

Updike's *Terrorist*, and Don De Lillo's *Falling Man* as Neo-Orientalist Narratives of Arab and Muslim characters

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Abstract:

Since the Crusades, there has been a centuries-long conflict between the West and Islam. The crusaders' philosophy was centered on the duality of "we" versus "them." Western monarchs, clergy, missionaries, businessmen, and authors tended to see Islam and Muslims through myopic lenses, creating an exotic, weird, and distorted image of Islam and Arabs Muslims in their Fiction. These novels profoundly impacted how the Muslim and Islamic World were portrayed in the scholarly subject of Orientalism and Neo-Orientalism. This study underpins that orientalist depictions of Arabs and Muslims as barbarians, lethargic, unprogressive, and a potential threat to world peace are still prevalent in today's world. Neo-Orientalism is the postcolonial label for this reincarnation of orientalist ideology. Updike's *Terrorist* (2006), and Don DeLillo's *Falling Man* (2007), have been chosen as specimen texts to this effect.

Keywords: Neo-Orientalism, Arab and Muslim characters, Updike's *Terrorist*, DeLillo's *Falling Man*

Introduction and theoretical framework:

In postcolonial studies and literature, the topic of Orientalism has received a lot of attention. *Orientalism* (1979), a foundational work by Said, "It examines preconceived notions that comprise a wide array of subjective constructs about the peoples of the Orient, their beliefs, and the way they act is an important precursor and the most authoritative scholarship in the field" (Kerboua 9). Said (201) divides Orientalism into two types latent and manifest. The former "describes the dreams and fantasies about the Orient that... remain constant and fixed over time" (McLeod 43). Said (206) argues that latent Orientalism is unconscious and perhaps untouchable. This is because it refers to abstract concepts that cannot be seen or examined. These latent ideas, attitudes and ideologies can be realized when they are spoken out or written down. In contrast, manifest Orientalism refers to "the various stated views about Oriental society. Language, literature, history, sociology and so forth" (Said 206). Orientalism, according to Said, is a collection of stereotypes, distortions,

myths, and fancies imposed by the Occident (the West) to dominate it. As an academic subject, Orientalism was also a Western way of thinking: “a way of coming to terms with the Orient that is based on the Orient's special place in European Western experience” (Said 1). Using Michel Foucault's concept of discourse, Said argues that, “Orientalism can be discussed and analyzed as the corporate institution for dealing with the Orient—dealing with it by making statements about it, authorizing views of it, describing it, by teaching it, settling it, ruling over it: in short, Orientalism as a Western style for dominating, restructuring, and having authority over the Orient (Said 3). As a result: “This negative image is reflected in the polemical writings and literary texts of the day” (Kidwai 2016-3)

Branding Orientalism as a method of representation, Said argues that when Orientalism came to the East, they thought that the “main thing of the European visions was a European representation of the Other”(1). Imaginative representations of the Orient are used to construct the Orient. The concept of representation is frequently founded on a desire to be faithful to the original. However, in addition to ‘truth,’ representation is heavily entwined with a variety of other factors. It is defined not only by a shared subject matter but also by a shared history, tradition, and universe of discourse within a certain topic. (Said 273). Writers, thinkers, artists, pundits, travelers, politicians, and others operating within comparable discursive contexts generate the phenomena of representation. According to Said, the West's image of the East is based on a deliberate and intentional endeavor at subordination. Orientalism, or Western discourse on the Orient, has historically worked to legitimize and sustain Western imperialism's goals: “For Said, Western representations of the Orient, no matter how well intentioned, have always been parts of this damaging discourse. Wittingly or unwittingly, they have always been complicit with the workings of Western power” (Bertens 204).

Furthermore, Bhabha (67) explains that the West engages in two types of representation: sexual and racial. The first emphasizes the physical body and the behavior of the natives in a way that makes them exotic and mostly distorted. The other one focuses on labeling stereotypes to each case of the native such as stereotyping the Indian as lazy and the Arab as violent (McLeod 44). This indicates that the West fixes some stereotypes in its representation of the Orient to prove that the Orientals are backward, degenerate, uncivilized, savage, violent or lazy. In addition, by fixing these stereotypes, Orientalism legitimizes the Western occupation of the Orient, as argued by Al-Malik: “The generalization becomes complicated when one adds Said's conception that Orientalism has nothing to do with the “real Orient” and it is – consciously or not – subservient to imperial interests. In other words, Orientalism does not depict the Orient, but legitimises the imperial order” (10).

