A REFLECTION OF AMERICAN CULTURE ON AN EVIL CLICHÉ: 

**THE EXORCIST**

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Most people crave seeing horror films without being aware of the reason. In general, anxiety of the incomprehensible plays a central role in evoking fear for human beings, and it functions as an illusion for their search for an answer. People assume that they might gratify their need for meaning by watching horror films, and that is why it increases the demand for any production of horror. Yet, American society demands and produces horror genre more than the rest of the world, and horror films are a great source of satisfaction for them. For example, *The Exorcist* is a great film that reflects American culture in many aspects, and its influence on the world is undeniable. In this respect, this study will mainly focus on how Calvinist doctrines have influenced the establishment of the exceptional nation concept and how they lead the nation to become a hegemonic power. Furthermore, it will analyse *The Exorcist* (1973) from a political perspective in order to emphasise its reflections on American culture. Finally, it will justify the argument with the psychological analysis of *The Exorcist* through the Jungian theory of archetypes.

Religious beliefs operate as the cornerstone of human society and its establishment. Many societies have a strong religious background, and American society is one of them. American culture is mainly based on the ideology that suggests this new land of America is exceptional, and this notion is grounded for Protestant ethics and Calvinist doctrines because of the Dutch-Protestant immigration. They dominated the land by claiming that it is an opportunity for them to create a new nation without any boundaries or dominance. According to five doctrines of Calvinism, human beings are condemned to eternal damnation due to original sin, only the limited amount of people (who are chosen by God) will be saved, and the elected ones are predestined to bring salvation to humanity, yet not everyone is destined for redemption so that some are condemned to eternal damnation (Calvin, 2002). Throughout history, American society has glorified their exceptional nation and has justified their dominance thanks to this notion, and they attempt to achieve their ideology in order to become the hegemonic power of the modern world. In the Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism,
Weber (2005) supports this notion by stating that the Calvinist and Protestant ideas have produced the American capitalist system.

Within the frame of it, the ideology of American Exceptionalism affects American-made horror films, and *The Exorcist* is such as to support this concept successfully. From the political aspect, the film contains a particular religious conflict between Christianity and Islam, even though the story does not discuss it notoriously. It imposes the idea to the unconscious mind with subliminal images; for instance, in the opening part, first the Virgin Mary statue appears on the screen and right after that, "The Exorcist" title occurs with the sound of Azan. Here, Islam and Christian religions are compared with the evil and the good one. In other words, while Virgin Mary is associated with Christianity and innocence, Azan, which is a call for Islam, is related to "the exorcist" and the evil. The occurrence of the title with an Islamic symbol is not a coincidence. Ashcroft, et al. (2007, p. 106) states that "... [H]egemony is the power of the ruling class to convince other classes that their interests are the interests of all." Therefore, American hegemonic culture makes Christianity the superior one to all religious beliefs, and films are a convenient tool for spreading the notion.

Then, it continues with the scene takes place in Iraq, and one of the protagonists, Father Merrin, discovers the Pazuzu's (the mythical king of demons) monument during the archaeological research. According to the story, Father Merrin once fought with Pazuzu in Africa, and now, he conflicts with another demon. Although Pazuzu is not the demon that possesses the little girl Regan, the excavation sequence implies that the source of a great ancient evil is situated in Iraq indirectly, and evil forces spread the world from its fountain so that it functions as a subliminal image that American society struggles with an evil entity originated in Iraq. Besides, there is a specific scene that includes Iraqi men who forge steel, and one of them, who has one glassy eye, encounters with Father Merrin. This intense gazing is like a foreshadowing that Father Merrin will face the demon again, yet the one-eyed Muslim man is a reminder of evil side, which is another indirect message that puts Islam in an inferior position. Therefore, the exceptional nation concept gets involved in the film again, and religion mainly turns into a horror element. Accordingly, it creates a sense that Christianity defeats the demonic forces, which come from an Islamic country, and it evokes disturbance.

When psychological perspective is taken into consideration, horror films contain the reverberations of cultural fears and cultural background as well. Every society carries the burden of their ancestors' repressed anxieties, and horror films reveal them by stimulating the
unconscious mind. Jung (1980, p. 5) claims that "...[T]he collective unconscious contents are concerned we are dealing with archaic or...primordial types, that is, with universal images that have existed since the remotest times." In other words, there are basic instincts that human beings share inherently in a different level of unconscious that is called the collective unconscious, and these instincts manifest themselves in human behaviours, which are called archetypes. When human beings behave against these archetypes, the unconscious mind responds with fear, disturbance and anxiety because it appears unordinary to the human mind. Besides, according to Christian beliefs, human beings should avoid seeing any unpleasant scene so that a good Christian is not supposed to witness any horrific scene deliberately. "I will set no wicked thing before mine eyes..." (Psalms 101-3 King James Version). However, according to Jung (1980), every individual should face with their shadow side in order to become self-conscious so that the dark and the light become a whole and balanced. On the other hand, Christianity rejects the shadow side, and so that it causes American society to develop unhealthy ideologies in the establishment of a new system.

Another point is that the film evokes disturbance and fear because the antagonist Regan is a child who is incompatible with the child archetype. A child should be innocent and harmless, yet she acts beyond ordinary. In the absence of the father archetype, she acts against moral codes by revealing her shadow archetype through demonic possession in disguise. In a way, her shadow side consumes her ego and her existence. Additionally, her shadow side is a reflection of an individual's anxiety and cultural fears. If this notion is adapted to American culture, Regan's shadow side projects their unconscious fear of being defeated by another hegemonic power. Besides, the other protagonist, Father Damien Karras, who is depressed due to his mother's death and becomes sceptical about his religious faith, represents the hero archetype. He suffers from his mother's death and meaninglessness of life. Later, he is able to defeat the demon and save Regan in the resolution part; however, he sacrifices himself as a Christ-like figure. Therefore, the devil is the projection of his shadow side, and when he defeats it, he overcomes the negativity of his shadow archetype. Through this, he redeems himself from scepticism, meaninglessness and emptiness of life. Accordingly, because of the Calvinist doctrines, American society believes that there are always enemies who attempt to defeat them, but the enemy is never able to succeed because God has chosen the United States of America as a saviour figure. This belief leads them to develop superiority complex and narcissistic attitudes towards other nations. In this case, while the cosmic evil force represents other nations,
Merrin and Karras are the incarnations of American society fights with evil for the sake of God and liberty.

In conclusion, every nation has its shadow side, and most of them deny their cultural fears. Yet, the shadow side grows deeper when it is rejected because of the toxic ego. The more the ego is bloated, the more the shadow becomes rooted, and religion is an efficient instrument for it. It shapes sociological and political systems of a nation, and it has a great place in the Jungian collective unconscious because of its deep roots. Thus, it is a great subject to point out in artworks. *The Exorcist* fits in this argument successfully because it examines a common religious conflict between good and evil, and it contains reflections of American culture. Some might avoid horror films and find them pointless; however, in-depth analysis, films lead one into the depths of unconscious mind, the place where one finds rooted fears and anxieties of humanity. Nations come and go, galaxies collapse, yet fear remains.

**REFERENCES**


