

Framing the Concept of 'Other' in the West : Muslims in Post 9/11 Fiction and Society

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Abstract. From western Africa to southern Asia, the Muslim world includes many countries with significant Muslim populations, not to mention Muslim Diasporas scattered throughout the globe. On 11th September 2001 with the fall of the Twin Towers in the US, the world experienced a huge change in the relationship of multicultural US with the Muslims of Asian-Arab countries, thereby developing a notion of the 'other'. The result of this Islamophobia has led to subsequent wars on terror and with the overthrow of Saddam Hussein's regime in Iraq, the United States has become deeply involved in the affairs of the Muslim world, where religion, politics and culture intertwine in complex and conflicting ways. The present study examines the impact and challenges of September 11, 2001 on liberal imagination and shows how our ability to engage in democratic criticism of the liberal public sphere in the 21st century is overshadowed by mistrust. Using references from a few Post 9/11 fictions, the paper examines how 9/11 introduces a new history of racial segregation of the Muslims as the 'other'.

Keywords : America; diaspora; islamophobia; multiculturalism, other, Post 9/11 Fiction.

With the collapse of the World Trade Center, the multicultural American society started experiencing a change, and many social theorists applied a new interpretation to the term 'multiculturalism' which was based on the concept of the 'other' for a given community. In the aftermath of the tragedy of the 11th September 2001, when the Twin Towers and the Pentagon were ravaged by the suicidal attack by Al-Qaeda, the world has never been the same for Muslims around the world. In response to the genocide, loss of lives, destruction of wealth and destruction of one of the most important sectors and centres of world trade, Western countries focused on the Middle East and South Asia, especially Afghanistan and Pakistan, which eventually led to the United States' involvement in the war against terrorism. In Iraq in the Middle East and in Afghanistan in South Asia, the United States announced a war on terrorism. Western media seemed to be obsessed with the activity of the Islamic world Post 9/11, including the Middle East and many of the

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countries in South-East Asia, portraying the Muslims as the 'other'. This has been problematized well in fiction written after the aftermath of the Post 9/11 like Don DeLillo's *Falling Man*, John Updike's *Terrorist*, Mohosin Hamid's *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* and Khaled Hosseini's *The Kite Runner* to name a few.

There is a perception that 9/11 damaged multiculturalism in the West because of fears that tolerance for cultural differences might lead to the spread of radical Islam among immigrant communities. Though, more substantial scrutiny reveals that multiculturalism's fate varies from society to society, due to the ways in which the least of a 'soft' kind appears to have been less adversely affected than Western Europe. In addition, native-immigrant boundaries define cultural differences. Since 9/11, multiculturalism has been particularly threatened wherever a large proportion of migrants are Muslims; and natives, whether secular or Christian, discriminate against ethnic minorities in the name of religion. In the U.S. approach to multiculturalism, it is witnessed that the second-generation youth often suffer from a variety of ethnic penalties yet have access to education, employment, assimilation, and even citizenship. As Winant points out, "much conceptual work still needs to be done in this area, regarding correlations between the well-developed theories of segmented assimilation and new assimilation that originated in the United States and other societies, such as France or Germany. Attention may also be paid to, as per the point of view of Winant, the differences in the institutions, self-understandings, and histories of these societies in ascertaining the role of state intervention in assimilation practices and policies. Studying integrating immigrant groups in various societies requires a systematic approach that accounts for the apparent path dependency in the integration process.

Political scientists have explored multiculturalism, while scholars of American Studies have turned their attention to transnational or globalized American culture. While discussing multiculturalism, these theorists largely ignore the traumatic effects of 9/11. Since 9/11, multicultural cultures on both sides of the Atlantic have faced major challenges, and American Studies plays an important role in this discussion, particularly because diversity is essentially cultural rather than political. Researchers studying multiculturalism after 9/11 primarily focus on the cultural context and implications of multiculturalism rather than the political ones and how these are expressed in cultural texts. The impact of 9/11 on the dynamics of American multiculturalism in a post-9/11 context is well reflected by writers of fiction as well.

The text, Delillo's *Falling Man* simply rethinks the identity of Muslim as confusing in entire manner and said to be hostile. The characters of Muslim subvert Americas' hegemonic hierarchies revealed, "It is said to be the 're-signification' racism concept in the level of narrative along with the religion as its component of the major level. It is getting meaning which is new in the juxtaposing society of America to the values of Islam, a binary level which is appearing in the stronger manner through novel" (Hubel *et al.* 42). The religion branding is allowing writer for incorporating the supremacy in the America's socio-historical context from past which continues in society of the contemporary world as a fear of Islam. "The text deconstruction is permitting us for seeing the religion as a kind of source to beliefs which is conceive and ideas have sheathed into racism notion" (Rana, 154). The novel's narrator goes into the mind of Hammad. Hammad who is a character of the novel of Muslim faith is getting ready for the suicide bombing with the help of lessons of stern religious belief. This has been demonstrated as the brain washing procedure. The radical kind of beliefs is pressurizing him for adopting in radical ways. In systematic manner, they have inculcated in him a spiritual world desire and morality of this kind of physical world.

