9/11 AND WESTERN IMAGINATION: A STUDY OF SELECT NOVELS

Thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy in

ENGLISH LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE

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Declaration

I, Shihabudheen. C, hereby declare that the dissertation entitled **9/11and Western Imagination: A Study of Select Novels** submitted to the University of Calicut in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in English Language and Literature, is a bona fide work done by me under the guidance of Dr. Umer Thasneem, Assistant Professor, Department of English, University of Calicut, and that I have not submitted it or any part of it for any degree, diploma or title before.

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Certificate

This is to certify that the dissertation entitled **9/11and Western Imagination: A Study of Select Novels** submitted to the University of Calicut in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in English Language and Literature, is a bonafide work carried out by Shihabudheen, C., under my guidance and supervision. Neither the dissertation nor any part of it has been submitted for the award of any degree, diploma, or title before.

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Introduction

On 11 September 2001, the World Trade Centre and the Pentagon in the United States came under terrorist attack. Noting the "enormity, unexpectedness, and uniqueness" of the attack, Beverley Raphael says that "not only was America assaulted, but the world saw, and felt what happened". (*9/11: Mental Health* 26) Yuval Neria, et al observe:

> On the morning of September 11, 2001, with the attacks on the World Trade Centre (WTC) and the Pentagon, the world that many of us thought we knew, was altered. While thousands of people were directly exposed to or witnessed the attacks from close proximity, millions around the globe watched the events in real time or repeatedly over time on news channels. The attacks of 9/11 will likely be the most witnessed terrorist acts in modern history. (*9/11: Mental Health* 1)

Indeed, when the news spread, the world stood, shocked, scared, and amazed. How could such an enormous act of terror be committed inside America, the world's most powerful nation, ever on the alert and guarded with an exceptionally elaborate and meticulous security and defence system? How could the terrorists manage to evade the constant vigilance of its various, well-trained, and well-equipped security agencies? An observation, which Pankaj Mishra makes in his book, Age *of Anger*, is worth noting in this context: Attacks on Western cities since 9/11 have repeatedly provoked the questions: 'Why do they hate us?' and 'Who are *they?* (Mishra, *Age of*

Anger 9). Such were the questions that immediately came to everyone's mind everywhere. The attack was, obviously, staggering in terms of the devastation it caused, killing around three thousand persons, injuring thousands, and razing to the ground the giant twin towers of the prestigious edifice of the WTC. Spectacular, dramatic, and well-orchestrated, it was carried out using four highjacked US airplanes, two of which were flown straight to hit the towers, and one to hit the Pentagon. The fourth airplane, rumoured to have been heading towards the White House, crashed in a field in Pennsylvania, a few miles off the Capitol. The hugeness of the havoc, which resulted from the attack, is summed up by Charles Townshend: "New York saw the damage that looked like a wartime raid" (*Terrorism: A Very Short Introduction* 2). He elucidates that "the attack was deadlier, in terms of fatalities in a single day than bloodiest battles of the Civil War (*Terrorism: A Very Short Introduction* 2). In Zizek's reckoning, "the attacks were a totally unexpected shock", and what really happened when the Towers fell, was "the unimaginable Impossible" (*Welcome to the Desert* 9). It may be of interest to note here that the 9/11 disaster had put the public in mind of Hollywood fantasies about grotesque-looking aliens with superior brains and technology, or ugly, gigantic, and super-strong creatures like Godzilla, attacking and terrorizing US cities. Commenting on this association of 9/11 with Hollywood disaster movies, Zizek observes that "the unthinkable, which happened was the object of fantasy, so that, in a way, America got what it fantasized about, and that was the biggest surprise" (*Welcome to the Desert* 10). Hollywood's imaginative, celluloid reality had become a material reality. As Zizek puts it, "what happened on September 11 was that this

phantasmatic screen apparition entered our reality. It is not that reality entered our image: the image entered and shattered our reality" (*Welcome to the Desert* 10).

The perpetrators of the 9/11 violence were soon enough identified by the US as nineteen men of Arab Muslim stock, who were allegedly in league with Osama Bin Laden's terrorist network, Al Qaeda. However, side by side with the wildly held belief that the attack was the work of alien Islamic fundamentalists, there also came up an altogether different version of the attack's genesis. In certain circles, it was held that the attack was the result of an internal, domestic conspiracy in which the US administration was stealthily complicit. According to this view, 9/11 was a premeditated, well-calculated, and deftly stage-managed disaster with the specific aim of inventing a reliable and credible pretext for the US to invade, with unanimous American and world support, certain countries for widening and advancing its economic, commercial, and political interests abroad. Nevertheless, what has since taken strong root in the mind and imagination of the US, the West, and the whole world is the thinking that the New York tragedy was indisputably the work of Islamic fundamentalists extremist rigidly and maliciously opposed to the liberal, cultural, and democratic values and the global political hegemony, of the United States. The conspiracy theory, though still held in certain corners, remains largely sidestepped in most writing on 9/11, the numerical abbreviation internationally popularised by the US and used to denote the terrorist assault on the WTC and the Pentagon.

Consequent to 9/11, terrorism came to be viewed more seriously. Kent Roach observes: "A common narrative that emerged from 9/11 was that terrorism

was taken more seriously when it came to the West" (*The 9/11 Effect* 77). Accordingly, there was an unprecedented amount of counter-terrorism activity by the United Nations Security Council as well as by many nation-states. Western national governments, particularly the US government, evinced a phenomenal growth of interest in ensuring national security. As Kent Roach puts it, "many democracies and the UN were prepared to enact much harsher laws in response to 9/11 than they had enacted in response to previous acts of terrorism" (*The 9/11 Effect* 77). Richard English observes: "Post-9/11, steps have, of course, been taken to improve practical and preventative security, the 2003 setting up of the US Department of Homeland Security being one famous example" (*Terrorism: How to Respond* 136). Accordingly, laws were hurriedly expanded, amended, or enacted with the sole objective of stemming all forms of terrorist activity inside and outside the nation. The US Patriot Act is a notable instance of this frenetic legislation process. The Act has since become a notorious milestone in US legal history, because of the large-scale latitude and the powers it gave the government, and its executive and security wings, for handling matters relating to terrorism and other activities likely to jeopardize national security and interests. It has also been severely criticized for its sinister and subversive structure of extreme methods like arbitrary imprisonment, indeterminate detention without trial, ruthless interrogation, contrived disappearances, torture, profiling, and its propensity for denial of civil rights and liberties. This denial of civil rights and liberties was particularly evident in the predicament of the Arab- American Muslims who, after 9/11, had to go through several bitter and unnerving experiences at the hands of the US administration, just as the Japanese Americans had after the 1941 Pearl Harbour attack. Richard

English's views on post-9/11 anti-terror legislation are worth noting in this context. "Rushed legislation amid terrorist crisis has repeatedly been shown to be damaging; this has been clear again after 2001 when new laws have undermined important civil liberties". (*Terrorism: How to Respond* 135-136). Vindicating the criticism of such legislation, he notes that "liberal democratic states have reacted to appalling terrorist violence with measures which seem to validate at least some of their opponents' criticisms" (*Terrorism: How to Respond* 136).

The corrosive impact of 9/11 did not stop with its adverse effects on public morale and civic confidence in the US alone. It spilled over into other sovereign territories in the shape of two deadly wars, the Afghan and the Iraq wars. Stunned to the core by the unexpected experience of 9/11, the US government quickly took to a belligerent path, loudly declaring its War on Terror and its resolve to hound terrorism out of the world. Accordingly, it accused Afghanistan of complicity in the 9/11 attack, contending that the country was providing Bin Laden and his terrorist outfit a safe base to operate from. The US did not spare Iraq either, accusing Saddam Hussein's regime of backing Al Qaeda. Indeed, it was an accusation which, subsequently, proved to be utterly unfounded. With this view of 9/11 and its overseas state supporters, the US invaded and occupied Afghanistan in 2001 and Iraq in 2003, causing more of concern and anxiety the world over, and more of death and destruction in those two countries. It may be noted here that, with its supposedly anti-terror war on Iraq, America lost its credibility across the world. Emphasizing the importance of maintaining "strong credibility in counter-terrorist public argument" (*Terrorism: How to Respond* 140), Richard English says:

> The history of terrorism demonstrates very clearly the problems which can occur when states undermine their own credibility in their ongoing struggle against terrorist opponents. This has been seen recently in the War on Terror, during which the United States has lost considerable credibility within the Muslim world as a consequence not only of its Iraq policy but also of the manner of exposing it. To claim that Saddam Hussein had been involved in producing 9/11, and then to have to admit that this was not so; to claim that Saddam possessed WMD, and then admit that none could be found --- these have been extraordinarily damaging in their impact on US credibility among those who are the vital constituency to be won over. (*Terrorism: How to Respond* 140)

In fact, both the Afghan and Iraq wars have subsequently been seen as premeditated, geopolitical US reactions oriented toward furthering its imperialistic and commercial goals in the Middle East and West Asia through dominance over the two most strategically situated countries in the region.

Inside the US, the UK, and Canada, the impact of 9/11 has chiefly been of a social and psychological nature. Many experienced what Beverley Raphael calls "the multiple, acute, and subsequent stressors of the attack and its aftermath" (*9/11 Mental Health* 26*)*. Grief, panic, anxiety, and a deep sense of insecurity and vulnerability gripped the populations of these countries. The attack had its ethnocultural impact, too. It did lead to "social network damage, splitting, fear, and rejection of those who are different, perhaps, in terms of ethno-cultural distinctions"

(*9/11 and Mental Health* 27). For Westerners, especially Americans, 9/11 became a source of trauma, including ethnocultural trauma. In the US, as in Canada and the UK who were close US allies and collaborators in counter-terrorism campaigns as well as in several other spheres of activity, the Arab Muslims found themselves in a state of double duress and suffering. As members of the larger society, they, too, had shared in its post-9/11 rage and grief. At the same time, they had also to bear the brunt of long-held prejudices which, after 9/11, had been raked up on an unparalleled scale and had assumed menacing forms of corporal and psychological harassment, even though they had nothing to do with 9/11 or its perpetrators. In fact, the post-9/11 status of Arab- American Muslims will make more sense, when viewed in the larger context of their US history. Louise A Cainkar says:

> The negative treatment of Arabs and Muslims in the US after 9/11 was not caused by the 9/11 attack themselves, but by pre-existing social constructions that configured them as people who would readily conduct and approve of such acts. These social constructions did not emerge on 9/11 but were the culmination of processes of labelling an interpretation transmitted by interested actors through major American social institutions over the latter decades of the 20th century. (*Homeland Insecurity* 3).

Cainkar argues that this interpretation, which, entailed essentialized notions of inherent human difference, was often sought to account for the unrest and turmoil among the Middle Eastern peoples. The condemnatory and pejorative social constructs of the Arab Muslim, according to Cainkar, “set the stage for Arab

American Muslims to be held collectively culpable for the 9/11 attacks by the government, the media, and the citizenry" (*Homeland Insecurity* 2). The US government's way of tackling the post- 9/11 domestic situation may be said to have contributed, no small measure, to the agonies of Arab- Americans. According to Cainkar "the American government alleged and then vigorously pursued efforts to find connections between Arabs and Muslims living in the United States and the 9/11 hijackers" (*Homeland Insecurity* 3).

