

PalArch's Journal of Archaeology  
of Egypt / Egyptology

**THE PREOCCUPATIONS OF THE TRAUMA WRITINGS: A  
THROWBACK AT THE REPRESENTATIVE 9/11 FICTION**

**Sohail Ahmad Saeed<sup>1</sup>, Ahmad Naeem<sup>2</sup>, Sajid Anwar<sup>3</sup>, Fateh Khan<sup>4</sup>**

**<sup>1</sup>Assistant Professor, Department of English, The Islamia University of Bahawalpur.**

**<sup>2,3,4</sup>Lecturer, Department of English Language and Literature, Gomal University,  
D.I.Khan.**

**Sohail Ahmad Saeed , Ahmad Naeem , Sajid Anwar , Fateh Khan , The  
Preoccupations Of The Trauma Writings: A Throwback At The Representative 9/11  
Fiction , Palarch's Journal Of Archaeology Of Egypt/Egyptology 18(10), 1208-1214.  
ISSN 1567-214x.**

**Keywords: identity crisis, racial discrimination, religious hatred, psychological  
trauma, fundamentalism.**

**Abstract**

Several novels have appeared after the attacks of 9/11 and these novels either directly or indirectly deal with the effect of the event on individuals. Although these novels often claim to represent the post traumatic aftermath of the incident, the writers regularly use stereotyping resulting in strengthening the old binary discourse. The other basic issues highlighted in the representative post 9/11 texts are identity crisis, racial discrimination, religious hatred and psychological traumas as in the case of Mohsin Hamid's *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*, John Updike's *Terrorist*, and Don DeLillo's *Falling Man*. These novels explore the experiences of persons suffering from the trauma which followed the attacks. This paper focuses on the ways in which the novelists have represented the impacts of 9/11 on a world with different ideologies.

**Introduction**

The literature of any period is a reflection of its historical context and social feelings. For McLeod, "it situates texts in history by exposing how historical contexts influence the production

of meaning within literary texts” (38). So when one reads Dante’s inferno (canto 28) in which the writer describes the punishment for Mohammad with such an extraordinary passionate tone, one realizes the extent of hostility toward Muslims in that era. The same applies to the contemporary anti-Muslim literary texts and political or religious articles and statements. Samuel Huntington in *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order* rejects the idea of one world and preaches for social values. According to Huntington, the future carries a series of clashes between the West and the Rest. He rejects the old theories based on chaos and realism and declares a new model of contemporary world that articulates a civilization of different cultures and religions. Such culture provides an integration of thought. Huntington says that the religion becomes a central cause of motivation for people. He asserts that an aggressive Muslim posture toward the West is rooted in the very nature of Islam and should not be understood as a product of Islamic fundamentalism or the militancy of a few Muslim extremists (25-27). This theory by Huntington seems relative to the current emerging global encounter with terrorism and gives a new idea of dominant conservative ideology. As a result a new unity of Islam and West is formed. His work provides a model for covering the conflicts and contradictions of Islam and the West. The attacks of September 11, 2001 and the ‘war on terror’ also brought the old Orientalist discourse with its binary division between ‘us’ and ‘them’ into focus once again. Orientalism has constructed an essential entity of the so called Oriental that makes it radically different from its Western counterparts. The consequences of ‘war on terror’ have been depressing and disturbing. This phenomenon led towards the issues of identity, religion, racism and different traumatic disorders. This paper offers a contrapuntal reading of three novels, *Terrorist* by John Updike, *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* by Mohsin Hamid and Don DeLillo’s *Falling Man* these novelists are prominent canonical figures of recent times. The novels are of significance as these novelists have a reputation of legitimacy among their audiences and critics which increases the credibility of their claims. However, the present paper also investigates the novelists’ attempt to render the distorted representation with a normative authority so that the reader would accept such constructions as a mirror like representation of the reality. All the protagonists have a disturbed personality, searching for identity in multicultural societies. The trauma of such individuals can only be treated with the perceived sense of collective gains at national level without a confusion of race and culture.