Delillo has said "the things have faded in the dust. Its' better to Leave these kind of things behind when we have ate and slept over here along with all kind of people and houses. This is all dust particles in light and fire of days for coming this is all kind of dust particles" (Delillo, 171). Hence the ideology is produced about Muslims as 'they' are unable to cope up with the American mindset as well as their religious primitiveness is a reason to make them feel a kind of alienation from the mainstream American society.

Similarly, John Updike in his novel *Terrorist* opens with a contradiction. The first page of the narrative explores an essential contradiction between American society and Islam from Ahmad's viewpoint. He is 'excluded' and 'subordinated' in many ways (Wieviorka 14). "Islam was supposed to be as inherently violent. Updike's novel portrays such 'essentialized' Islamic beliefs assumed by Americans to explain the innate and biological differences in the form of religious identity markers; naturally possessed by Muslims as shared characteristics" (Fredrickson, 3). The narrative emphasizes the environment at the expense of characters, rebellious and disapproving of the American society. Perception of Christian worshippers as 'kinky-haired kafirs' that "reflect insanity of Ahmad's mind that views 'the singe of hellfire' for Americans" (Updike, 17). It develops Ahmad's image as a psychopath with an abnormal

and violent social behaviour. The narrative depicts an extremely violent picture of fundamentalist Islam - a plain view of Islam as a threat- "a historic enemy whose faith... [is]distinctly opposed to West" (Esposito, 169). It is to condition the way in which non-Muslims treat Muslims. American characters in the novel share same opinion of Islam and Muslims. Ahmad's mother, Teresa clearly denounces Islamic beliefs in chapter two of the book "I've never believed in people being pots of clay, to be shaped" (Updike, 90). Islam teaches the doctrine of all human beings as products of clay shaped in various moulds. Teresa, Ahmad's mother is weary of the situation and behaves indifferently towards Ahmad, particularly his religious matters. Here a historical manifestation of racism in the form of religious fear dominates the discourse of the novel and represents Muslims as 'others'.

Contemporary American novels focus on South Asians, the Middle East, and Muslims, adapts alterations to American Orientalism's institution, making it more imperial: "American novel defines itself within the broader post 9/11 American cultural context which is based on the American political orientations as well as the relationship between politics and aesthetics, and between history and narratives." (Altwaiji, 75) Secondly, we also need to look at how Islamists and Islamic fundamentalists are utilized to symbolize a variety of Islamic principles and Middle Eastern culture. Islamism is now seen as a separate movement from Islam, as a fundamentalist movement based on political Islam. New authoritarianism has developed from the ideology of a worldwide modern movement. It will also look at how Islamic terrorism became a must-have in American fiction about Orientals. Yet, if we don't consider Islamic terrorism in connection with hegemony, we would be making a grave error.

Huntington claims that "future conflicts will be sparked by culture, and that interaction with other civilizations will result in a feeling of difference for each culture. In addition, he emphasizes that religion plays a crucial role in establishing cultural identity and that religious beliefs can be the most influential and differentiating aspect. This binary opposition between 'us' and 'them' will have a significant impact on the definition of their religious and ethnic identities." (21) The aftermath of 9/11 would lead to Muslims being viewed as immoral and incapable of adapting to modernity.

In this context, the Muslims ('other') are portrayed as America's enemy. Orientalism still appears to dominate Western perceptions of the

Oriental more than three centuries after its creation. Orientalism is reproduced today with an amplified fear of the Orient and a definitive link with terrorism. In Gregory's view, "Orientalism is abroad again, reborn and enflamed - because these accretions also create a performative citationary structure." (Gregory, 18) Western perception of the Oriental affects its object, the Orient, because of "the practices of those who draw upon it. Since 9/11, Oriental images are revived and invigorated in order to establish a clearer picture of the enemy. A geopolitical analysis of De Lillo's portrayal of Islam and Muslims in *Falling Man* is offered in this paper using the conceptualization of Orientalism and architectures of enmity. By using 'Difference' as a construct, the novel illustrates how difference plays a role in portraying Muslims. 'Islamic agency' examines the narrative's illustration of the association between Islam and Muslims' extremist acts and radical ideologies. As a conflicting ideology, Islam plays a role in the third construct, 'clashing Islam.'