Indeed, there has been a tradition, in Western culture, of representing Arab Muslims as a monolithic people ever prone to violence and living with a weather-beaten, pathological culture. Their Islamic faith has accordingly been stereotyped as "a morally deviant religion that sanctions killing" (*Homeland Insecurity* 2). The minority community of Arab American Muslims, like some of the other minority communities, has over the years been racialized in America. In Cainkars's view, this realization can be attributed not to American "domestic interests" but to "the global political and economic interests of a rising American superpower" (*Homeland Insecurity* 2). During the post-cold war years, which witnessed a large-scale migration of Arab Muslims to the United States, Arab American Muslims were easily reinvented and depicted as a people unknown to mainstream America. Before long, they were seen as a volatile social formation, culturally conditioned to be a potential threat not only to the global allies and interests of the US but also to the US culture itself. Their religion was perceived as one that was intrinsically opposed to the West's core values of democracy and personal freedom. Notions about Islam as a serious cultural threat eventually became justification enough even for

"harassment and assault of Muslim women in hijab (headscarves)" (*Homeland Insecurity* 3). For the Arab - American Muslims, post-9/11 Unites States, whether it was their native or adopted homeland, "had ceased to be a place where members of these communities felt safe and protected" (*Homeland Insecurity* 3). To a large extent, the state of uncertainty and insecurity, in which they had to live, derived from the post-9/11 federal government policies which were "deeply informed by notions of unvarying, monolithic, and threatening Arabs and Muslims" (*Homeland Insecurity* 3). In the wake of 9/11, on grounds of not being US citizens, thousands of Arab Muslim immigrants were deported, and hundreds were jailed for extended periods of time without charge. Also, large numbers of Arab Muslims, who were born American citizens, were savagely interrogated and kept under constant surveillance. As such, Arab American Muslims were forced to live a nightmarish life, fearful that even an inadvertent violation of the norms s of behaviour expected of them can land them in serious difficulties with the authorities. "Their behaviour needed to meet a standard of perfection reserved for profiled groups: full stops at all stop signs, turn signals on all turns" (*Homeland Insecurity* 3). Collectively targeted as they were, they found their grounding in the US destabilized. Their social harassment and ostracization took on a variety of humiliating forms. There were shouts, asking them to go back to their country or threatening to kill them. Neighbours and citizens called them 'Osama' and taunted them, asking if they were bombs in their briefcases. Their outsider status and sense of insecurity were demeaningly and aggravatingly thrust upon them at the everyday local level by means of egg-throwing, spitting, hijab-pulling, garbage-dumping, ethnic slurs,

religious affronts, hate graffiti, insulting hand gestures, removal from planes, and even violent physical assault and murder. Cainkar observes:

> Battered in the grounded spaces of their daily lives, in the media, and the fundamental arenas of rights and citizenship, listening to co-workers' tales of Arab and Muslim barbarism, asked to explain the reasons for the attacks or to apologize for them, facing discrimination in the workplace, at airports, and in schools and banks, it is no surprise that Arabs and Muslims felt the chill of homeland insecurity" (*Homeland Insecurity* 4).

The social and political environment of the Arab Americans after 9/11 seemed to be one in which it was possible, even permissible, to say or do anything to them in the US. It is sufficient to note here that the situation of their counterparts in post-9/11 Canada or the UK was more or less identical.

9/11, and its consequences, instantly became a weighty subject for scholars and specialists in various branches of knowledge and academic disciplines. Sociologists, psychologists, experts in Terrorism Studies, International Relations, Trauma Studies, Peace Studies, and Globalization Studies have all scrutinized, and written about, it. As such, there is a large body of non-literary writing extant today. History and literature are intimately connected. A look at the literatures of the world will undoubtedly show that major historical events have always had their impact on literature. British Restoration Literature, Post-War Literature are classic examples. India's Independence Struggle has had an enormous impact on the literatures produced in India in its various vernaculars. It is, therefore, small surprise if a

cataclysmic event like 9/11, and the crisis it bred, became fit and ample raw material for filmmakers, creative writers, and other artists. Indeed, 9/11 has registered its impact on all branches of literature. The literature produced in the years immediately following it has now come to be known as post- 9/11 literature. 9/11 fiction is a significant tributary to this literature. This fiction may be broadly defined as fiction that treats, as its central concern, the 9/11 disaster and its aftermath. Not only American novelists but also novelists who belong to other cultures and nationalities have drawn on 9/11 and its socio-political, cultural, other dimensions.

Following 9/11, there was the feeling, particularly among writers, that it was so unique and horrible an attack that it was impossible to represent it in words or any other form of art. Catherine Morley observes that " in the immediate aftermath of the attacks, after all, many writers openly admitted their feelings of confusion and the futility of words in the face of such terrible (and starkly visual) events" (Morley, "How Do We Write" 719). Naming some such writers, Morley adds "So Jay McInerney, Arundhathi Roy, Zadie Smith, Ian McEwan, among many others worried about the inability of language to capture the reverberations of the attacks (719). Writing about 9/11, James Berger notes that "nothing corresponding in language could stand-in for it. No metaphor could carry language across to it (Berger, "There is No Background" 54). In Kleinfield's view, what the Lower Manhattan population witnessed on 11 September was "the inexpressible, the incomprehensible, the unthinkable" ("A Creeping Tower" 10). To Laub, 9/11 was "an event without a voice" ("September 11, 2001" 205)

Norman Mailer was of the view that writers should "wait 10 years"

(Morley, “How Do We Write” 719) to write about 9/11 because it would take that long for them “to make sense of it” (719). Writers, however, didn’t wait. What followed was several literary works, most of them, naturally enough, from the US, which took in 9/11 as their subject, and included, besides novels, plays, poems, short stories and even memoirs. Touching on the paradoxicality inherent in this phenomenon, Soltysik Monnet observes: “Thus, paradoxically, despite the widespread claims that language can only fail in the face of an event like 9/11, a fairly large number novels and works have been written about it”. (Monnet, “Image and Narrative” 159). The inexpressibility or unrepresentability of 9/11 may, therefore, be seen as a motif underpinning 9/11 novels. According to Morley, many of these works were immersed in “domestic, introverted scenes” (Morley, “How Do We Write” 720).

The tendency to represent 9/11 as a rupture with the past, followed by change, has dominated not only the immediate media responses to 9/11 but also the works of academics and writers. Lucy Bond rhetorically comments: “The feeling that time had stopped, that history was over, innocents destroyed, the nation traumatized, and America altered forever dominated the immediate reaction to the attacks across critical, political, media cultures in the US” (“Compromised Critique” 733). This notion of American change can be seen foregrounded in the title of the book, *The Sky Changed Forever* (2003) by Firyal Alshalabi and Sam Drexler. This idea of rupture is also be said to be a defining feature of 9/11 fiction.

The notions of incomprehensibility and inexpressibility have been yoked to the notion of rupture and used in analysing the 9/11 catastrophe and its impact. Lucy

Bond comments: “Such analyses bestow the impression of 11 September 2001 as a seismic schism between an orderly and innocent prelapsarian America and a horrifying and chaotic new reality” (“Compromised Critique” 735). It is a new reality that calls for new rules; usual rules are ineffectual in it. This idea of a new reality to be governed by the new rules is explicitly articulated in Joyce Maynard’s 9/11 novel *The Usual Rules* (2004). The novel rejects the applicability of the usual rules. “The usual rules just don’t apply anymore” (*The Usual Rules* 95). Therapists like Susan W Coates, who have worked with traumatized children and their families have said: “It was instant wisdom that the world had changed utterly” (“Brief Interventions” 25). In 2001, DeLillo described 9/11 as an event that “changed the grain of the most routine moment” (“In the Ruins of the Future” 12). Other writers like Jonathan Franzen Foer, Jay McInerny, Dory Laub, and NR Kenfield and many others also shared in the idea of change. 9/11 had altered everything, disrupted normality, and ushered in a new era and time. Using a couple of examples, one of which is DeLillo's *Falling Man*, Lucy Bond observes: “This notion of rupture has provided a master theme for the emergent corpus of 9/11 literature” (“Compromised Critique” 736). According to Bond, “DeLillo portrays the attacks as a period of interruptive time” (736). DeLillo’s protagonist Kaith Neudeckar, a direct victim and survivor of 9/11, frames and visualizes New Yorkers as living “in the light of what comes after” (DeLillo, *Falling Man* 246). The representation of rupture and change in 9/11 novels creates the impression that what confronts the characters is “a yawning temporal void” (“Compromised Critique” 737) and that what lies ahead for them is “the struggle to traverse the distance between ‘before’ and ‘after’, without

falling into the depths (737). In other words, it is a tough life in which they have to move on with care and caution.

The notions of change and discontinuity insistently articulated in 9/11 novels have been critiqued. Susan Faludi, for example, calls the idea of total change an "Insta-bite mantra, recited in lieu of insight" (*The Terror Dream* 2). What Faludi implies is that an inflated concern with the ideas of change and rupture in literary and non -literary discourses can hamstring the attainment of correct perspectives on 9/11 terrorism. As though, endorsing Faludi's view, Lucy Bond observes "Faludi's comments suggest that the concept of rupture works to deter, rather than facilitate understanding ("Compromised Critique" 737). In her view, the discourse of rupture and change is "apocalyptic rhetoric" that "repels the historical perspective" (737). The notion of rupture and concomitant change may be contested, since as Lucy Bond points out, "the exact moment of transformation is hard to locate" (737). Similarly, its vehement representation may also be scrutinized to see if it deters or promotes correct readings and knowledge of 9/11. The fact, nevertheless, is that it has passed into a recurring theme in 9/11 fiction and has become one of its clear markers.

Undoubtedly, there is, in 9/11 fiction a persistence of the element of the local and domestic, depicting the more intimate repercussions of 9/11 for individuals, families, and communities. Perhaps, this can be attributed to the preoccupation with the ideas of rupture and change. As Lucy Bond rightly puts it, "this sheltered domestic realm forms the setting for many of the archetypal examples of 9/11 fiction" (737). It may be noted here that the term 'domestic' is not used in its narrow

sense to refer to ‘home’ which denotes a family. It is also used in its broader sense to refer to the ‘inside’ or ‘internal’ of a nation like the US, the UK or Canada. Used as it is in contradistinction to the term ‘international’ or ‘global’ it denotes ‘homeland’. Morley observes that “overwhelmed by the enormity of the attacks”, many American 9/11 novelists “turned inward to depict fractured unions and broken homes” (Morley, “How Do We Write” 719). Many of them, she contends, “took refuge” (719) in portraying the effects of trauma both personal and communal.

