

Tracing Identity, Fear and Trauma in Don DeLillo's *Falling Man*

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Abstract – In the inception of the 21st century, the world witnesses the 9/11 that has affected everything. The literary representation of the 9/11 cover a wide range of its issues; narratives of trauma, fear and phobia. The genre of post-9/11 fiction touches the primary theme of fear and trauma as the issues of identity emerged in the period. DeLillo's *Falling Man*(2007) is one of the literary representations of post-9/11 trauma fiction. DeLillo's *Falling Man* reveals the American psyche that has developed after the 9/11 with full of trauma and fear. This paper aims to analyze Don DeLillo's *Falling Man* in the context of fear and trauma. The paper also attempts to examine the oriental discourse of DeLillo's *Falling Man*. The paper also tries to investigate how does an identity response the 9/11 and how does it cause the fear and trauma in the novel?

Keywords: Identity, Fear, Trauma, 9/11, Orientalism, Don DeLillo, *Falling Man*

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INTRODUCTION

Don DeLillo is the most popular American Novelist. He was born in 1936 in New York. His writing covers a wide range of subjects and themes. He attempts to depict the social, historical and political subject of America. He stands a very versatile American writer. His writing always touches most serious and very controversial subjects and themes that include the Cold War, Terrorism and politics. These subjects are widely reflected in his writings. He has written novels; *Americana* (1971) and *End Zone* (1972), *White Noise* (1985), *Libra* (1988), and *Mao II* (1991), *Underworld* (1998), *Artist* (2001) and *Cosmopolis* (2003). DeLillo's *Falling Man* (2007) is the most critical novel. The novel covers oriental discourse of terrorism and trauma. He has received Carl Sandburg Literary Award in 2012 and Medal in 2015 to American letters.

Don DeLillo's *Falling Man* (2007) is the most popular and very critical novel of the 21st century. 9/11 is widely discussed, debated and analyzed but still in subtle discourse and narrative that became a very horrifying incident in history. The post-9/11 world reshapes new debate on identity, fear and trauma. The Post-9/11 fictions also cover these debate and begin a narrative and counter-narrative as DeLillo's *Falling Man* create a narrative of trauma and fear caused by the 9/11. DeLillo intensively and extensively depicts the trauma and fear through his novel that tries to historicize the event. He successfully and artistically portrays a character of the novel; Keith Neudecker who is the protagonist of the novel. Through his protagonist, he wants to

represent the post-9/11 traumatic condition of the people. The image of a falling man has been created through his writing that develops a narrative of post-9/11 fear and trauma. The falling man is an image that symbolizes the level of attack. The image of a falling man also creates a high level of fear and trauma.

DeLillo's *Falling Man* represents characters who are survivors of terrorist attacks of the 9/11. These characters of the novel witness the attacks. The major character of the novel is Keith Neudecker who is also one of the 9/11 survivors of the attack. Keith is a character who is a 39-year-old lawyer. He works in the World Trade Centre. He is one of the survivors of 9/11 who escapes from the tower. From the tower, he escapes then moves unconsciously to his separated wife; Lianne. He shares his experience of the attacks and escapes from the tower. Both of them were separated but these horrifying incidents make a chance to meet each other again. Lianne is also a survivor of the attacks. She also escapes from the tower. Lianne is a physician as she treats to Alzheimer patients. Lianne started disliking Arabs and Muslims.

The novel includes its characters from a different part of the world America, Arabs and European. Keith and Lianne are American natives who experienced 9/11 and faces trauma. There are characters; Martin and Nina. Martin is the boyfriend of Nina. Both of them have a different idea of 9/11. There are also Muslim characters, Hammad and Amir. They are portrayed differently through DeLillo. Keith and Florence have encountered the

9/11 attacks. Both of them were in the tower but fortunately but escape from there. The incident left a mark in their psychological status of mind as their lives have been disturbed and devastating. They have experienced an attack that causes horror and fear. They live a life completely different and face emotional and psychological problems aftermath of the attack. Keith develops an emotional attachment to Florence. The life of Lianne has also been affected. She has a new development, a sense of obsession and starts suspecting everything a life-threatening. She begins a new life treating survivors of 9/11 and its affected people.

