

**JOHN UPDIKE'S TERRORIST AND DON DELILLO'S FALLING MAN: A  
NEW TREND OF STEREOTYPING MUSLIMS IN THE 9/11 NOVEL****Bilal Ahmad Kuthoo**

Research Scholar (English), Jiwaji University, Gwalior



**Cite This Article:** Bilal Ahmad Kuthoo, "John Updike's Terrorist and Don DeLillo's Falling Man: A New Trend of Stereotyping Muslims in the 9/11 Novel", International Journal of Interdisciplinary Research in Arts and Humanities, Volume 3, Conference World Special Issue 1, Page Number 236-238, 2018.

**Abstract:**

The September 11, 2001 attacks on World Trade Center effected many endeavors in world from foreign policy to military alliances, discrimination and profiling, images and stereotypes both in news media and films, and American state policy "War on Terror". Fiction about 9/11 is abundant with the images of trauma, terror, loss and a sense of victimization on the part of Americans. But at the same time, a new trend of Muslim profiling is found in many 9/11 novel written by novelists like Don DeLillo and John Updike. This paper will analyze the stereotyping of Muslims as Terrorists, hijackers, fundamentalists, violent extremists etc. in the novel about 9/11 especially John Updike's *Terrorist* (2006) and Don DeLillo's *Falling Man* (2007). Muslims were profiled all over Europe after 9/11, discriminations against Muslims were on rise, the novel has played a definite role in documenting this profiling of Muslims. The paper will concentrate on both depictions of stereotyping and profiling, and identity dilemma of Muslims after 9/11.

**Key Words:** 9/11, Stereotypes, Muslims, Profiling, Terrorists & Fundamentalists

**Introduction:**

The initial novels on 9/11 like Art Spiegelman's influential 2004 novel *In the Shadow of No Towers* is bound to depict the experiences of the attack and its aftermath, and it recounts the "physical and emotional" response to 9/11 (Keniston & Quinn 1). But tracing the history of 9/11 writings shorter forms appeared first—essays, brief personal reminiscences, and poetry. And at the same time, 9/11 has given rise to a number of hybrid forms, including the *New York Times's* "Portraits of Grief," and to new kinds of images and iconography in written texts, graphic novels, and traditional comic books. The initial writings about 9/11 include poems published online by nonprofessional and often anonymous poets. Frequently conventional in form, these poems attempt to bridge the gap between personal loss and a larger political meaning. The 2002 poetry collection edited by Allen Cohen and Clive Matson, *An Eye for an Eye Makes the Whole World Blind: Poets on 9/11*, consciously attempted, as its editor claims, to set forth through poetry "historical record of these monumental events."

Frederic Beigbeder's novel *Windows on the World* (2004), depicts events inside the World Trade Center on September 11, while Don DeLillo's *Falling Man* (2007) incorporates 9/11 into a larger story about its effects on a survivor and his family. Transition from 2004's *Windows on the World* to 2007's *Falling Man* demonstrates another feature of 9/11 narratives, now Muslims appear as prominent characters in 9/11 novels like Hammad in *Falling Man* (2007) or Ahmad in *Terrorist* (2006). The focus now is on Muslim characters, their religiosity, their morality, their violent nature and mentality, their reaction to American ways of life, multiculturalism, sexuality and female liberation. In the case of novel like *Terrorist* and *Falling Man*, both the authors have portrayed Muslims with archaic mentality which abhors any advancement in civil liberty or morality. Ahmad in *Terrorist* is stereotyped as a religiously emotional teenager and Hammad in *Falling Man* is depicted as a hijacker motivated to kill Americans. This paper analyses these stereotypes in 9/11 novels.

**Ahmad in John Updike's Terrorist:**

Ahmad is the main character of the John Updike's novel *Terrorist*, a nineteen-year-old American-Muslim, product of a catholic Irish mother and Egyptian Muslim father. Born in America and brought up by non-practicing catholic mother in absence of his Muslim father, Ahmad ironically depicts an inborn attraction to Islam and abhorrence both to American way of life and Christianity. Updike does not provide Ahmad any chance to show any teen age emotion either in the school among other fellow students or in post-school life when he choose track driving as his career. Ahmad has been stereotyped as deprived of any type of teen age emotions including any feeling for opposite sex. Joryleen, a classmate of Ahmad feels attracted to him and invites Ahmad to church to listen her sing a solo. Ahmad's quick response is, "I am not of your faith," and Joryleen's reply, "Oh, I don't take all that seriously," surprises Ahmad. He, even at the age of nineteen, is depicted as deeply involved in religion, taking religion seriously unlike any other American teen. He instructs Joryleen, "If you don't take your religion seriously, you should not go" (10-11). Updike has borrowed typical Orientalist perception to portray Ahmad with an inborn religion tendency.