This interest in the domestic is a characteristic feature of 9/11 fiction. Nevertheless, scholars, like Richard Gray, and Michael Rothberg, have expressed their displeasure over it. They consider it to be a limitation of this fiction. Gray’s criticism is that most 9/11 American novels do not move beyond the depiction of trauma. In other words, the novels seem to be more interested in traumatized characters and the courses their life takes. Gray is also critical of the gap he perceives between the novelists’ concern with the motif of change and the conventionalism of their narrative forms. As he sees it, a changed, the world has to be represented in terms of a correspondingly altered or unconventional narrative mode. Conceding Gray’s strictures, Rothberg says that the 9/11 American novelist “does not bear witness to the fundamental change” (Rothberg, “A Failure of the Imagination” 151). He also sees in their works the assimilation of the unfamiliar into familiar structures. He considers Gray’s diagnosis of the flaws discernible in “the earliest fictional responses” to 9/11 to be “largely correct” (151). In his opinion, Gray’s model of a deterritorialized representation of ‘otherness’ is “not entirely sufficient” (153). In his view, “Gray’s model of critical multiculturalism” (153)

needs to be supplemented with a different order of fiction that focuses on international issues, "a fictional of international relations and extraterritorial citizenships" (153). He finds the envisaged by Gray to be centripetal, depicting "the world's movements toward America" (153). This 'centripetal' fiction, he thinks, has to be strengthened with "a complimentary centrifugal mapping that charts the outward movement of American power. Gray's suggestion of an American immigration fiction also does not find much favour with Rothberg. As Morley puts it, he also sees Gray's emphasis on the fiction of the immigration as a potential step towards a 're-domestication' which will only lead to further thrust on the native soil and with "the other's encounter with the American scene. It may be worthwhile to note here that this 'encounter' after 9/11 is what is central to Halaby's *Once in a Promised Land*. Rothberg's argument is that to comprehend the extent of America's global reach, American writers must look post-9/11 American writers should look beyond the borders of their homeland and produce centrifugal literature of extraterritoriality. Morley says: "According to Rothberg, the domestication of 9/11 is a political manoeuvre which fails to deal with the outward movement of American power, the ways in which American foreign policy is entangled in global networks" (Morley, "How Do We Write" 718). Indeed, Gray and Rothberg's unsympathetic views on 9/11 fiction have their precedence, too. Morley points out that in 2007, Anthony Cummings "went so far as to say that much of what we classify as post-9/11 literature actually sells the events short, presenting stories that is otherwise would have been written (718). Morley also draws attention to Pankaj Mishra's criticism of post 9/11 fiction. According to Mishra "most of the literary fiction that

self-consciously addresses 9/11 still seems underpinned by outdated assumptions of national isolation and self-sufficiency (Mishra, "The End of Innocence" 2).

It is important to note that the negative perceptions of 9/11 fiction have not gone unchallenged. Morley, for example, pulls Gray and Rothberg up for "the prescriptive nature of their discussion of 9/11 fiction and their conception of "literary fiction as an essentially political enterprise?" (Morley, "How Do We Write" 720). Criticizing their disapproval of the 9/11 novelists' interest in local and domestic issues and problems Morley forcefully observes:

> In urging writers to shift their focus from the visceral rawness of the 2001 attacks to the history and ramifications of the United States entanglement in global affairs (above all in the Middle East), these critics are effectively asking American writers to turn their gaze away from home, away from the peoples and communities which have, up to now, dominated their fiction (720).

What seems "most troubling" to Morley is Gray and Rothberg's "suggestion that fiction is no more than a political tool." (720). Morley admits that "fiction can certainly play such a role," but it should not be at the cost of "its power" (720) to cut across the political. Shrewdly indicating the irony involved in the views of the critics of 9/11 fiction, she writes: "when Gray, Rothberg, and Mishra bemoan the tendency toward the domestic in post-9/11 literature, in other words, they are merely highlighting one of the most enduring and inevitable aspects of all literary fiction" (721). In addition to all her contestations of Gray and Rothberg's carpings at post-9/11 novels, Morley also holds them guilty of careless reading. She contends that

"Gray and Rothberg are overlooking the fact that the novels they criticize *do* offer the kinds of interpretation they are looking for" (723). In other words, these novels do embody the very elements, like the encounter with the other and the extraterritorial and international, which they find absent in them. She illustrates this using DeLillo's *Falling Man,* a novel both Gray and Rothberg have explored. She shows that there is, in this novel, "a considered encounter with the other" (723). Her reference obviously is to the immigrant characters like Hammad. She also notes "the snippets of his life in Germany and in the United States" (723). To put it differently, the novel has scenes taking place in Germany as well as the US, thereby contributing to its international dimension.

Post- 9/11 fiction, it can confidently be argued now, is increasingly being recognized as serious and important fiction. Clemens Spahr aptly observes: "Recent scholarship on post-9/11 fiction has stressed the need to understand the literature concerned with and produced in the immediate aftermath of 9/11" (Spahr, "Post 9/11 Literature" 496). Indeed, it can be seen as being part not only of the literary but also of the political and social developments that came after the 9/11 disaster.

Methodology

The study is mainly concerned with the critical reading of the texts of the novels chosen for the study. Textual analysis, accordingly, pays special attention to the storyline, the characters, their evolution and experiences, the incidents, and episodes through which the narrative progresses, the significance of major scenes. In the process, the study also makes use of insights and perspectives drawn from such fields of study as Trauma Studies, Sociology, Cultural Studies and Critical Race

Theory. Ideas and views expressed by socio-political critics have also been applied whenever relevant. These insights of the experts help explain the varied responses to 9/11. The fears and anxieties generated by 9/11 within and without the US have led to wide-ranging socio-cultural and psychological consequences. As such, trauma theories have much to contribute to a consideration of 9/11 and its effects on both society and individuals, as reflected in the novels taken up for study. Similarly, Foucauldian and New Historicism concepts such as discourse, panopticism, and surveillance will also be resorted to as part of the methodology. These concepts certainly facilitate a better understanding of the post-9/11 Western socio-cultural and political environment as mapped in the novels. Alien dominance is central to colonialism. Until very recently, this dominance has been a burdensome experience for many peoples in different parts of the world. European colonialism, as everyone knows, is a thing of the past. However, a new form of colonialism with its basis in the binary, 'we' and 'they'/ 'us' and 'them' seems to be sweeping across the world. Even in the post-9/11 counter-terrorism legislation, the legacy of British colonial practices, like administrative detention, suspension of habeas corpus, deportation, and the prohibition on speech and associations, can be detected. The potential to buttress the current neo-colonial trend is, therefore, inherent in this legislation that has had, and is still having, its impact upon several nations of the world. This has been especially so in the US, England, and Canada. Accordingly, the methodology will also involve an examination of the relevant elements of the counter-terrorism law enacted by these countries. The application of theories of colonialism and imperialism can shed more light on the treatment of 9/11 in the novels. It may also

help in seeing how far the 9/11 discourse is an extension of the Euro-centric discourses and practices of post colonialism.

The study also takes cognizance of Human Rights issues since there has been a criticism that counter-terrorism legislation has not paid sufficient attention to the protection of human rights. This facilitates a better understanding of the nature of the post-9/11 experiences and social relations recounted through several scenes and episodes in the novels under study. Since the works studied are by writers who, even though Western, belong to different countries, the convergences, and divergences in their approach to 9/11 and the US have also been looked into.

The novels chosen for study are Ian McEwan's *Saturday* (2005), David Bernans' *North of 9/11* (2006), Don DeLillo's *Falling Man* (2007), John Updike's *Terrorist* (2007), and Laila Halaby's *Once in a Promised Land* (2007). McEwan is British, Bernans Canadian. Updike, DeLillo, and Halaby are American. This is because the countries, to which they belong, have been the major players in counter-terrorism campaigns, and in reviving or modifying pre-9/11 anti-terrorism laws and policies, or in enacting fresh ones.

The choice of Western novels has been determined by the fact that 9/11 was a Western event and that its impact was felt more in the Western world than by the Eastern. Similarly, the choice of three novels from the US, whereas there is only one each from Canada and the UK can be accounted for in terms of the site, New York, a major US city. Besides, it was the Americans, who, more than anybody else, were affected by it. And it was the US that responded to 9/11 most violently.

This dissertation comprises of five chapters, besides an Introduction and a Conclusion. The first chapter, “Plane on Fire”, explores McEwan’s novel *Saturday*. The second, **“**Jaggi Singh and Teddy Bears,” focuses on Bernans’ novel *North of 9/11*. The third, “Bin Laden and Bill Lawton” analyses DeLillo’s, *Falling Man*. The fourth, “God and Devils” discusses Updike’s *Terrorist*. And the fifth, “Chronic Others” considers Halaby’s *Once in a Promised Land*. The “Introduction” charts the post-9/11 socio-cultural and political background to 9/11 fiction, outlines the major themes and features of the fiction, looks into critical views expressed on it. The “Introduction” also sets forth the methodology employed and outlines the chapterisation. The “Conclusion” focuses on the value and importance of the ideas, thoughts, and issues which are embedded in the novels examined and which are relevant to the world of the West as well as the East.

Chapter 1

Plane on Fire

Ian McEwan is, indisputably, one of the most renowned contemporary novelists writing in English. Sebastian Groes calls him "the foremost cartographer of our time" ("A Cartography" 1) Groes's tribute rests on his assessment that McEwan's literary contributions have been eminently successful "in mapping the workings of the private life and the personal imagination, and the wider concerns of the nation and the world…." (1). According to Matt Ridley, McEwan is a scientist of the human mind. He writes, "Does McEwan's interest in the human mind make him a scientist? I think so." In his view, McEwan is a writer who uses fiction to understand the mind and to explore human nature and who has a remarkable "ability to replicate consciousness" ("Ian McEwan" 9). Drawing upon McEwan's vision of the novelist, Matt Ridley observes:

> The novelist's privilege, according to Ian McEwan, is to step inside the consciousness of others and to lead the reader there like a psychological Virgil. Again and again, in McEwan's books, it is the interior monologue of the characters, and that monologue's encounter with the 'truth in the outside world, that grips us…. The brains of McEwan's protagonists construct their mental world as we the readers watch and empathize. ("Ian McEwan" 9)

Ridley sums up his admiration for McEwan's virtues in memorably respectful terms: "I salute a great image- conjuring storyteller exploring human nature" (12). Over

the past four decades or so, McEwan's works have been critically and academically acclaimed and embraced by audiences across the world. It was with a collection of short stories, entitled *First Love, Last Rites* (1975), that McEwan made his literary debut. *The Child in Time* (1987) became the recipient of the Whitbread Novel Award. The novel *Saturday* (2005) was awarded the James Tait Black Memorial Prize. *Amsterdam* (1998) won the Man Booker Prize, and *Solar* (2010) won the Bollinger Everyman Wodehouse Prize. *The Children Act* (2014), *Nutshell* (2016), and *Machines Like Me* (2019) are also novels that have added to McEwan's reputation and literary achievements. Some of his works, *The Comfort of Strangers* (1990), *Enduring Love* (2004), and *Atonement* (2007) have been successfully adapted for the screen, too. A unique feature of McEwan's oeuvre is its creative versatility. Though, primarily a novelist, he has tried his hand at a variety of media and literary forms as well. He has successfully written short stories, a novel for children, entitled *The Day Dreamer* (1995), and several television scripts and screenplays. He has also to his credit two librettos, *Or Shall We Die* (1983) and *For You* (2008), produced in collaboration with the composer Michael Berkley. There is also an illustrated children's book, *Rose Blanche* (1985) in which McEwan looks at German Narcissism. McEwan has also delivered numerous lectures on the role that science and literature can play in furthering our understanding of human nature. His lecture, "End of the World Blues" (2007), is especially notable for its denouncement of the dangers posited by religious fundamentalism. It is on account of this versatility of his output that McEwan has been called "man for all media" (Haffenden 168).