From Orientalism to neo-Orientalism:

In the humanities and social sciences, the topic of Orientalism has been extensively discussed. It sheds light on the Arab-Muslim world's peculiar structure. Orientalism has

existed in a variety of historical contexts, but it has always emphasized specific Western interpretations of the Orient. In today's world, the term has evolved to refer to modern Oriental structures. In the Western public sphere, new portrayals of Islam and the Muslim world are gaining traction (Kerboua7). Orientalism reappeared in the post-World War II guise as Neo-Orientalism. In actuality, it was a repackaging of an older version of Orientalism that vociferously attacked just Islam and its adherents, rather than a fresh concept about Islam. Under the patronage of Bernard Lewis, the new-Orientalists argue that Islamic nations have fallen behind the times and that Islam's precepts concerning the inextricable interplay of politics, religion, and politics make it incompatible with modern democratic norms (Arif at al. 454). After 9/11, when a number of literary works based on Neo-Orientalist ideology surfaced, this thoughtwave gained substantial traction. In the Neo-Orientalist ideology, the Muslims and Arabs are represented as terrorists.

In the aftermath of the 9/11 attacks, (Wajahat et al 3,9,13,15,19) document the funding and dissemination of Islam phobic propaganda by prestigious and wealthy foundations, think tanks, as well as presumed experts and politicians in the American public scene. They emphasize the anti-Muslim campaigns' domestic nature. However, it is worth mentioning that actors in the American public sphere also contribute to the strange constructs of the Muslim world in general. (Wajahat et al. 58,94) also look at how neoconservative activists, commentators, and politicians like Daniel Pipes, Newt Gingrich, Robert Spencer, and David Horowitz helped to create unfavorable stereotypes about Islam, the Muslim world, Arabs and Muslims in the United States

Similarly, American policymakers launched the "War on Terror" against a non-state entity known as Al Qaida, as well as its satellites and affiliate movements around the world. Since then, an increasing number of Western intellectuals and academics have investigated the ideologies that motivate such non-state actors to understand what happened, why it happened, and how to deal with it (Asad 7,9).

In addition to having an impact on society through policymakers, the 9/11 discourse has also impacted the literary sphere. As a result, a number of writers have emphasized the Americans' innocence and victimization as a result of the terrorist attacks. For instance, the critic Martin Randall clearly mentions "that the dominant discourse has sacralized the 9/11 attacks and ... that this discourse has affected 9/11 literature" (Eikonsalo 88). This indicates the extent to which the attacks are highlighted and given importance. As a result, the majority of post-9/11 fiction portrays Arabs and Muslims as terrorists and vicious who cannot cope with the modernity of the Western societies. In this light of Neo-Orientalist ideology, this study sheds light in the stereotypes of Arabs and Muslims post 9/11 in the work of Updike's *Terrorists* (2006) And Don DeLillo's *Falling Man* (2007).

Arab Muslim Characters in John Updike's *Terrorist* (2006)

In the aftermath of the 9/11 attacks, many writers have portrayed the impact of these events on the US and its population. They have portrayed the Americans innocent and victims and the Muslims as extremists, terrorists, and the only ones to be blamed. As a result, Arab/Muslim characters are depicted as terrorists and a serious problem for those in power and ordinary people as well. This section shows how Muslim characters Ahmad, his father, Shaikh Rashid, and Charlie are depicted in the *Terrorist* by John Updike. *Terrorist* tells the story of Ahmad Ashmawy, an 18-year-old who follows the Islamic path and seeks martyrdom. At home, He lives with his third-generation Irish American mother, who is a Catholic but has abandoned her religious beliefs. He hates his mother because of her openness to sexuality, her relationship with men, and her lack of religious beliefs.

Ahmad was a good student in high school who attended the Quran lessons of his teacher, the Yemeni Imam Shaikh Rashid, in a neighboring mosque. These lessons were held in the mosque every Friday after evening prayer before the sunset. Ahmad's attitude towards his girlfriend and disdain for unbelievers in his heart was a result of Shaikh Rashid's instructions. Ahmad is drawn first to Islam and then to Islamic terrorism. After graduating from high school (though he was intelligent enough to join university) he was hired as a truck driver with Excellence Home Furniture which finally led him to cause a huge explosion in the name of Allah. His job at Excellency Home Furnishings was secured by his imam Shaikh Rashid who manipulates him into assisting in a bombing plot. Updike attributes Ahmad's radicalization to his father's absence, which died when he was three years old. He needed to be guided by the father in his life, as his mother Terry says: "I guess a boy needs a father, and if he does not have one, he'll invent one." (Updike 117). The absence of his father leads him to trust a Yemeni imam, Shaikh Rashid who brainwashed him to become a suicide bomber in Lincoln Tunnel but Ahmad gives up on his terrorist plan after the intervention by Jewish man, Jack Levy.