"By juxtaposing the lives of an Islam-fanatic, self-marginalized, eighteen-year-old Arab American student, Ahmad Ashmawy Mulloy and a middle-aged, Jewish-but-atheist school counselor, Jack Levy," Pamela Mansutti argues and goes on to say that "Updike effectively crystallizes post-9/11 American stereotypes about religious and racial identity" (108). Updike has forced the comparison of Islam throughout the novel with Christian and Jewish cultures, the former has been depicted more fanatical, violent and narrow, the later has been portrayed as rational, peaceful and broad minded. Sheikh Rashid and Jack Levy play the role of Ahmad's teacher, through them Updike spells out his perceptions about Islamic and Judo-Christian cultures and religion. Jack Levy is a rational face of everything, being a Jew Updike portrays him most reasonable who advises Ahmad to advance his studies and try to get into some good university. Whereas Ahmad's religious mentor, Sheikh Rashid, advises him to become a truck driver because he convinces Ahmad that college education will take him away from Islam. As Ahmad says, "He said the college track exposed me to corrupting influences—bad philosophy and bad literature. Western culture is Godless" (38).

Ahmad is a stereotypical Muslim character who hates American way and senses being protector of God, "being God's sole custodian." His religious sense has been given more emphasis than any other emotion in him. Ahmad tells Jack Levy, "I of course do not hate all Americans. But the American way is the way of infidels. It is headed to terrible doom" (39). Ahmad has been made the representative of youth of whole Muslim world and as if millions of young boys from all over the Muslim world

hate America without any reason and as if the opinions about America does not have any historical background. Sheik Rashid without any ambiguity represents the religious leaders of Islam who, as portrayed by Updike, keep Muslim youth away from any rational thought and scientific education. And Updike makes Ahmad to acknowledge as on the part of whole Muslim youth, as taught to them, “all unbelievers are our enemies. The Prophet said that eventually all unbelievers must be destroyed” (68). Updike’s point seems to be that Muslims youth does not do anything but to plan day and night how to destroy America, in reality there is a major portion of Muslim youth who dream to advance their careers in American and other Western countries.

Updike makes Ahmad obsessed with “Strait Path” and trucking, as if both are interconnected, as if driving a truck will lead him to the Strait Path but it certainly leads Ahmad to terrorist plot to blow up the Lincoln Tunnel with a truck full of explosives. Updike justifies the act of Ahmad, “*Be ruthless to unbelievers. Burn them, crush them because they have forgotten God*” (294). Updike uses many passages from Quran to prove that the behavior of suicide bombers is always suctioned by Islam and killing all non-Muslims is the principal preaching of Quran. Updike tries to be the master of teen age Muslim mind, making Ahmad think and act in such a way that seems to be the typical Islamic mentality but in reality he creates an Other, a mentality which is deviation from the rational American mind. Ahmad has been made a stereotypical representation of Muslim youth.

#### **Hammad in Don DeLillo’s *Falling Man*:**

Don DeLillo has often written about terrorism and he is considered one of the prominent novelists to create the terrorist characters. Hammad has been portrayed as a typical stereotypical terrorist who has a good technical education and is trained for flying an airplane. *Falling Man*, a novel about the trauma suffered by the American people after the attack, a good portion of the novel has been dedicated to discussion of Islam, God and terrorism: “They invoke God constantly. This is their oldest source, their oldest word. Yes there is something else...” (FM 112). Hammad as a character of Muslim terrorist pervaded with arguments what “their” God allows and how they have been doing this to make the God happy. DeLillo puts all the notions in the head of Hammad about everything in Muslim World. He thinks “Most of the countries are run by mad men” who are nothing more than the instruments of America. Hammad almost scorns the rulers of every Muslim country from Saudis to Kadafi.

DeLillo starts in the novels about the hijackers describing their nationality, “A man turns up from Kandhar, another from Riyadh,” and “One of the men had fought in Bosnia” (81, 80). DeLillo describing their stereotypical appearance says, “They all were growing beards” (79). Next they have been shown plotting the terrorist attack in a mosque and sometimes at a flat of one of the comrades. Their animosity towards America, as other characters in the novel discuss and argue, DeLillo eliminates any historical development but remains content with mere self-declaration that all this is sanctions by their religion and God. And DeLillo humorously say “they knew that Islam is under attack.” The only source of violence for Hammad and his comrades is that “they read the sword verses of the Koran” (83). DeLillo proclaims all this with such a surety as if all the Muslims unceasingly think only of destroying America and is the product of American abhorrence in Muslims.