McEwan's *Saturday* is a brilliant portrayal of the post 9/11 world, bringing out in clear terms the dangerous reverberations of the World Trade Centre attacks, felt across the United Kingdom. Sebastian Groes observes:

> In *Saturday*, he captures the anxious and uncertain post-9/11 climate while anticipating the terrorist attacks on London, 7 July 2005, that followed shortly after the novel's publication. The next day he commented that we 'have been savagely woken from a pleasant dream' and that we as citizens again had to renegotiate 'that deal we must constantly make and remake with the state - how much power must we grant Leviathan, how much freedom will be asked to trade for our security. ("A cartography" 3)

The novel focuses on the fear psychosis, and the debilitating traumas, that had come in the wake of the 9/11 attacks. Dominic Head calls *Saturday* "a novel of its moment" (*Ian McEwan* 180). He adds: "In *Saturday*, however, McEwan treats, not an evanescent social mood, but a global political context that will surely endure" (180). In fact, McEwan was quick to identify the psychological, as distinct from the physical, dimension of the attacks. He was quick to see the immense gravity and magnitude of the 'human terrorists' engendered by the 9/11 hijackers. This is evident in an article that McEwan wrote in *the Guardian* the day after the attacks.

> Always, it seemed, it was what we could not see that was so frightening. We saw the skyscrapers, the tilting plane, the awful impact, the cumuli of dust engulfing the streets. But we were left to imagine for ourselves the human terror inside the airliner, down the

> corridors and elevator lobbies of the stricken buildings, or in the streets below as the towers collapsed on to rescue workers and morning crowds. **(“**Beyond Belief” 1)

McEwan’s account of the chaotic and the confounded state of mind, that was visible everywhere after the New York disaster, is of special note in this context. In an article, written just four days after the disaster, he writes:

> By Thursday, I noticed among friends, and in TV and radio commentaries, a new mood of exhaustion and despair. People spoke of being depressed. No other public event had cut so deeply. The spectacle was over. Now we were hearing from the bereaved. Each individual death is an explosion in itself, wrecking the lives of those nearest. We were beginning to grasp the human cost. This was what it was always really about. (“Only Love” 1)

In the same article, he had also suggested that the terrorists would not have done what they did, had they been capable of imagining themselves in the position of the passengers in the airplane and sensing their thoughts and feelings. He was looking at the 9/11 violence from a moral and ethical angle. This is seen especially in his emphasis upon the values of compassion and empathy in a notable passage in the article.

> Imagining what it is like to be someone other than yourself is at the core of our humanity. It is the essence of compassion, and it is the beginning of morality. The hijackers used fanatical certainty, misplaced religious faith, and dehumanising hatred to purge

> themselves of the human instinct for empathy. Among their crimes was a failure of the imagination. (“Only Love” 1).

The passage evidently shows McEwan’s rejection of religious fanaticism and extremism, though not of religion as such. As he sees it, it is ‘misplaced religious faith’ and ‘fanatical certainty ‘coupled with a lack of the ethical and moral imperatives of empathy and compassion that lead to dehumanizing hatred and acts of brutality.

Saturday is a “circadian novel” (“A Cartography” 4). It was well-received when it was published in 2005. This reception, it may be said, had been partly influenced by of the particular consonance between the mood of anxiety and insecurity insistently depicted in the novel and the prevailing public mood. Nevertheless, it has had to face a certain amount of adverse criticism, too. This was primarily because of McEwan’s treatment of Islam, and the Iraq war in which Britain was one of America's allies. Ziauddin Sardar is one of those who were in the forefront of castigating McEwan for his pro-Americanism and anti-Islamic propensities. He considers McEwan to be one of the three dominant British writers whom he sarcastically labels “the Blitcones” (“The Blitcon” 1), the British literary conservatives, the other two being Martin Amis and Salman Rushdie. According to Sardar, the project embarked on by these writers is aimed “to advance a clear global political agenda” and to underscore “the absolute supremacy of American culture”. Their fiction, which Sardar calls “Blitcon fiction” (1) is a re-enactment of Orientalism. “Blitcon fiction”, Sardar observes, “is Orientalism for the 21st century, shifting the emphasis from the supremacy of the West in general to the supremacy of

American ideas of freedom". Also, Sardar finds in these novelists the idea that "Islam is the greatest threat to the idea of civilization" (1). He also arraigns them for their misperception of not only Islam but also the generality of Muslims. McEwan took on criticism on this order rather stoically for some time. But, when it grew, with the British media and the Muslim Council of Great Britain categorically portrays him as being blatantly anti- Muslim, McEwan, as Sebastian Groes puts it, was prompted "to publish a statement on his website, explaining he has spoken out against Islamism and Jihadists, not against Islam" ("A cartography" 10).

Saturday narrates the incidents that take place within a duration of 24 hours in the life of its protagonist, the neurosurgeon Henry Perowne who wakes up early in the morning, "in an unusual state of mind" (McEwan, *Saturday* 17). His intention is to enjoy his day of leisure. One of his happy experiences is his reunion with his wife Rosalind, after a period of familial discord. The trajectory of his day's experiences in the city of London is disrupted when a protest march carried out, on 15 February 2003, against the imminent war in Iraq blocks of his envisaged journey. A little later his car collides with that of the thuggish, Baxter. The novel deeply engages with the post-9/11 state of the world, the national and international issues, like the Iraq war, generated by 9/11 and the US counterterrorism.

Perowne does not participate in the protest march. Nevertheless, he "Experiences his ambivalence as a form of vertigo, of dizzy indecision" (McEwan, *Saturday* 141). The novel, it is significant to note, is saturated with debates about the war. When the eventful day of Perowne, the "uncultured and tedious medic" (McEwan, *Saturday* 195) winds up, it becomes almost clear that his ambiguity is, on

the one hand, a reflection of the post-9/11 uncertainties and, on the other, a form of recalcitrance to both the State's hegemonic postures and the anti-war zealots' sense of self-righteousness.

The dilemmas concerning how to accept one's place and involvement in the world without compromising individual autonomy, how to strike a balance between personal freedom and personal responsibility, and how to navigate one's private life in the context of global crises are some of the contemporary liberal world's dilemmas explored by McEwan in the novel. Andrew Foley says:

> *Saturday* returns to the fundamental liberal concern of the individual's right to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness, but it does so in the altered circumstances of a globalized world in which those very values of life, liberty, and happiness are seen to be under threat from many new hostile forces, ranging from radical Islamic terrorism to casual violence on city streets ("Liberalism" 135).

The backdrop of 9/11 and the war on terror looms large throughout the novel. The novel's central character is a 48-year-old, London-based neurosurgeon, Henry Perowne. It is the experiences that he goes through precisely from the early morning of Saturday 15 February 2003 in the early morning of the following Sunday that the novel's action properly covers. Significantly enough, Perowne's Saturday turns out to be to be an important day, since it is the day of an international protest against the proposed invasion of Iraq which is part of America's war on terror. In the opening scene, Henry Perowne, who is supremely fond of his wife, Rosalind and his two

children, Daisy and Theo, is looking out his bedroom window, having woken up, in a state of ecstasy, even before dawn. As he looks out, he sees an aircraft on fire.

> It is directly south of him now, barely a mile away, soon to pass into the topmost lattice of the bare plane trees, and then behind the Post Office Tower, at the level of the lowest microwave dishes. Despite the city lights, the contours of the plane aren't visible in the early-morning darkness. The fire must be on the nearside wing where it joins the fuselage, or perhaps in one of the engines slung below (McEwan, *Saturday* 14-15).

The image of the burning airplane approaching the Post Office Tower immediately triggers off, in his mind, associations with the 9/11 attack on the World Trade Centre. Forthwith, Perowne finds himself speculating on the fate of the passengers in the airplane and their ways of dealing with what he fantasizes to be a terrorist hijack. The euphoria, he wakes up with, now comes to an end. His "elation is passing, and he's beginning to shiver…. He watches an ambulance" (McEwan, *Saturday* 21). He turns from the window. It may be noted that the airplane sets Perowne's imagination ablaze, propelling him to conjure up visions of terrorists on their way to wreak havoc on London. Perowne grows inordinately restive and panicky. It may be the jihadists. A moment later, his consternation becomes manifest in his conversation with his young son, Theo. When he tells Theo that he has seen an airplane, his son asks him: "You reckon it's terrorists?" And he replies, "It's a possibility" (McEwan, *Saturday* 40). The fact that Perowne's sight of what he describes as "a plane on fire, heading into Heathrow" (McEwan, *Saturday* 37)

comes within eighteen months of the 9/11 attacks certainly invests the experience with a deeper meaning when viewed in the light of his mind already racked and traumatized by the attacks. Images and reports of the disaster are still an inalienable part of his subconscious.

> It's already almost eighteen months since half the planet watched and watched again the unseen captives driven through the sky to the Slaughter, at which time there gathered round the innocent silhouette Of any jet plane a novel association. Everyone agrees airliners look different in the sky these days, predatory or doomed (McEwan, *Saturday* 16).

The neurosurgeon also sees 9/11 as an event that has brought about shifts in people's as well as his mode of perception. 9/11 has altered people's perception of things and events, and, as such, the familiar and the habitual, like a car, an airplane, and even language, have taken on a fresh hue, 'a novel association', and a new significance. If, in Perowne's imagination, the plane he assumes terrorist connotations, it is because his consciousness is instinct with 9/11 and its disastrous consequences. Evidently, 9/11 and the massive discourse, especially media discourse generated by it have strongly impacted and conditioned his mind. It may be noted here that a compulsive habit with Perowne, which has "grown stronger these past two years" (McEwan, *Saturday* 176). Since 9/11, is to tune in to the news and be "joined to the generality, to a community of anxiety". As he thinks, in a society of consumer voyeurism, the possible recurrence of "monstrous and spectacular scenes" is "one thread that blinds the eyes" (176). Perowne's only wish is to live a happy and

successful life, familial as well as professional. He has, however, to live this life in an ambiance of terror and war in post 9/11 London. Besides, he has also to struggle with his own traumatized and overstrung consciousness. Throughout the novel, McEwan's emphasis clearly falls on Perwone's bodily movements and mental processes. The novel, as Frances Ferguson puts it, "tracks its chief protagonist's movements and thoughts with the sort of closeness only available in the mode of reported speech and thought, or free indirect style" ("The Way We Love" 44). While Perowne makes his morning coffee, he indulges in meditations on the technical refinement and aestheticization of the kettle. Similarly, Perowne has his reflections and thoughts even while he urinates and defecates. The result of McEwan's preoccupation even with such minute details as these is to fully lay bare Perowne's mind. As Fergune puts it, "we learn what one might learn if one were inside the head of Henry Perowne" (44). It is this meticulous dissection of Perowne's head, and the parading of it, that is the basis of Joanna Kosmalska's labelling of McEwan's *Saturday* as "his stream of consciousness novel" ("Dichotomous Images" 269). Perowne's mindset, where 9/11 is still a lingering horror, may be said to be representative of the traumatized post- 9/11 Western mindset. The experiences, which he goes through within a twenty-four-hour span, reveal the extent of the disorientation of his mind and imagination under the impact of 9/11.

Saturday adapts the 9/11 shock into Perowne's persistent mood of existential malaise, into his sense of unease and imminent disaster. By depicting his bafflement, consternation, and diseased imagination, the novel makes the incomprehensible comprehensible, the meaningless meaningful, and metamorphoses the 9/11 violence

into an individual's fearful existence. The post- 9/11 state of the world has made the neurosurgeon superlatively meditative and reflective. In a sense, he has in him a strain of the sad lover of Arnold's poem "Dover Beach", which McEwan puts to superb use to buttress some of the ideas central to the novel. Wally Johannes points out: "There's not more than meets the eye, but that's not a bad thing. Observing two nurses on their way home causes Perowne to muse about the condito humana ("*Saturday* as a New Atheist Novel" 111**).** To Perwone, the nurses are "hot little biological engines with bipedal skills suited to any terrain, endowed with innumerable branching neural networks sunk deep in a knob of bone casing" (McEwan, *Saturday* 21). It is the kinetic corporeality of the nurses that fascinates Perowne, and his estimate of it is purely biological. It is patently devoid of any element of the spiritual or religious, as he is an ardent proponent of science and technology. The two nurses become, in Perowne's analysis, two automatons. Corresponding to his profound sense of 9/11, Perowne suspects religious fanaticism to be the cause behind the inflamed aircraft he espies in the morning. As his meditations on the nurses suggest, Perowne rejects religion as a form of wish-fulfilment, as a product that belongs to the realms of the imaginary.