### Analysis

A peculiar type of reaction has been observed against the terrorist attacks. The majority of the people detested the attacks but it also triggered a wave of hatred towards the Muslims in general. The Muslims were blamed for all other problems too: economic issues and unemployment. As Edward Said in *Orientalism* explains that these people masked their representations of the Orient and Islam with a systematic statement to give them a scientific immunity and a false objectivity, “so that one is given an impression of a pedagogical demonstration during which the scholar-scientist stands before us on a lecture-laboratory platform, creating, confining, and judging the material he discusses” (143).

So, in **Terrorist**, there is a terrorist in the guise of a religious leader and Updike gives the impression of a pure Islamic research and authenticity before writing the novel as he has used many Islamic verses and symbols in his work, thus making the fictional factual. This novel can be seen as Updike’s 9/11 novel and the plot to destroy the tunnel is fixed on the anniversary of attacks to convey the message that the terrorist will strike whenever they please. The imam feels

happy and triumphant at the fall of the twin towers as a symbol of capitalistic oppression. The reaction of society has been beautifully explained when Teresa Mulloy explains that they had to disconnect their landline because it was flooded with hate calls.

Mita Banerjee maintains that “Terrorist is a novel obsessed with, and not only curious about, skin color” (16). There was a sudden increase of the issue of racial discrimination after the incident of 9/11. This issue was observed by many writers. Terrorist also deals with the same idea of racial differences. Banerjee observes how this novel is connected to the cultural climate of the tragic event and argues that whiteness has gained a new currency and legitimation in cultural discourses after the attacks. The person who is facing racial discrimination is forced to commit a crime. She declares that biological skin color has become a tool for exclusion and denial of citizenship. However, Banerjee might have a point in saying that Updike’s fiction is reactionary in having Ahmad’s gaze profiling everyone throughout the novel, astutely inverting ethno-historical roles. Whiteness does not come out as strong and muscular as she thinks it does, since, indeed Updike wants to sound fair. Updike is not racist as long as the white implied narrative sides with Ahmad. Otherwise, the narrative would undermine itself and look prejudiced.

Updike explains the development of Ahmad Ash Mulloy, an eighteen year old teenager. He thinks God is an invisible companion, “a Siamese twin attached in every part, inside and out, and to whom he could turn every moment in prayer” (37). Ahmad is represented as a traumatic angry young man who hates American life style. As a fundamentalist, he shows deep hatred towards what he sees around him, for example girls with bare bellies and teachers who teach democratic and secular values. He also hates the flirtatious character of his mother and for him the radio and the television channels are disgusting as they project these sham values. He has decided to take a strict religious path which is very difficult while living in a culture which is full of infidels.

Ahmad is a product of a third generation Irish-American mother who has forgotten her religious faith and an Egyptian student who suddenly departed when Ahmad was only three years old. He adores his absent father, yearns for him and turned towards religion when he was eleven. The Imam at mosque becomes his surrogate father who motivates him to involve in terrorist activities. He is fully aware of the fact that he is being manipulated by his imam yet he faithfully listens to his master who advises him to become a truck driver instead of continuing his studies. Ahmad also fears that his studies would make him a secular American citizen and will ultimately take him away from his religion. By becoming a truck driver, he thinks he will take revenge from the infidels and become a martyr.

Jack Levy, the career guidance counselor of Ahmad is quite perplexed at his sudden decision of becoming a truck driver especially after the incident of 9/11. Levy is an American Jew who is cut off from religious practice. He is the alter ego of Ahmed. He too is critical of American culture, but unlike Ahmed, he views it as the outcome of historical events. He feels at home, yet there are significant similarities between the views of the world-weary Jewish teacher and his idealistic Muslim student. Through Jack, Updike blames the society for not allowing the children to be innocent anymore. The adults are not the role models and no one is there to accept the responsibility. “Kids keep showing up, hoping for some guidance ... They want to please society... They want to be worthy, if we could just tell them what worth is” (202). Ahmad proves his loyalty towards religion by following his Imam’s orders and drives the truck full of explosives to destroy the tunnel. He is ordered to fulfill this mission exactly at the anniversary of

9/11 attack. Jack is also with him and convinces Ahmad not to explode the bomb. Ahmad is angry with him and expresses his displeasure about his mother's association with a Jew. But Jack asks him to consider him an American first, "Hey come on, we are Americans here. That's the idea; didn't they tell you that at central high? Irish-American, African-American, Jewish Americans, there are even Arab-Americans" (297).