As previously mentioned, Ahmad was drawn to Islam and then to fanaticism and terrorism. Even his imam was surprised by his religious feelings: "The student's faith exceeds the master's; it frightens Shaikh Rashid to be riding the winged white steed of Islam, its irresistible on-rushing" (Updike 7). As a result of religious fanaticism, Ahmad develops hatred toward the United States, and its capitalist society, the center of globalization, and "Satan's heart" (Updike 293); and he thinks that "Western culture is Godless. [...] And because it has no God, it is obsessed with sex and luxury goods" (Updike 38). As depicted by Updike, Ahmad's anti-modernist stance, which opposes everything about America, puts him in the "Other" category. Updike identifies Ahmad as the "Other" when he shows how as a teenager, he is entirely different from a normal American teenager. He shows abhorrence for Western ways instead of receiving pleasure from an erotic and permissive atmosphere, as natural to a teen.

Updike plays the idea of a cycle: At first, Ahmad thinks "Devils' seek to take away my God" (3). Also, at the end of the novel and after Jack has convinced him to give up his plan because he himself is a "victim" (309), Ahmad feels again that he is deprived "These devils, Ahmad thinks, have taken away my God" (Updike 310).

Another main character in the novel is Shaikh Rashid, a Yemeni Imam who teaches Ahmad the Quran in the mosque. He cites many Quranic verses about Jihad to teach Ahmad and develop the idea of Jihad 'martyrdom' in his mind. He is considered as a symbol for Arabs/ Muslims and for every imam who uses the Quran to persuade others to fight against the West and America. Shaikh Rashid teaches Ahmad that all non-Muslims will be tormented in the furnace of Hell. He refers to them as 'kafir', which literally means unbelievers. He recites many verses from the Quran to incite hatred and intolerance in Ahmad's heart towards America and to prepare him to bomb himself up in the tunnel. Shaikh Rashid develops complete hatred for nonbelievers by comparing them to insects and cockroaches with no significant existence. Shaikh Rashid teaches Ahmad that there are verses whose meanings cannot be known and that thinking about the Hereafter and about God is considered a sin. Updike highlights the threat of people like Shaikh Rashid to show how dangerous they are. Shaikh Rashid considers any religious question that does not have suitable answer to be placed in the category of blasphemy. Shaikh Rashid is considered as cultivating Ahmad's mind with abhorrence for everything American. Ahmad and Shaikh Rashid view Americans as "manifestation of Satan" and "devils" (Updike 77). Updike uses Shaikh Rashid's character as a symbol of all Arabs and Muslims to generalize his idea for all Muslims and Arabs even though such a character is an enemy for Arabs and Muslims more than to the West.

Another Muslim character is Charlie Chehab. He is Ahmad's partner at the company of Excellency Home Furnishings, who recruits him for a bombing plot. Like Ahmad, Charlie grudgingly agrees that America wants to "to take our God" (Updike 188). He also loathes the imperialistic threat posed by America: "The Western powers steal our oil, they take our land" and a fundamental denial of human dignity: "They take from Muslims their traditions and a sense of themselves, the pride in themselves that all men are entitled to" (Updike 188). However, Charlie is "enamored of George Washington" (Updike 180) and risked his life for America's well-being by working undercover for the CIA. He exposes the plot of the terrorists to bomb Lincoln Tunnel. He finally "died for his country" (Updike 291) at the hands of the terrorists at the end of the novel. Charlie's strength of character lies in being more American than Muslim.

Throughout the novel, Updike presents the Jewish character Jack Levy as opposed to Shaikh Rashid, Ahmad, and Omar Ashmawy's religious views. Muslim characters are compared with a Jewish character to show how Muslims are extremists, terrorists, and enemies to America while Jack, through his secularism, has abandoned religion to assimilate

himself into the American identity. Updike demonizes Islam by portraying Shaikh Rashid, Ahmad, his father and Charlie with terrorist traits. Instead of giving an accurate image of Islam and its followers, he has given Western stereotyped images of Muslims. Updike distances himself from his characters and lets them express what they feel and think. However, I believe that he implicitly tries to present his characters from his point of view as a western intellectual in general and an American in particular.