> If Perowne were inclined to religious feeling, to supernatural explanations, he could play with the idea that he's been summoned; that having woken in an unusual state of mind, and gone to the window for no reason, he should acknowledge a hidden order, an external intelligence, which wants to show or tell him something of significance (McEwan, *Saturday* 17).

Perowne presents issues, like terrorist threats and media construction of reality, that have gripped the international consciousness since 9/11. In *Saturday*, McEwan knits together meaningful images, complex descriptions, and different kinds of language to form a diary account, as it were, in order to capture the ethos of the contemporary world. Commenting on McEwan's mode of imaging reality, Joanna Kosmalska observes:

> It is the extensive retrospections, discerning commentaries, and meticulous descriptions of Perowne that endow his depiction of reality with a sophisticated even-handedness. Important is also his personal qualities ("Dichotomous Images in Ian McEwan's" 269).

Perowne's professional training and fondness for logical reasoning are factors that invariably influence his way of perceiving the world. He is, as a rule, prone to defining external reality in an unemotional, analytical, and organized way. Very often, he looks at an issue from different angles. According to Joanna Kosmalska, Perowne "illuminates two oppositional views of the same issue without passing judgment" ("Dichotomous Images" 269). Drawing analogies between neural and social systems is a habit that Perowne finds hard to resist. As such, he never hesitates to resort to this device while examining social phenomena. The concept of the neuron-social, it may be suggested, can be of help in exploring the significance of the tangled and strange series of events that unfold from the very opening of the novel. These events are set in motion precisely at 3.40 before dawn when Perowne suddenly rises and semi-automatically moves from his bed towards the window. "Some hours before dawn Henry Perowne, a neurosurgeon, wakes to find himself

already in motion, pushing back the covers from a sitting position and then rising to his feet" (McEwan, *Saturday* 3). It is now that he, as mentioned earlier, sees the sinister-looking aircraft. In this context, it may be interesting to note that consequent on the spectacular and dramatic 9/11 attacks, in which airplanes were major players, an airplane seems to have acquired a certain degree of symbolic meaning, of negative connotation. It is no longer viewed as a piece of technological wonder alone; it has become an ominous entity, a type of a bete noire as well, evoking feelings of fright and concern. As Perowne closely watches the 'plane on fire' (McEwan, *Saturday* 37), it leads him into a state of nervous indecision. Should he wake his wife and tell her? Should he alert emergency services? Should he do something or nothing? These thoughts beleaguer him. He thinks that the passengers' will be either alive or dead. He feels that he is powerless to influence the situation and outcome. Then, he heads downstairs to wait for the news report. But no news of a terrorist plane or attack comes. Later, it transpires that it was a cargo plane that had accidentally caught fire in one of its wings and that it had landed safely. The fact is that Perwone's over-fraught imagination gives the plane an exaggerated meaning. An abrupt, cataclysmic transformation of an everyday routine is what overtakes Perowne, radically altering his psyche and producing in him an awareness of uncertainty, relativity, and exigence.

Terror and its repercussions on men and matters across the world undoubtedly constitute the central concerns of S*aturday*. Accordingly, the Iraq war figures rather prominently in the novel. The protest scene, which Perowne witnesses, therefore, acquires especial significance in the overall context of the novel. On his

way to a squash match, he watches people preparing for a mass protest against the war on Iraq. He is confounded by the excitement and exultations of the assembling crowd. People are hugging each other, cheering, clapping, and shouting slogans. He sees them take out placards, banners, football rattles, funny hats, and rubber masks with cartoonish images of politicians. The demonstration is marked by a carnivalesque cheerfulness about it. The merry, noisy, and cacophonous scene is described in a telling passage in the novel.

> From the impatient pavement crowds, some dry runs with the noisemakers - a trombone, a squeeze-ball car horn, a Lambeg drum. There are ragged practiced chants which at first, he cannot make out. Tumty tummy turn. Do not attack Iraq. Placards not yet on duty are held at the slope, at rakish angles over shoulders. Not in my Name goes past a dozen times (McEwan, *Saturday* 71).

The organizations associated with protest are the British Association of Muslims and the Swaffham Women's Choir; the towns associated with it are Stratford, Gloucester, and Evesham. This description of the anti-war activists, however, is not all complimentary. It also critiques and subverts their levities and their ignorance of the political realities in Iraq. Perowne's immediate reaction to what he sees in the streets is a recollection of what Prof Miri Taleb has told him about Iraq and Saddam's regime.

> Miri Taleb is in his late sixties, a man of slight, almost girlish build, with a nervous laugh, a whinnying giggle that could have something to do with his time in prison…. His arrest came one winter's

> afternoon in 1994, outside a lecture room where he was about to teach. His students were waiting for him inside and did not see what happened (McEwan, *Saturday* 62).

Perowne would normally be opposed to the Iraq war, but he has been influenced by Miri Taleb, who has been a victim of Saddam Hussein's brutal dictatorship. Taleb's estimate of the political situation in Iraq is of interest here. He contends that "it's the only terror that holds the nation together, the whole system runs on fear, and no one knows how to stop it. Now the Americans are coming, perhaps for bad reasons. But Saddam and the Ba'athists will go" (McEwan, *Saturday* 64). Taleb has also recounted to Perowne the practice of torture under the Saddam regime. When he was in prison, he had heard the helpless cries and screams of the prisoners tortured in the adjacent cells.

> He and his companions heard the screaming from their cells and waited to be called. Beatings, electrocution, anal rape, near-drowning, thrashing the soles of the feet. Everyone, from top officials to street sweepers, lived in a state of anxiety, constant fear (McEwan, *Saturday* 64).

In Talib's view, Iraq under Saddam Hussein is a terror state and Saddam is the ruler as a terrorist. This assessment, no doubt, chimes with the American image of Saddam Hussein as a supporter of terrorism and a potential threat to the world. Perhaps, McEwan also implies that terrorism is not the sole preserve of individuals or groups of individuals like Al Qaeda and that it can be practiced even by states under the pretext of national sovereignty and legitimacy. The question that arises

when a state regime runs and holds a nation together by the dint of sheer terror and torture is how to deal with such a regime. It may be noted that Taleb, while happily envisioning the downfall of Saddam and his formidable Batheeists, is at the same time skeptical of the vaunted liberation objectives of the US intervention. He is aware that the reasons, which the US attributes to its Iraq invasion, are far from honest and genuine. They are 'bad'. He is apprehensive that the US itself might, in the long run, become a Saddam-like regime for the people of Iraq. Taleb's story, however, leaves its imprint on Perowne's mind, prompting him to visualize Iraq's political fate after the war. Kathleen Wall aptly comments:

> Knowing Taleb's story allows him at least to imagine another scenario in Iraq besides the quick victory and establishment of democracy offered by the British government, one that makes him less certain about either the wisdom or the futility of the seemingly inevitable war ("Ethics, Knowledge" 784).

Taleb's sufferings justifiably trouble Perowne, but he appropriates them to reduce his own political anxieties. Taleb was incarcerated and made to suffer for an unspecified crime, and he never discovered what the charges against him were. It is important to note that Perowne reminisces Taleb's story in the context of the anti-war protest. On the one hand, the passages devoted to describing Taleb's ordeals highlight the terror of Saddam's regime; on the other, they provide a stark contrast to the anti-war march, underscoring the impropriety of emotions on display on the protest scene. Perowne's ambivalent and conflicting sentiments in Iraq and the protest march are evident in his reflections.

> All this happiness on display is suspect… If they think and they could be right—that continued torture and summary executions, ethnic cleansing, and occasional genocide are preferable to an invasion, they should be somber in their view (McEwan, *Saturday* 69).

An interesting motif, which *Saturday* touches on, is that the aftermath of the 9/11 violence has, among other things, a linguistic dimension, too. Perowne, for example, thinks that the changes, which have come over people's ways of perceiving the world, have also told upon the processes of speech and signification in society. This is suggested in his musings on his hospital's Emergency Plan:

> There is to be a new look—there's always a new look—at the hospital's Emergency Plan. Simple train crashes are no longer all that are envisaged, and words like 'catastrophe' and 'mass facilities', 'chemical and biological warfare' and 'major attack' have recently become bland through repetition (McEwan, *Saturday* 11-12).

The streets of London city, which constitute the locale of the professional, familial, and societal encounters of McEwan's neurosurgeon, are dominated by a major political event. It is as Martin Ryle calls it, "the very large demonstration that took place in London on 15 February 2003 against the imminent invasion of Iraq" ("Anosognosia" 25). Most of the novel's action, as has already been mentioned, occurs entirely on this day, and is, directly or indirectly, linked to "Islamic terrorism" (McEwan, *Saturday* 77). In his book, *Two Hours That Shook the World*, Fred Halliday observes:

> The world will be lucky to have worked through the impact of

> these events and dealt with their causes in a hundred years. This is not, of course, a very long time in the span of human history, but it does suggest that a strong dose of resolve, clarity, and courage will be needed, in the West as in the East, in the years to come (Fred Halliday 216)

In *Saturday*, closely echoing Halliday, McEwan writes that "The New York attacks precipitated a global crisis that would if we were lucky, take a hundred years to resolve"(McEwan, *Saturday* 32). Perowne certainly can see the central sentiments of this conception of 9/11. He is fully aware that there is a post-9/11 crisis and that it will "resolve", too. Nevertheless. He does not seem to subscribe to Halliday's time schedule, "a hundred years", required for resolution if humanity is "lucky". He is more optimistic than Halliday and sees the crisis as a short-lived phenomenon, as "an aberration" that will "soon" be righted and remedied. In his diagnosis, the current crisis is

> an aberration and that the world would surely calm down and soon be otherwise, that solutions were possible, that reason, being a powerful tool, was irresistible, the only way out; or that like any other crisis, this one would fade soon... There are always crises and Islamic terrorism will settle into place, alongside recent wars, climate change, the politics of international trade, land, and freshwater shortages, hunger, poverty, and the rest (McEwan, *Saturday* 32).

Despite this utopian prognosis, Perowne is unable to shed the feeling that Islamic terror is somehow different from and more dangerous than other world crises.

Perowne's use of the word "jihadists" is intended to suggest the religious underpinnings of what, in his view, is an ongoing, fervent war "on our whole way of life" (McEwan, *Saturday* 35), the way of life of the Western world. It may be noted here that in Perowne's use of the word "our, there is the well-known dichotomy between "we", referring to the West, and "they", referring to the Islamic world.

It pits Islam as an ideology that is up in arm against the West and its culture. McEwan's vision of Islam, it may be said, is in tune with the West's insistent association of Islam with terrorism. Edward Said contends that Islam alone has been purposefully picked and targeted for malignation. He points out that invidious commentary about the world of Islam, particularly after 9/11, has popularized the notion that Islam is by nature a violent, intolerant religion, much given to raving fundamentalism and suicidal terrorism.