Finally the transformation of a serious minded teenage Muslim boy takes place. In a moment he realizes that, "God does not want to destroy: . . . He wills life" (301). This sudden change of heart is not the last minute transformation. The inner struggle, conflict whether to be a Jihadi or not can be traced back when he himself confides, "Jihad doesn't have to mean war. . . . It means striving, along the path of God. It can mean inner struggle" (146). The confused innocent soul can be seen when his imam asks, "Did you not discover that the world in its American portion emits a stench of waste and greed of sensuality and futility?" and to which his reply is honest if not pleasing, "People are pretty nice mostly," (230). He decides to observe life through a new angle. Besides Jack, Ahmad's employer Habib Chehab also believes that America is a friendly and honest country where everyone can live without any problems. He never agrees with the allegations maintained against America. In this novel, Updike confirms the thought that the belief in American multiculturalism is the only good cause: "You believe this; I believe that, we all get along" (36).

Ahmad is seen as a battlefield of two contending ideologies. The Imam represents the Islamic extremism and uses Ahmad's personal trauma to develop hatred against the society he lives in. Jack, on the other hand, is the symbolical figure of American inclusive way of life and consequently is able to appeal Ahmad's conscience. The writer suggests indirectly that unless American values intervene, the Islamic extremism may succeed.

**The Reluctant Fundamentalist** is about the experiences of a Pakistani Muslim youth living in the United States when the 9/11 happened. This novel explains the impact of the attacks on the individual's sense of belonging in relation to the host and home nations and the subsequent conflict. One common theme in the 9/11 texts is the desire of a person to return to the past. The terrorist attacks of 9/11 presented a challenge to the contemporary life and induced a frightening narrative of the future. Henry Giroux explains the idea of politics of worldliness which is similar to the idea of wakefulness by Edward Said. The idea of personal inability to sleep is related to politics as Giroux argues:

This sense of being awake, displaced, caught in a combination of diverse circumstances suggests a particular notion of worldliness—a critical and engaged interaction with the world we live in mediated by a responsibility for challenging structures of domination and for alleviating human suffering. As an ethical and political stance, worldliness rejects modes of education removed from political or social concerns, divorced from history and matters of injury and injustice. (150)

This theory of cultural and critical wakefulness points at the importance of action. The trauma of 9/11 encouraged the individuals to understand their existence. It was the incident of 9/11 which stimulated Changez and made him realize his truth.

Changez's responsiveness towards fundamentalism is an absolute freedom of choice. Unlike other typical fundamentalists, Changez is a descendent of a prominent rich family from Lahore, works in a firm in America, in pursuit of his American dream and in love with a beautiful American girl, Erica. The description of the protagonist is made through his monologues with an American tourist. In the beginning, Changez behaves as a person who

deeply loves America. His admission at Princeton University for higher studies is one of his dreams. This develops an idea in his mind that everything is possible in life. Having a job in America marks the accomplishment of his dreams. He is leading a satisfactory position and a life of success. But this dream-life is thwarted by 9/11. When he watches the collapse of the Twin Towers, he is perplexed but at the same time he registers: "And then I smiled. Yes despicable as it may sound, my initial reaction was to be remarkably pleased" (72). Was he after all not a reluctant fundamentalist but an inherent one? This secret sense of elation is a verdict. He is that typical Muslim youth who is in awe of American life style and at the same time politically charged. Knowing that American Empire has its own fundamentals, he is only too happy to know that at least someone has been able to bring America to her knees. This ambivalent reaction to a horrific image later helps him in his soul searching, making him realize that he would always be an outsider. He also realizes that he will always be judged, closely watched and not trusted as an American.