Arab Muslim Characters in Don DeLillo's *Falling Man* (2007)

Falling Man presents the terrorists' viewpoint about the world. The novel has the two Muslim characters, Hammad and Amir (Mohamed Mohamedel- Amir el-Sayed Atta) to reveal everything about their beliefs and identify themselves as terrorists. Hammad is the young fictional terrorist located initially in Germany, where the real-life attacker Mohammad Ata (known in the novel by the Arabic title Amir, meaning a commander or leader) is grooming him to carry out the twin towers attack. The author talks about two different worlds and society: American culture and the group of fundamentalists Muslims. The extremist part is presented through the Muslim characters, Hammad and Amir by focusing on their fanatical and terrorist aspects. Hammad is one of the terrorists in the novel who helped hijack the planes and stands for death, not for life. On the other hand, Amir is another terrorist in the novel who works along with Hammad. He is the leader of the terrorist group. He portrays Hammad and Amir as an example of the beginning of the modern era of terrorism. His characters are a representation of the mentality of the post 9/11 young jihadist.

Hammad, the Arab Muslim who holds an American passport, is considered the central Islamic figure in the novel, who embodies terrorism. Hammad, a young Muslim man, becomes involved in a terrorist group from various countries around the world whose members are Muslims "He had to struggle against himself, first, and then against the injustice that haunted their lives. They read the sword verses of the Koran. They were strong-willed, determined to become one mind" (DeLillo 83). Hammad and his group see themselves living in an unjust society so they have to struggle with themselves and against injustice as well. He was influenced by his charismatic friend, Mohamed el- Amir el-Sayed Atta, who was at the group's secret meetings. He was finally found to be the terrorist who blew up the Twin Towers. Through the character Hammad and his leader Amir, he shows how the terrorists see the West: "Everything here was twisted, hypocrite, the West corrupt of mind and body, determined to shiver Islam down to bread crumbs for birds. They studied architecture and believe in destroying the West because it controls their world" (DeLillo 79).

Regarding the description of Muslim characters as terrorists, the novel is divided into three parts, which are as follows: pre-attack world, flight training and the hijacking of the plane, and crushing the towers. The first part shows the terrorist, Hammad in Hamburg, Germany where he starts his early days under the leadership of the real terrorist, Mohammad

Atta “They studied architecture and engineering. They studied urban planning, and one of them blamed the Jews for defects in construction.” (DeLillo 79). The second part is in Nokomis Florida, Hammad with other fellow terrorists where “they sat around a table on day one and pledged to accept their duty, which was for each of them, in blood trust, to kill Americans.” (DeLillo 171) The same group is training on a flight in Nokomis. The last part is inside the hijacked plane, the last moments of Hammad before crushing the towers. He thinks that: “Every sin of your life is forgiven in the seconds to come. There is nothing between you and eternal life in the seconds to come.” (DeLillo 239). And "recite the sacred words" (DeLillo 238) to be patient in order to complete the mission “finally, ready to close the distance to God" (DeLillo 172).

Falling Man also explores Hammad's mindset and formulates it with the rhetoric of imaginative terrorists revealing his vision. He is deeply investigating Hammad's thinking and highlights his main fault of being extremely impotent and powerless in front of his fierce friends “He was a bulky man, clumsy, and thought all his life that some unnamed energy was sealed in his body, too tight to be released.” (DeLillo 79). Then a transformation appears in his mindset, where he finds it necessary to shake the West into chaos: “Everything here was twisted, hypocrite, the West corrupt of mind and body, determined to shiver Islam down to bread crumbs for birds” (DeLillo 79).

Amir asserts that they are on the right path to remove doubts from Hammad’s mind: “This is not suicide in any meaning or interpretation of the word. It is only something long written. We are finding the way already chosen for us.” (DeLillo 175) Amir teaches Hammad to feel no regret for his person or any remorse for his victims. In other words, he is brainwashed by Amir especially when he asks about the others who will die. Amir answers simply: “There are no others. The others exist only to the degree that they fill the role we have designed for them. This is their function as others. Those who will die have no claim to their lives outside the useful fact of their dying” (DeLillo 176). As a result of brainwashing, Hammad becomes ready to die, and considers the point of his strength to love death “We are willing to die, they are not. This is our strength, to love death, to feel the claim of armed martyrdom” (DeLillo 178). Amir ‘s perpetual powerful rhetoric which borders on a religious war, a key to paradise, and America ‘s blatant interference in their culture has broken Hammad’s innate resistance. Hammad finally interprets that the only task that will give meaning to his life is to die for the sake of God “There was no feeling like this ever in his life. He wore a bomb vest and knew he was a man now, finally, ready to close the distance to God” (DeLillo 172). It is clear that “Hammad’s body becomes the agent of the sovereign will of fundamentalist terror against his own will” (Cvek 9)