> There has been no end of "experts" and evangelists repeating the same rubbish, aided, and abetted by discrediting Orientalists like Bernard Lewis. It is a sign of the intellectual and humanistic poverty of the times that such patent propaganda (in the literal sense of the word) has gained such currency and, even more disastrously, that it is carried on without the slightest reference to Christian, Jewish, and Hindu fundamentalism, which, as extremist political ideologies, have been at least as bloody and disastrous as Islam (*Humanism* 51).

It is important to note that during an argument concerning the Bali bombings, Perowne indignantly tells his daughter that "radical Islam hates your freedom" (McEwan, *Saturday* 91). In his eyes, radical Islam is a formidable enemy, an enemy

that is "well-organized, tentacular, full of hatred and focused on zeal" (McEwan, *Saturday* 76). Radical Islamists are a more dangerous lot than mere nihilists. The reason, according to Perowne, is that they are a type of idealists and utopianists.

> They want the perfect society on earth, which is Islam. They belong in a doomed tradition about which Perowne takes the conventional view, the pursuit of utopia ends up licensing every form of excess, all ruthless means of its realization. If everyone is sure to end up happy forever, what crime, can it be to slaughter a million or two now? (McEwan, *Saturday* 34).

9/11 has obviously bred in Perowne's psychology a certain amount of negativity toward Islam and the utopia the Islamists want to establish. As for the ideal Islamic state under Sharia law, he mockingly thinks that there will be room in it for neurosurgeons like himself. Blues guitarists, like his son, will have to give up their chosen art and seek employment in other fields. 9/11 and its discursive media construction have certainly rendered him not only skeptical and sarcastic but also scared of Islam and its worldview.

The Islamic bomb is a perpetual source of anxiety for Perowne. He even considers the possibility of "a bomb in the cause of jihad" right in his neighborhood: "London, his small part of it, lies wide open, impossible to defend, waiting for its bomb, like a hundred other cities" (McEwan, *Saturday* 276). McEwan's concern is not only with the immorality and unethicality inherent in terrorism but also with the encroachments it viciously makes upon human rights and freedoms in everyday life everywhere. The calls often made on behalf of the need for compassion and empathy

in our age of belligerence and the scientific conception of the human being as the universal biological matter have led to an appraisal, especially in the human sciences, of the long-discarded idea of the transhistorical nature of humans. Laura Colombino argues:

> The globalization of conscience with its abundant intense awareness of the traumatized other (the suffering Iraqi people for Perowne), the material conditions of existence foregrounded by terrorist attacks and other crises, and, finally, the new prestige gained by evolutionary biology and neuroscience, all these elements have conspired to weakening linguistic and cultural explanations of experience and making us intensely aware of our physical and material nature ("The Rebuilding of the Liberal" 211).

The protest against the imminent Iraq war alters the current of Perowne's thoughts. Besides, it makes him encounter the seamy side of the city. His car collides with a BMW with the young Baxter and two of his accomplices in it. The accident, however, precipitates the humiliating troubles that Perowne goes through later in his Saturday Indeed, Perowne has been living a cocooned life of modern comforts symbolized by his silver Mercedes. "This cocoon," ("A Cartography" 6) as Groes puts it, "is ruptured when Perowne's car collides with Baxter's, unleashing a sequence of violent encounters with darkest London. Perowne's first reaction to the accident is a kind of road rage. Describing it, McEwan writes that "there swells in him a peculiarly modern emotion - the motorist's rectitude, spot welding a passion for justice to the thrill of hatred" (McEwan, *Saturday* 84). Soon enough, Perowne

realizes the risky situation in which he finds himself since the street is "completely deserted" (McEwan, *Saturday* 84) because of road closures for purposes of the protest march. With the connivance of the Police officer on duty, Perowne takes the closed road. It is then that the accident occurs. At first, Perowne shrugs off its seriousness. For him, it is "a trivial matter" (McEwan, *Saturday* 82). But soon, he grows upset and nervous. Andrew Foley observes: "His fears are realized when Baxter, the powerfully built young thug who has been driving the other car, is provoked by Perowne's "superior" attitude into a violent attack of pure hatred" ("Liberalism" 150). Baxter punches Perowne. This produces a quite different kind of "thrill" in Perowne:

> The blow that's aimed at Perowne's heart and that he dodges only fractionally, lands on his sternum with colossal force, so that it seems to him, and perhaps it is the case, that their surges throughout his body a sharp ridge, a shock wave, of high blood pressure, a concussive thrill that carries with it not so much pain like an electric jolt of stupefaction and a brief deathly chill… (McEwan, *Saturday* 92).

Perowne recovers and manages to detach himself from the situation, drawing Baxter's attention to his neural disease, with the sinister motive of instilling fear in him. It may be noted that, afterward, he feels a vague "guilt" (McEwan, *Saturday* 102) about the confrontation, being aware of the "shameless blackmail" (McEwan, *Saturday* 92) he had cunningly indulged in and of the "humiliation" (McEwan, *Saturday* 92) Baxter must have felt in front of his friends. Understandably annoyed

by the accident, Perowne feels his car "will never be the same again" and that the incident, as a whole, has "ruinously altered" (McEwan, *Saturday* 82) his Saturday as well. Slightly later, Perowne gets exasperated when he senses the "prolonged trauma" (McEwan, *Saturday* 89) that might result from the prodigious amount of paperwork associated with the accident. Engrossed as he is in his histrionics, Perowne ignores the gravity of Baxter's recognition of the real cause of the accident. Baxter realizes that it is Perowne who is actually at fault, as he was driving on a street closed to the public. He accuses Perowne of violating traffic rules. "The Tottenham Court Road's closed. You aren't supposed to be there" (McEwan, *Saturday* 89). Perowne unashamedly asserts his privileged position and maintains that it was Baxter's fault, not his, on the ground that he had been officially allowed to take the road: "The rules of the road aren't suspended. Anyway, a policeman waved me across" (McEwan, *Saturday* 89). Instead of addressing the conflict, Perowne, who is about to miss his squash match with Jay, finds in the situation "a game-like quality" (McEwan, *Saturday* 83) which seems to him to be a welcome compensation for his spoiled Saturday. Commenting on Perowne's demeanour and self-perception of the accident scene, Clemens Spahr observes: "Self-perception is that of a cool, analytical person, but the allegedly prosaic surgeon pictures himself on a stage, just as initially the plane had provided the stuff for a fantasy of disaster ("Prolonged Suspension" 230). In fact, Perowne had already sensed "a little drama" when the police officer approached him (McEwan, *Saturday* 79) and felt that "play acting is about to begin," conceiving of the situation as "urban drama" and "pure artifice" (McEwan, *Saturday* 86). Clemens adds:

> His reference to drama and tragedy is a sense-making strategy that obscures what is truly at stake, the question of privilege and power. Instead, his vulgar sense of tragedy leads him to believe that "nothing can be predicted, but everything, as soon as it happens, will seem to fit" ("Prolonged Suspension" 230).

As in the 'plane scene' of the morning, so also in the accident scene McEwan re-creates 9/11. Underlying the scene is also the idea that certain tragic and unanticipated events can shock and jolt us into new ways of thinking and seeing life and the realities around us. Perowne's car, which also symbolizes his journey through life, will never be the same. As for his Saturday, which stands for the time-bound, temporal nature of his life, it will also never be the same. The collision between BMW and the Mercedes assumes more of suggestiveness when viewed in conjunction with the insinuated parallelism between Baxter and Saddam Hussein and with the role of the minor terrorist that Baxter later assumes in Perowne's home. The collision can then be seen as metaphorically evoking the disastrous collision of the terrorist planes with America's twin Towers on 11 September 2001, which permanently altered the nation's skyline and its sense of normality. Perowne's escape from Baxter on the accident scene is only temporary. Baxter has just entered his life and is going to come back, bent upon wreaking vengeance on the Perowne. This incident is elaborately charted in the Dinner Scene. After his game of squash, his visit to his ailing mother in a nursing home, and his attendance at his son's blues band concert, Perowne returns home for a family get-together at which his daughter, Daisy, and his father-in-law, John Grammaticus are also present. The dark

premonitions, that have been haunting Perowne all through the day consequent on the morning spectacle of the burning plane and the unpleasant incidents that followed, now materialize. Baxter, with his henchman, Nigel, arrives on the scene and takes the entire family hostage. He holds a knife to the throat of Perowne's wife Rosalind, breaks his father-in-law's nose, and finally settles on his daughter Daisy. Threatening to kill her mother, Baxter forces Daisy to undress. Daisy, it is significant to note, is a poet who has been trying to inculcate in her science-loving father a love of literature, too. However, when it transpires that she is pregnant, Baxter relents and controls himself. Luckily enough, his eyes now fall on Daisy's proof copy of her poetry collection entitled *My Saucy Bark.* With this, the scene, which is one of the profoundest and more striking in the novel, gains in momentum. Baxter asks the naked, pregnant Daisy to read from her poetry. Daisy does not read out from her volume. Instead, she recites, at the shrewd and equivocally- phrased instance of her grandfather, Arnold's celebrated poem "Dover Beach".

> Daisy recited a poem that casts a spell on one man. Perhaps any poem would have done the trick and thrown the switch on a sudden mood change. Still, Baxter fell for the magic, he was transfixed by it, and he was reminded how much he wanted to live. No one can forgive him for the use of the knife. But Baxter heard what Henry never has, and probably never will, despite all Daisy's efforts to educate him. Some nineteenth-century poet – Henry has yet to find out whether this Arnold is famous or obscure- touched off in Baxter a yearning he could barely begin to define. That hunger is his claim on life, on a

> mental existence, and because it won't last much longer because the door of his consciousness is beginning to close (McEwan, *Saturday* 278).

The poem's effect on the villainous Baxter is tremendous. It transforms him; he now longs for life, not for taking or damaging it. His conversion, it may be suggested, is reminiscent of the Islamic anecdote of the infuriated Omar, who, with sword in hand, rushes to kill his sister who has embraced Islam and become a disciple of the Prophet. At the door, when he hears certain Quranic verses being recited by her, he is transfixed and spell-bound by their symphony and meaning. Consequently, he turns over a new leaf and becomes a Muslim himself. The ideas that inform the Dinner Scene are unmistakably clear. Imaginative literature can play a crucial and valuable role in diffusing or stemming violence as it has the power to culture and refine the human mind. It may be noted that it is not Perowne's scientific wit that saves his family and himself from Baxter's lethal, humiliating hands; their saviour is poetry. Reason and imagination must go hand in hand. The advancement of the rational, the scientific, and the technological alone, at the expense of the arts, the product of imagination, are wrecking civilized life. Terrorism is one consequence of this process. What seems imperative in such a context, is an aesthetic, empathic, and even amorous outlook on life. Such an outlook alone can be creative, life-giving, not life-denying. The image of the young, naked, and pregnant poet, Daisy, reciting "Dover Beach" to the violent Baxter symbolizes this truth. The terrorist lacks this outlook. Hence, his proclivity to violence. Arnold's "Dover Beach", the full text of which is given as an epilogue to the novel is central to an understanding of

Perowne's distressed state of mind and its causes. Just as Arnold's protagonist is obsessed with the 'Darkling plain', where ignorant armies clash by night, so also Perowne is obsessed with, traumatized, and even confused by, the post -9/11 international landscape taken over by terrorists, counter-terrorists, and warmongers. The only anodyne the poem suggests for the malady is love. It is to be noted that the poem has a salutary influence upon Perowne, too. His wife tells him that it was Daisy who 'delivered' him through 'Arnold someone' and he agrees, emphatically saying' Matthew Arnold'. McEwan successfully exploits "Dover Beach", its images, and its closing epiphanic vision. Significantly enough, the novel closes with a scene of lovemaking between Perowne and his wife, Rosalind. It is the neurosurgeon re-enacting the love held by the lover- protagonist of "Dover Beach". The scene may be seen as an index of the beginning of the end of Perowne's traumatic distresses.