In the novel, DeLillo tries to portray Muslims characters through his orientalist point of view. He looks the East, Arabs, Muslim and Islam through his oriental lenses. Amir and Hammad are two Muslim characters of the novel. They are associated as terrorists who attacked the twin towers. DeLillo targets Islam and terrorism in the novel. He leaves the responsible for traumatic life due to Muslims. He targets a particular community through his representation of Muslim characters.

He constructs a narrative of terrorism and trauma through his oriental point of view. He creates his idea of terrorism and trauma in the novel prejudicially that is based on biased regional, racial and religious proliferation of identity. He narrates in the novel that:

Islam is the world outside the prayer rooms as well as the *Surahs* in the Koran. Islam is the struggle against the enemy, near enemy and far, Jews first, for all things unjust and hateful, and then America. [...] There was the feeling of lost history. They were too long in isolation. This is what they talked about, being crowded out by other cultures, other future, the all-enfolding will of capital market and foreign policies. (DeLillo 79-80)

In the novel, DeLillo very tactfully attempts to present Islam and Muslim in the form of terrorism and terrorist. Moreover, He tries to bias in showing and representing Islam and Muslim as stereotypically backward and violent. In the novel, DeLillo has applied the orientalist approach of defining and describes Islam, Koran and Prophet. In the novel, He correlates Islam and terrorism through the Muslims characters. He implicitly applied the orientalist view as observed in the novel:

They read the sword verses of the Koran. They were strong willed, determined to become one mind. Shed everything but the man you were with. Become each other's running blood.

Sometimes there were ten pairs of shoes. This was the house of the followers, that's what they called it, *dar al-ansar*, and that's what they were, followers of the prophet.

The beard would look better if he trimmed it. But there were rules now and he was determined to follow them. He was becoming one of them now, learning to look like them and think like them. This was inseparable from Jihad. He prayed with them to be with them. They were becoming total brothers. (DeLillo 83)

DeLillo's *Falling Man* narrates not only the experience of 9/11 but also the post-9/11 condition of American people and their painful and traumatic life. The novel tries to revisit the 9/11 that has left a dark and horrifying memory in Americans minds. The novel depicts the mental condition of the victims and sufferer of 9/11 American society. It represents the life of Americans after 9/11. The novel shows 9/11 and explains how the life of American society has changed after the attacks. DeLillo's *Falling Man* describe the horrifying historical events of the 21st century that has badly caused the personal social, political, and psychological condition of Americans and American society. DeLillo creates a historical narrative of 9/11 through its imaginative victims and sufferers in the novel who witness the attacks. He presents survivors in the novel through his oriental discourse of 9/11 and its trauma.

DeLillo presents the attacks at a very full of horrifying imagery that disturbs the normal mind completely. He attempts to dramatize the attack as traumatizing picturesque memories. DeLillo analyzes trauma and fear in the novel that is majorly caused due to the 9/11 attack. *Falling Man* appears to be as a narrative of trauma that has been created through victims who witnessed the attacks as he explains in the novel:

It was not a street anymore but a world, a time and space of falling ash and near night. He was walking north through rubble and mud and there were people running past holding towels to their faces or jackets over their heads....They ran and fell, some of them, confused and ungainly, with debris coming down around them, and there were people taking shelter under cars. (Updike 3)

Don DeLillo's *Falling Man* presents dimensions of fear and trauma based on individual and collective memories, assumption, perception and response of the 9/11. Through different characters of the novel, DeLillo tries to show the symptoms of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder in Americans. DeLillo tries to delineate the issues of post-traumatic stress disorder as Keith is victim responded actively and Lianne passively who treats and helps the patients of Alzheimer.

Don DeLillo's *Falling Man* tries to perpetuate the narrative of fear and trauma caused by 9/11. It is observed DeLillo depicts the characters in the novel through his orientalist approach visualizing and developing the symptoms of fear and trauma within a group of Americans rather than America

as a whole. There are so many studies that analyzed the contextual texts of the trauma largely discuss the fear and trauma after 9/11. It is claimed after 9/11 that fear and trauma have emerged as major issues in America and American societies including nonwhite, Muslims, Punjabis, immigrants.

DeLillo's *Falling Man* is an orientalist representation of fear and trauma that is narrative of the West that creates a binary showing the misrepresentation of Islam and the East. In the novel, DeLillo presents characters stereotypically, based on presupposed of victims and sufferers of 9/11 from a particular group and family rather than from diverse American societies. In the study, it is observed that DeLillo has biased and orientalist approach for creating the narrative of fear and trauma by targeting other communities.

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