This event of great destruction made all the foreigners, particularly Muslims, an object of suspicion. After 9/11 attacks, young American Muslims, especially the immigrants have to face a racial discrimination. Perhaps, this war on terror was formulated primarily against the immigrants: "Pakistani cab drivers were being beaten to within an inch of their twice; the FBI was raiding mosques, shops and even people's houses; Muslim men were disappearing, perhaps into shadowy detention centre for questioning or worse" (56). Changez was no exception and it added to his trauma. During this incident, Changez is also suffering from mental sickness that leads him towards delusions. The title of the novel makes the readers anticipate Changez to move towards fundamentalism, though reluctantly. But that the real fundamentalism that Hamid points out is that of the US capitalism represented by the Underwood Sampson: "Focus on the fundamentals. This was Underwood Sampson's guiding principle drilled into us since our first day at work" (49). Changez's final decision to quit this job indicates his discrediting the financial fundamentals and he moves back to a place where the current economic and sociopolitical situation is in a state of fluctuation. Later, Changez comforts his American listener by assuring him that, "I am a believer in non-violence: the spilling of blood is abhorrent to me, save in self-defense" (91), thus, putting his fundamentals in juxtaposition to American war on terror.

**Falling Man** by DeLillo is about the traumatic state of the protagonist, Keith Neudecker, a lawyer in an office in the World Trade Center and a survivor of the attacks. This novel elaborates Keith's life after the attacks, following him through domestic and workplace issues. The experiences of Keith after the attacks are explained. He is living an aimless life without any boundaries of time and space. The structure of the novel depicts a cyclical movement that supports his entrapment driven by grief. David Aberbach explains the element of grief:

In normal grief four main phases may be identified, although these may oscillate or overlap with one another. First on suffering the loss there is a sensation of numbness, which may last for as little as a few hours and generally passes within a week or so. Second, the bereaved yearns and searches for the lost person—this may last for months or even years. Third despairing of the possibility that the lost person will return the bereaved undergoes depression, and this too may last for long periods. Fourth, and finally, he will come to terms with the loss and reorganize his life in accordance with the changed circumstances. (28)

In *Falling Man*, Keith is in search of his identity and he also desires love. He suffers from traumatic disorder and is unable to find peace anywhere. He tries to make his life normal but does not overcome his grief. These four conditions of grief appropriately circumscribe the sufferings of Keith. When the attack happens, he becomes senseless. Then he makes a search for his loved ones and comes back to his family. Then he undergoes a stage of depression and finally realizes his loss and comes to terms with this life.

Hammad, in contrast, is another example of a terrorist living in the United States. He is a terrorist who participates in the attack on the World Trade Centre. Hammad grew up in Iraq, took part in the Iraq-Iran war. The war experiences influenced him a lot. He experienced the cruelties of war, the death of his friends in horrible conditions that after this experience he could not live a normal life. He was not able to forget and meeting the other terrorists gave him hope. They convinced him that his life is predestined. They took a hard burden off him. He got rid of the guilt he felt for surviving the war and for killing other people. It seemed easier to become a puppet led on strings by others than living his life with all the duties and responsibilities that life brings on.

The terrorists persuaded Hammad with phony ideological belief: "Never have we destroyed a nation whose term of life was not ordained beforehand" (152). Still Hammad has his doubts. "He has to fight against the need to be normal in order to create the conditions that will allow him to help carry out the 9/11 plot" (Morley 84). Even at the end when sitting in the cockpit of the plane he has to assure himself that he is doing the only right thing he can do: "Forget the world. Be unmindful of the thing called the world. All of life's lost time is over now. This is your long wish, to die with your brothers" (224). *Falling Man* tells the story of Hammad and the other terrorists to juxtapose it to the sufferings of people like Keith. Moreover, the terrorists are the only Muslim characters in the novel. He excludes any possible Muslim victim of the attacks. Don DeLillo concentrates on common Americans, how they dealt with the attacks, how their lives went, how can a man put up with something so inhuman. But these Americans are the proper Americans.