Once the home invasion is over and Baxter has suffered his injury, there is a distinct shift in the novel's narrative mood. In a humorous vein, Grammaticus, the grandfather, remarks to Daisy, "I began to feel sorry for that fellow. I think, my dear, you made him fall in love with you" (McEwan, *Saturday* 278). Tim Gauthier comments on Grammaticus' attitude:

> This indicates that even during the confrontation, Grammaticus experienced a sense of pity for the man who broke his nose moments earlier. And Theo asks the investigators whether he and his father might be charged with something, revealing a fleeting sense of complicity in the way events have unfolded. But the fear and anxiety brought on by Baxter's violence do not lead the Perowne to

> contemplate a mutual vulnerability they might share with their assailant ("Selective in Your Mercies" 21).

The Perowne family's recognition of Baxter's appreciation of "Dover Beach" overshadows whatever terror he may have elicited. As they reminisce about the events of the evening, while enjoying their interrupted dinner, even Perowne expresses surprise at what he calls his "shift in sympathies": "What weakness, what delusional folly, to permit yourself sympathy towards a man, sick or not, who invades your house like this" (McEwan, *Saturday* 239). The fact that Perowne and his family permit themselves these kindlier feelings and sentiments is an intimation of their own awareness of their privileged social standing in contrast to the lowly social status of their assailant. Tim Gauthier argues: "This is no longer a conflict between equals, and the novel itself reflects this transition, for Baxter's significance to the plot diminishes rapidly once he has been defeated, now serving only as if the object through which Perowne demonstrates his rational magnanimity" ("Selective in Your Mercies" 21)

Trauma is central to *Saturday*. As such, it may be worthwhile to briefly consider McEwan's treatment of it through the figure of Perowne. Examining the connection between change and the experience of trauma, Judith Butler observes:

> Perhaps, rather, one mourns when one accepts that by the loss one undergoes one will be changed, possibly forever. Perhaps, mourning has to do with agreeing to undergo a transformation (perhaps one should say submitting to a transformation) the full results of which one cannot know in advance (*Precarious life* 21).

Butler concedes that a willingness to be transformed by trauma may not necessarily be typical: “When grieving is something to be feared, our fears can give rise to the impulse to resolve it quickly, to banish it in the name of an action invested with the power to restore the loss or return the world to a former order” (Butler, *Precarious life* 30). An intriguing question, as far as *Saturday* is concerned, is whether the traumatized Perowne comes under this kind of change. Tim Gauthier categorically asserts that no transformation occurs in the case of Perowne. “No such transformation occurs on his part. He remains remarkably consistent throughout, clinging to his role as a professional reductionist” (“Selective in Your Mercies” 21). Sebastian Groes, however, has an entirely different view about the motif of transformation. He sees in Perowne a growth in self-knowledge and a change in perception.

> At the heart of the novel lies the reinvigoration of a topos as old as storytelling itself – the transformation of the self, which has its forebears in classic writers such as Homer and Ovid. The trajectory of Perowne’s growing self-knowledge is tied to his engagement with and changing the perception of a wide variety of cultural and political debates at the beginning of the twenty-first century (“Ian McEwan and the Modernist” 102).

Gross’ assessment, it may be said, seems more appropriate. For example, in the climactic scene, in which “Dover Beach” is recited, even Perowne responds to the poem in his own fashion, thereby indicating that he entrenched philistinism in literary matters is in for a change. He also seems to be accepting the vision of love

as a refuge from the ills of the world. This acceptance is well demonstrated, at the close of the novel, through his reinvigorated love and regard for his wife, Rosalind.

Saturday is, indubitably, a serious and important novel, written by McEwan with 9/11 and its consequences evidently on the back of his mind. Through its central character, Perowne, and his interactions with society, the novel provides glimpses of the material and psychological nature of post 9/11 life in the West. *Saturday* belongs to the emerging fictional genre termed the neuronarrative. In Gary Johnson's view, the neuronarrative is a form of the narrative "which is concerned with the exploration of current scientific theories, particularly in the field of the cognitive sciences" ("Consciousness as Content" 180). Johnson postulates that

> The authors of neuronarratives tend to personally battle with, on the one hand, conveying the complex scientific developments of the cognitive sciences and, on the other, managing to maintain a flowing, un-textbook-like narrative fiction, which affirms the place of the humanities (especially creative literature) as important alongside the epistemological breakthroughs of the sciences ("Consciousness as Content" 181).

Commenting on McEwan's adept synthesis of fiction and neuroscience in *Saturday*, Laura Colombino says: "What I would like to broach, first of all, is the idea that in his novel McEwan uses the specialization of the brain generated by neuroscience as a metaphor of larger spatiality, both urban and global." She explains that "spaces – with their architectures, complexities, and, most importantly, catastrophes – are mediated and resolved symbolically through the conduit of the 'somatic' self" ("The

body, the city, the global" 9). Sabine Sielke notes that "Unlike the term Holocaust, the concept of trauma is not used as a trope of remembering, forgetting, and recognition, but of modes of repetition and revision, giving rise to a "hauntology" of what cannot even remember". Trauma, as Sielke sees it, is "the phenomenon that allows us to repeatedly reproduce the process of uncovering what is concealed, a process fundamental to all knowledge production, while at the same time frustrating our desire to know ("Why 9/11" 390). Cathy Caruth's idea of "the phenomenon of the traumatic recall" (*Unclaimed Experience* 129) is of particular significance, as it is remarkably applicable to McEwan's construction of Perowne's consciousness. Trauma theory can broadly be divided into two basic trends. One type of trauma emphasizes trauma as the breaking up of an entire self. The other focuses on the survival function of trauma, on how trauma allows its victim to get over an overwhelming experience by benumbing oneself to it. In modern trauma theory, however, the emphasis is mostly on the destructive repetition of the trauma that governs a person's life. Caruth observes:

> As modern neurobiologists point out, the repetition of the traumatic experience in the flashback can itself be traumatizing; if not life-threatening, it is at least threatening to the chemical structure of the brain and can ultimately lead to deterioration. And this would also seem to explain the high suicide rate of survivors… As a paradigm for the human experience that governs history, then, the traumatic disorder is indeed the apparent struggle to die (*Unclaimed Experience* 73).

Kristiaan Versluys considers the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, to be "A traumatic event of global proportions from which we cannot hope to recover until the means has been found to convert "traumatic memory" into "narrative memory". In his view, there has been, along with the collapse of the Twin Towers, a collapse of the "network of significations", too. (*Out of the Blue: September 11 and the Novel* 23). Versluys considers the restoration of this network to be of vital importance.

Philip Tew regards *Saturday* as a novel that embodies "an edgy, conflicted, fearful world" (*Contemporary British Novel* 202). This is the post-9/11 world. It is this world in which the Perownes negotiates their lives, and it is its salient issues, such as the 9/11 attacks, Islamic Terrorism, Osama Bin Ladan, the Iraq War, human freedoms and rights, and even mortal diseases, that they frequently discuss and debate. In fact, it is not just Islam as a particular religion that Perowne finds "distasteful" (McEwan, *Saturday* 124); it is any form of religion. With his enormous faith in science, technology, and reason, Perowne is not "inclined to religious feeling, to supernatural explanations" (McEwan, *Saturday* 17). All that he can muster up is a certain amount of "a queasy agnosticism" when he hears the "big ideas" being put across to account for the "ongoing injustice, inequality, and human suffering in the world" (McEwan, *Saturday* 74). McEwan is also immensely interested in the value of empathy, a key concept in the claims made for the value of literature as well as medical science. It is no accident that McEwan chose, as the novel's 'day', the day of the historic London demonstration against the Iraq war. This imbues the beginning of the novel with a sense of precariousness. The

melodramatic demonstration serves as an effective pointer to the theme of conflict and chaos that the novel underscores.

One of the most interesting characters in the novel is Baxter, who comes next in importance to Perowne. McEwan's profound interest in the city and its vibrant, variegated life and activities can also be seen in his depiction of Baxter. Baxter represents, as it were, the public area of the street. In Dominic Head's view, *Saturday* is an "allegory of the post-9/11 world". He adds that the novel involves "a process of demonization conducted from a western perspective, most especially in the parallel between Baxter and Saddam Hussein." Head discerns in the novel, "an invitation to speculate on the possibility of a common psychological disorder" (*Ian McEwan* 181), a psychological disorder common to both Baxter and Saddam Hussein. Referring to the profile of Saddam, which the political psychologist and international affairs expert, Jerrold M Post, had delivered to the US House Armed Services, during the days of Saddam Hussein's invasion of Kuwait, Head says that the dominant traits of Saddam's personality as identified by Post were Messianic ambition for unlimited power, absence of consciousness, unconstrained aggressiveness, and a paranoid outlook and that these traits are in consonance with the patterns of behaviour shown by Baxter. Head acknowledges, however, that this parallel with Saddam is not a full-fledged one in the novel. He says: "This is not a parallel that is fully developed…" (*Ian McEwan* 182). Nevertheless, the Baxter plot has a more obvious and socially significant dimension to it. It discloses and stages McEwan's concern with the question of relative privilege and social status, especially in terms of social class. Perowne, it may be noted, belongs to the privileged class, whereas Baxter belongs to the underprivileged. Perowne is very

affluent, highly educated, and knowledgeable and is, by calling, a neurosurgeon. In many respects, he is, therefore, far above Baxter. It is interesting to note that it is by using his superior wit and knowledge that Perowne successfully manipulates Baxter into believing that there is a newly - found cure for his disease and that he is eventually able to overpower the unarmed and off-guard Baxter by throwing him down the stairs. Perowne's defence of his family against the disruptive inroads that Baxter makes into it may also be seen as being symptomatic of his attempts to seal his privileged space off from that of the ordinary and underprivileged.

McEwan's description of the world has a dichotomous side to it. In a sense, it hinges on Roland Barthes's idea of binary oppositions. This may be seen particularly in McEwan's juxtaposition of contradictory ideas and images. To some extent, this strategy is what makes possible a more complete depiction of an event, like 9/11 or the anti-war demonstration, or of a person, like Perowne or his daughter, Daisy. Joanna Kosmalska put it this way, "every event, character, and conflict that occurs on this particular Saturday is illuminated from multiple, often contradictory, points of view by Perowne's extensive commentary, flashback, and reference to other books" ("Dichotomous Images" 269). For example, the mass protest is impugned by Miri Taleb's imprisonment and torture. Similarly, the overhanging terrorist threat is contrasted with national paranoia. The certainty of Prime Minister, Tony Blair, is negated by a flashback of Perowne's brief encounter with him, an encounter in which the Prime Minister bungles the surgeon's identity. Baxter is depicted as both an offender and a victim. The contrast between divergent ideas is further accentuated by McEwan's effective use of a variety of registers in the novel. Medical, media, upper-class, working-class, and other types of language are used in

the novel. This use of language seems designed to suggest that register can be used, in the day-to-day parlance and discourse, by people to control and exclude others and, thereby, to assert and foreground their own authority and position of supremacy.