Hammad is portrayed in the novel as the naive victim of Amir. He was affected by some ideas that are against his human will. DeLillo returns to an old stereotype that illustrates

some cultural biases, and that demonstrates the influence of young people with anti-Western discourse. Regarding this Said demonstrates the differences between the Westerners and Arab/Muslims: “the former is rational, peaceful, liberal, logical, capable of holding real values, without natural suspicion; the latter is none of these things” (Said 49)”. One more aspect that added to Hammad’s personality is the inability of the character to comprehend humanity or find a justification for what he is doing. There is no sense of the other and what will happen to them. He thinks from a narrow window that makes him commit such crimes: “the terrorists fail to recognize the humanity of their victims” (Versluys 19).

He asserts how religion is used to manipulate young people through old Muslims from Iraq who had served in the army during the days of Saddam Hussein. He tells his story to Hammad when he was in the army about young boys “the martyrs of Ayatollah, here to fall and die” (DeLillo 77) they were driven by an ideology that will grant them Paradise.

Through describing Arab Muslims characters as a terrorist who attacked the World Trade Center. DeLillo correlates Islam with terrorism, as he constructs his narrative of terrorism through his view of Arabs, Islam, and Muslims. He states that “Islam is the struggle against the enemy, near the enemy and far, Jews first, for all things unjust and hateful, and then America” (DeLillo 79). He correlates Islam with terrorism through depicting Muslims characters in the novel “Hammad in a certain way though this was unfair.... He had to fight against the need to be normal. He had to struggle against himself, first and then against the injustice that haunted their lives” (DeLillo 83). The above quotation shows the hatred that Muslims carry towards the West. He indicates that the criminality of the Muslims is rooted in collective Islamicism, describing the group of Muslims living in New York as terrorists where “every cab driver in New York was named Muhammed” (28). In describing Muslims this way, they are introduced as enemies of the American style of life.

The only possible heroes of our time, says George Haddad in *Mao II* (1991), are “the lethal believer(s), whose who kill and die for the faith (Hossein et al 158). This idea takes less than two decades to be fully realized in *Falling Man*. Hammad is like Ahmed in Updike’s *Terrorist* who is willing to die for one’s faith because of his faulty mindset. Hammad has become one of the extremists and terrorists as he thinks and looks the same way his group does. He declares “We are willing to die, they are not. This is our strength, to love death, to feel the claim of armed martyrdom” (178).

The minor character in the novel, Anna, from Alzheimer’s groups, shows the local people’s reaction to the event “You can’t get to these people or even see them in their pictures in the paper. You can see their faces but what does it mean? . . . You don’t know what to do. Because they’re a million miles outside your life” (DeLillo 80-81).”.

There is a brief reference to Omar, who is not portrayed as a terrorist. He is the only Muslim in the novel who is not portrayed as a terrorist. Through which the writer drew an illustration of the state of Muslims in America after the events of 9/11. Omar is a member of the Alzheimer's group and he is the only student who does not want to write about the events of 9/11, which is considered as the feeling of guilt by Muslims. In other words, the impact of events on all Muslims resulted in a special type of insecurity. On the other hand, Omar's favorite and safe place is the writing group. He is afraid to go out into the street because people might recognize him and harm him. To conclude, the process of generalizing that Muslims and Arabs are all terrorists reiterates the clash of civilizations.

Conclusion:

After analyzing the representation of Arab and Muslim characters in Updike's *Terrorist* (2006), and Don DeLillo's *Falling Man* (2007), one can wrap up by saying that these novels prove to be a Neo-Orientalist narrative in the representation of Arab and Muslim characters. They adopt the Neo-Orientalists' view of Arabs and Muslims as new barbarians and terrorists. Both of them have given Western stereotyped image of Muslims. They demonize Arab and Muslim characters by portraying Ahmad, Shaikh Rashid, Omar Ashmawy, Hammad, and Amir (Mohamed Mohamedel- Amir el-Sayed Atta) with barbaric and terrorist traits and neglect any positive aspects for the same. Portraying all Arab and Muslim characters negatively provides readers with a distorted image of all Arabs and Muslims as barbarians and terrorists. For Updike and DeLillo, the violence of Arabs and Muslims is inherited in their cultures. They follow the Neo-Orientalists' assumption that cultures of Arabs and Muslims encourage violence. Tuastadsays: "Neo Orientalism, are consistent with the tenets of new barbarism, where violence is seen as deeply rooted in local culture" (595).

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