## **Conclusion**

In these three novels central characters are opposite to each other. Ahmad is represented as a teenager who is studying in high school. Changez is a highly educated person leading his life of his own accord. Keith is an American who is living a dispersed life due to the attacks. Updike makes a stereotype notion that the Muslims will always try to topple the American way of life and with a tendency to turn to violence whenever it is convenient for them. Hence, they are culturally misfit in American society. Whereas Hamid gives an opposite view that the Muslims are not terrorists, but because of being perpetually alienated racially and culturally, they become reactionary. As Changez tells the American, "you should not imagine that we Pakistanis are all potential terrorists, just as we should not imagine that you Americans are all undercover assassins" (111). While DeLillo represents an American suffering from the attacks. This perspective forces the reader to think about the problems of Americans in a sentimental way. As an aftermath of 9/11 the political landscape of the world is deepened with distrust, suspicion and confrontation. Through these novels a tensed relationship between the West and the rest is portrayed. Terrorism becomes the vital cause of clash of civilizations as Huntington observes, "the paramount axis of world politics will be the relation between the west and rest". The quest for identity has become a problem after the 9/11 attacks. Secularism has been threatened by

attacks on the Twin Towers. This century has been recognized as the post secular era, denoting either turns to religion or the rapid rise of fundamentalism. As a famous political theorist T.N.Srinivasan notes:

Resort to a single religious identity is self-defeating in a multi-religious society. Secularism is not just the confrontation between religion and the state. It requires new initiatives by the state and by the citizens in relation to the essentials of a secularized society. If citizenship is to be the primary identity, it will have to place other identities of class, caste, religion, gender and language in their appropriate places, and will have to define the identities that go into the making of citizenship. (106)

These novels suggest that the trauma that followed the 9/11 attacks forced the individuals (and writers also) to embrace a single religious/national identity as is evident through the engagements of the characters.

### References

- Abel, Marco. "Don DeLillo's 'In the Ruins of the Future': Literature, Images, and the Rhetoric of Seeing 9/11." *Pmla*, vol. 118, no. 5, 2003, pp. 1236–1250., doi:10.1632/003081203x68027.
- Aberbach, David. *Surviving Trauma: Loss, Literature and Psychoanalysis*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1989.
- Banerjee, Mita. "'Whiteness of a Different Color'? Racial Profiling in John Updike's *Terrorist*." *Neohelicon*, vol. 35, no. 2, 2008, pp. 13–28., doi:10.1007/s11059-008-4002-x.
- DeLillo, Don. *Falling Man: a Novel*. New York: Scribner, 2007. Print.
- Giroux, Henry A. *Terror of Neoliberalism: Authoritarianism and the Eclipse of Democracy*. Aurora, Ontario: Garamond Press, 2004. Print.
- Hamid, Mohsin. *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*. Oxford University Press, 2007. Print.
- Huntington, Samuel P. *The Clash of Civilizations: the Debate*. New York: Foreign Affairs, 1996, [www.hks.harvard.edu/fs/pnorris/acrobat/huntington\\_clash.pdf](http://www.hks.harvard.edu/fs/pnorris/acrobat/huntington_clash.pdf).
- Kakutani, Michiko. "A Man, a Woman and a Day of Terror." *The New York Times*, *The New York Times*, 9 May 2007, [www.nytimes.com/2007/05/09/books/09kaku.html](http://www.nytimes.com/2007/05/09/books/09kaku.html).
- McLeod, John. *Beginning Postcolonialism*. U.K: Manchester University Press, 2000. Print.
- Morley, Catherine. "The End of Innocence: Tales of Terror after 9/11". *Review of International American Studies*. Volume 3.3 – 4.1. Winter 2008 / Spring 2009. (82-93)
- Said, Edward W. *Orientalism*. New York: Pantheon Books, 1978. Print.
- Srinivasan, Thirukodikaval N. *The Future of Secularism*. New Delhi: Oxford Univ. Press, 2011. Print.
- Updike, John. *Terrorist: A Novel*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2006. Print.