documenter.

silent rebel. (2007, April 17). I am lost for words!”

Stephen Arthurs. (2011, September 28). Give him a chance.

Suhail Butt. (2007, May 4). ESSENTIAL READING FOR ALL HUMANITY.

Teresa Jordan “Tesa Jordan.” (2007, March 30). This should be required reading for
EVERYONE.

text vendor. (2011, October 13). After the expose.

Well Read Post Grad “Lerin.” (2008, May 8). Good story lost in poor writing.

William H. Fuller. (2006, August 16). As-Salaam Alaaikum.

William V. Yount “Bill Yount.” (2007, July 10). Borders and boundaries.

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