There were two entries when *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* (2007) was first published. In the first article, Rajini Srikanth examines South Asia's role in the Global War on Terror, while Deborah Solomon interviews the author in the New York Times (2007). "Manipulative Fictions: Democratic Futures in Pakistan" by Cara Cilano and "Covert Operations in Contemporary Pakistani Fiction" are early works that focus on Pakistani literature. According to Khan's 2011 article, "Pakistani fiction challenges stereotypes of the terrorist as a Middle Eastern man from the Middle East and emphasizes the protagonist's ties to America. The entries in the book are characterized by several recurring themes, including post-9/11 America, globalization, fundamentalism; East meets West, identity, and the other." (Gohar, 86)

The essay "Psychoanalysis and the Transformation of Heroes" by Abdul G Awan, Shaista Andleeb, and Farhat Yasin of the Institute of Southern Punjab in Multan, Pakistan, will be helpful in this case. Both novels by Mohsin Hamid, *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* (Changez) and *Moth Smoke* (Daru) feature Pakistani heroes. While they live in different countries, one in America and the other in Pakistan, the authors highlight a number of similarities between the two characters. During times of crisis, both characters become antiheroes. After 9/11, Changez quits his successful life in America and goes to Pakistan to begin a new life. Dastur loses his job after being employed for several years. In order to regain financial stability, he does not have the right contacts. He begins using drugs and gets incarcerated.

According to Greta Olson's "Identity and Identification in Mohsin Hamid's *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*", 9/11 still holds a significant place in world history. Authors around the globe have been influenced by it, among other things. In both the novel's discourse and story, Olson discusses how identity and identification are represented. From the standpoint of both the main character and the environment in the United States, she points out that the main character's identity changed after 9/11. Oliver reflects on how *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* leaves the reader to interpret its ending. Identity, as in national, social, and personal identity, thus becomes central to the interpretation of the novel. Her essay on personal identity and thoughts on identity will aid in the analysis of the characters in this essay.

Akbar S. Ahmed argues that hysterical attacks on the South Asian, Arab, and Muslim communities after September 11 reinforced "existing stereotypes about Muslims" since "to many Americans Islam is synonymous with terrorism or extremism." (Ahmad, 140) Islamophobia and binary thinking soon swept the world. Since the 9/11 attacks, the term "Islamophobia" has existed in different societies for several decades in the form of stereotypes and prejudices. A. G. Noorani points out that this reaction is "a malaise" of today's times, which "banishes reason from religion" and compassion from faith". (Noorani A.G., 18)

In *The Kite Runner*, a community of Afghan immigrants in America attempts to rebuild their Afghan identities through traditional practices. Migrant writers like Hosseini seek to bring recognition back to their homelands. *The Kite Runner* presents the following perspective: "Iran was a rising power in Asia and most people around the world couldn't even find Afghanistan on a world map." (50)

Or Because of terror and the Taliban, Afghanistan occupies more space in the news than it did in his first novel. In such circumstances, through a meaningful piece of writing, a responsible writer must be able to remove assumptions and hypotheses. *The Kite Runner's* preface reveals that many people around the world have taken action and helped in rescue and rehabilitation camps after reading the book. Throughout the novel, dates are referenced which contributes to the authenticity of the story. After a long time, Amir's return to Afghanistan is again seen as a return to the past with his driver remarking, "You've always been a tourist here, you just didn't know it" (204). Due to the anti immigrant attitude especially towards the Muslims, according to the novelist, is a struggle for the lower middle class Afghans to stay in America with dignity. They are the Muslims-the 'others'.

As a result of September 11, 2001, literature and history have entered in a new period: even current events are viewed through the prism of 9/11. If September 11th, 2001, marked a traumatic event for the United States of America, it also marked the beginning of identity negotiations for the Muslims. In the wake of the tragic events of this day and their difficult aftermath, everyone has divided their lives into two sections: Before and after. In the post-modern period, executions were seen equally as moral and physical: designs were created for punishing those who did not side with the US, binary opposition and separation emerged in many societies, and Western extremism echoed Islamic fundamentalism by demonizing Islam, Muslims, and Muslim traditions.

Some authors took this subject on as a challenge, choosing to politicize their works while others stayed true to the human component of the tragedy by setting it within the confines of one social unit, the family, and a microcosm of each individual. Novels about 9/11 is dominated by the theme of self-destruction: society's confusion is reflected in them. Often, the main character is numb, confused, and disenchanted with society. Often, the main character must face existential questions alone, misunderstood, and differing from society. The result is self-destruction in various forms. It is usually the protagonist of a story who has strong beliefs, and he or she is often referred to as a hero rather than a victim. In 9/11 literature, there is a great deal of criticism of consumer society and mass media influence. In such novel, a novelist reveals the tragedy of individual and societal injustice, moral apathy and harsh real-life circumstances.

After 9/11, many critics agree that literature started a new era. According to Akbar S. Ahmed says, "ideas and practices of multicultural harmony, eclecticism and juxtapositions [...] were halted in their tracks on 11 September 2001". (Ahmed, 140) As Ahmed points out, the horrific incident triggered numerous lasting changes in American society and culture, "the tragic event was the beginning of the new century in many ways. American society's frustration and loss are echoed in literary texts in many different forms and extend across national borders. The 9/11 novel is characterized by its attempt to disclose a global conflict, which is about the contrast between two different cultures, between American modernity and consumerism and obedience and faith. In many novels, American and Islamic attitudes toward culture and religion are in conflict and make Islam and Muslims as 'other' which has left multiple argument to be countered.

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