Hammad is a stereotypical combination of many things, he is religious, violent, motivated to kill as many Americans as possible with blowing himself in the midair with an American plane killing Americans on and on. He represents Muslims with murderous intentions that in themselves are fiction as explained by theorists like Zizek and Baudrillard. Hammad “fully indoctrinated by the spirit of Islamic fundamentalism, he is trained for suicide missions and wears a plastic key on a chain around his neck to open the door to Heaven when the time comes” (Mihāilā 23). “Afghanistan, in a training camp, where Hammad had begun to understand that death is stronger than life. This is where the landscape consumed him, waterfalls frozen in space, a sky that never ended. It was all Islam, the rivers and streams” (FM 106). Hammad has been made an embodiment of violence and than that violence has been associated with Islam by proving this is all Hammad is inspired by and “taking hostages, the siege, the explosions, this was Russia, Somewhere, hundreds dead, many children” (FM 206).

Hammad is indecisive regarding his life, he wants to lead a normal life and at the same time he longs for heaven. But he is equally violent in his acts; DeLillo describes him, “Together with two other Muslims, Hammad goes for hunting a man whose identity remains unclear. Being unsure what that act is all about, Hammad hits the guy three or four times and readily leaves the place” (FM 57). “In the following passage,” Ali Aldukhina argues, “DeLillo wants to complete his orientalist picture of Hammad representing him as a ruthless murderer” (9). Hammad’s internal monologue has been offered as evidence for his being inclined towards the acts of terrorism and heaven which seem complimentary to each other.

#### **Conclusion:**

*Terrorist and Falling Man*, while portraying the so-called Islamic terrorism, have borrowed the popular images of news media. Both Ahmad and Hammad are complicated stereotypes of terrorism and Islamic fundamentalism. Taking impetus from orientalist perceptions and commercial Hollywood movies, Ahmad and Hammad have been depicted as obsessed with the desired object i.e. heaven. Both the authors try to show that the motivation behind the violent acts is Islamic teaching which is not Western’s new discovery either. European Orientalists always blamed Islam for conservative culture of Islamic countries, non-cooperation with imperialist projects and resistance to Western modernism. In the post-9/11 fiction these Orientalist stereotypes resurfaced and image of a young Muslim terrorist suicide bomber and hijacker became almost a cliché.

#### **References:**

1. Aldalala`a, Nath. “Contesting the Story?: Plotting the Terrorist in Don DeLillo’s *Falling Man*.” *Jordan Journal of Modern Languages and Literature* Vol. 5, No. 1, 2013, pp.71 – 84. Web.
2. Aldukhina, Iman Ahmed Ali “The Representation of Islam and Muslims in Don DeLillo’s *Falling Man*.” AL – NASSER UNIVERSITY, July- December 2015 Vol. 1 No. 6. 1-14.web.
3. DeLillo, Don. *Falling Man*. Great Britain: Picador, 2007. Print.
4. English, Sandy. “Casting about for the truth of 9/11: Don DeLillo’s *Falling Man*.” *World Socialist Web Site*, 27 August 2008. Retrieved on 23/01/2018 from <https://www.wsws.org/en/articles/2008/08/fall-a27.html>
5. Hartnell, Anna. “Writing Islam in Post-9/11 America: John Updike’s *Terrorist*.” *Culture, Diaspora, and Modernity in Muslim Writing*. Ed. Rehana Ahmed, Peter Morey, Amina. New York: Routledge, 2012. 135-148. Print.

6. Mansutti, Pamela. "Ethno-religious Identities and Cosmopolitan Echoes in John Updike's 'Terrorist' (2006) and Joseph O'Neill's 'Netherland' (2008)." *Università degli Studi di Milano- Facoltà di Lettere e Filosofia*. 9/11/2011 – 11/2011. 105-123. Web.
7. Mihăilă, Rodica. "The Falling Man of the 9/11 Novels." *University of Bucharest Review*, Volume X, no. 1, 2008. 21-25. Web.
8. Pirnajmuddin, H. and M. Salehnia. "Islam and Modernity: A Study of John Updike's *Terrorist* (2006)." *The Journal of Teaching Language Skills (JTLS)*, 4(2), Summer 2012, Ser. 67/4. 71-86. Web.
9. Updike, John. *Terrorist*. United States: Penguin Books, 2007. Print.