Saturday tackles the post-9/11 geopolitical situation head-on. Through the consciousness of the cosy-living Henry Perowne, it unfolds the traumatic effects of 9/11, the paranoid sense of insecurity, the anxieties about the impending war on Iraq, popular anti-war frenzies, and the question of class distinctions. *Saturday* is also about the power and function of art in a conflict-ridden world. The novel underscores the idea that literature does matter, in a social or cultural as well as political sense. Indeed, science is greatly lauded in the novel. "Yet, the notion of an ethical role for the novel", as Head points out, "is retained in the most obvious way… through the plotting of *Saturday* and its treatment of how individuals situate themselves about current ideas" *(Ian McEwan* 108). The plot constantly pushes Perowne into socially symbolic situations, in the course of which he chances upon Baxter, a proletariat, plays squash with the pro-war American, Jay Strauss, and discusses the coming Iraq war with his daughter, Daisy. Simultaneously, the novel summons the whole panoply of western art. *Saturday* is framed, for instance, by an epigraph taken from Saul Bellow's *Herzog*, a novel about a man who finds himself in "a society that was no community and devalued the person" (*Saturday* ix). The quotation from Herzog is, as Groes points out, an acknowledgment of the fact that Perowne's "socio-cultural context is largely defined and shaped by American power – a major concern within *Saturday*" ("The City in *Saturday*"105). The novel's frame ends with Matthew Arnold's "Dover Beach" which plays a climacteric role in

its concluding scene, reinforcing the ideas of conflict and turmoil that the novel focuses on. According to Groes, the cultural and political discussions in the novel are shaped by "many competing ideas, voices, and literary references" ("The City in *Saturday*"102). The intertextuality, which "so distinguishes the form of *Saturday"* ("The City in *Saturday*"103) is overwhelming in its extent, comprehending as it does a plethora of creative writers, artists, painters, and musicians. Groes observes: "McEwan utilizes three distinct types of intertextual engagements: first, direct citation and borrowing of 'voice', second, the construction of parallels, and third, echo and allusion" ("The City in *Saturday*"102). The question, to which this massive, epic intertextuality and political referencing seem to boil-down, relates to the value of literature in an age that tends to be increasingly unliterary. Indeed, *Saturday*, opens a window on post-9/11 Britain, on its socio-political and cultural concerns and anxieties. In tune with Perowne's faith in gradualism, slow progress, and development, the novel also profiles Britain as a country where social advancement is the due reward for talent. The novel shows the extension of opportunity beyond the pale of the white Anglo Saxons who have been the prime beneficiaries of the widening educational and career opportunities in the decades immediately following World War II. Since Perowne's youth, the barriers, that had stood in the way of women and black people, have been removed. Significantly, Perowne's colleagues include non-whites like Gita Syal and Rodney Browne. There are also two "West Indian" security guards, one of whom is "thinking of training as a paramedic" (McEwan, *Saturday* 244). Likewise, there is a black girl who, inspired by Perowne, resolves to become a neurosurgeon herself.

Chapter 2

Jaggi Singh and Teddy Bears

David Bernans is a left-oriented Canadian novelist, translator, and activist. He is not a prolific writer and has, to his credit, only two novels, *North of 9/11* (2006) and *Collateral Murder* (2012). His only nonfiction book, *Con U Inc.: Privatization, Marketization and Globalization at Concordia University (and Beyond)*, had come out a few earlier, in 2001. Based in Quebec, he continues to write political articles and blog- posts of a satirical nature. *North of 9/11*, his debut novel, made international headlines, particularly on account of Concordia University's banning of his proposed reading of excerpts from the novel on 11 September 2006, the day of the fifth anniversary of 9/11. Bernans' critical stance on America is evident in *Collateral Murder*, too. Here, again, he strongly disapproves of America's war on terror, seeing in it nothing but a continuation of the terror and violence it is supposed to fight and end.

Written against the backdrop of the terrorist attack on New York's World Trade Centre on 11 September 2001, it is a remarkably daring and incisive treatment of 9/11, its antecedents, and its aftermath. It is not an easy read. It demands focus and attention. The non-chronological ordering of the events, which makes up the storyline, is one of the factors that militate against easy reading. Set in Montreal, *North of 9/11* tells the story of the Murphy family- Jack Murphy, Sherley Murphy, and of their nineteen-year-old activist daughter Sarah and her group of Palestinian Solidarity and anti-war activists. The main storyline involves a group of activists led

by Sarah, who plot direct action in the shape of occupying a corporate office building to raise people's conscience against America's counter-terrorism wars. The occupation of the building, which accordingly takes place, is foiled by the Canadian police. Sarah is shot dead, and her associates are arrested. It is on this tragic note that the story of *North of 9/11* comes to an end. The novel's action proper covers roughly a month, beginning on Tuesday, 11 September 2001, and closing on 9 October 2001. The first two characters, who are introduced, are Jack Murphy, a white American - Canadian, and Hassan Mohamed, an Arab- Muslim immigrant who is a taxi driver. Jack is a corporate executive, and is on his way, in Hassan's taxi, to attend a meeting. This taxi scene takes place on 23 September 2001, twelve days after the New York terrorist attack. An ongoing protest demonstration against the Afghan war has created a heavy traffic jam on the streets. Honking horns, police sirens, drums, whistles, shout, and slogans have created pandemonium all around. A staunch upholder of order and discipline, Jack is greatly annoyed over the chaos. He wonders why the world has become so disorderly and irrational, and asks in his mind, "Why couldn't the world be as orderly and as rational as he?" (Bernans, *North of 9/11* 1) In his view, North America has lost its serenity and sublimeness. He thinks that "somehow everything got mixed up. Western civilization – rationality, morality, the work ethic--- it had all been contaminated. He could smell the contamination even in this cab. It came from the cabby" (Bernans, *North of 9/11* 9). It is significant to note that the source of the contamination, as Jack metaphorically identifies it, is the cabbie, Hassan Mohamed, who is an Arab. Jack finds that many things have changed after 9/11. Therefore, the corporate business has been severely affected. For example, civilian aerospace has taken a disappointing nosedive. Nevertheless,

Jack feels encouraged by the potential discernible in the military sector. With his shrewd corporate mind, he anticipates an increase in this potential, since 9/11 has paved the way for armed conflicts as instanced by the US war on Afghanistan. All that has come about is beyond his control. He is convinced that "nothing could be done to reverse the 9/11 factor" (Bernans, *North of 9/11* 10). To Jack, the anti-war demonstrators before the American consulate, who comprise French and English-speaking Canadians as well as Arab immigrants and expatriates and who, accordingly, are shouting slogans like "*George Bush, terroriste! Canada complice"* (10) in English, French, and Arabic are "barbarians" (Bernans, *North of 9/11* 10). The demonstration has a different impact on Hassan Mohamed. He is excited by the sight and wants to join the demonstrators, but he can't afford to do it in the prevailing context of hate and hostility toward immigrant minorities like Arab Muslims and Indian Sikhs. He is aware that his calling as a cabby is likely to suffer on account of the anti-Arab, anti-immigrant passions created in Canada by the 9/11 attack. He is deeply scared that a backlash from the side of the white Canadian population is imminent. This fear has already begun to compel him to make alterations in his physique and sartorial culture. As such, he is not now wearing the customary Arab kaffiyeh (scarf) and he has taken to close, clean shaving of his face to look less Arab, to project himself as an Arab who is amenable to western cultural norms. His Sikh friends cannot do this, as their turban and beard are indispensable items of their religious identity. The figure of Hassan Mohamed is crucial to our understanding of the enormity of the shaky and distressful situation 9/11 had occasioned for Arab and other immigrant communities in Canada. To ward off harm

to life and property, they had to resort, as does Hassan Mohamed, to make shifts in their cultural and behavioural patterns.

In the car, Jack feels extremely restive, as he is apprehensive that he might be late for the meeting with his client, an important aerospace manufacturer. He is now a top consultant of a reputed public relations firm. At this juncture, he recalls his 1983 encounter with his old friend, Mordecai Dingle men a Groucho Marxist, like himself, in their youthful years. Jack was an American who had refused to be drafted into the army and go to fight in the Vietnam war. Similarly, Mordecai had refused to join the Israeli army and go and oppress the Palestinians in the Israeli-occupied territories. He was opposed to Israel's policies toward Palestine, just as Jack was to America's toward Vietnam. In the socially and politically tumultuous 1960s, they were both rebels. However, shortly afterwards, Jack turned over a new leaf, jettisoned his rebellious convictions, joined advertising, and drifted to Montreal in 1968. Their other Maoist friends had also become part of the establishment, but not Mordecai, who stood his ground, persisting in his activist faith and playing his recalcitrant roles despite his disillusionment with Maoism. In 1983, when he meets him after fifteen years, Jack finds him to be his old self, still glued to his principles and searing critiques of US policies. The explanation for his continued activism, that Mordecai gives Jack at this meeting, is noteworthy:

> "IT'S SOMETHING I FELT I HAD TO DO", MORTY EXPLAINED. "AS A LEFTIST AND AS A JEW". IT'S FINE FOR ME TO CRITICIZE WHAT UNCLE SAM'S DOING IN EL SALVADOR BUT LOOK WHAT'S BEING DONE IN MY NAME

> OVER THERE IN ISREAL: THE INVASION OF LEBANON, SABRA AND SHATILA MASSACRES, AND ALL THAT. PRETTY SCARY STUFF, MAN. (Bernans, *North of 9/11* 14)

In Mordecai's view, draft- dodgers are not traitors. "THEY ARE WAR RESISTERS, RESISTING AN UNJUST WAR OF OCCUPATION" (Bernans, *North of 9/11* 14) As Mordecai puts it in their 1983 conversation, Jack was also "ONE OF THE BIGGEST WAR RESISTERS BACK IN 69" (Bernans, *North of 9/11* 14). But, Jack does not want to look back; he doesn't want to be reminded of his past when, together with his Marxist colleagues, he used to condemn America's "DECADENT BOURGEOIS HABITS and its "LAPDOGS OF IMPERIALISM. (Bernans, *North of 9/11* 14). As far he is concerned, the rebellious life he had lived is a carcass, buried deep in the past. He had by 1983 become an "AD MAN, CLIMBING THE CORPORATE LADDER" (Bernans, *North of 9/11* 15*)*. For the last 30 years, he has been a resident of Canada, never looking back, always trying to erase the memory of Mordecai and the other leftists he had once clubbed himself with. The 9/11 catastrophe, however, awakens his dormant Americanness and his sense of his American roots. "September 11 was Jack's star-spangled rebirth" (Bernans, *North of 9/11* 15*.)* It serves as his catharsis, purging him of his guilt overdraft-dodging, of his feelings of resentment in America, of his sense of having and having been betrayed by America. It brings him closer to his American brethren who are rallying to the American flag, and "Signing 'God Bless America'" (Bernans, *North of 9/11* 15*)*. In short, the flames of the Twin Towers resurrect Jack as a revitalized American. His situation, however, is made ironic by the fact that his

daughter Sarah, is a rebel. Deeply anti-American, she is against the post-9/11 American invasion of Afghanistan. Jack believes that she has been corrupted by her Arab friends and his concern now is how to get her back to a normal life. Jack vindicates President Bush's War on Terror. He tells the cabby Hassan Mohamed "What I mean is that no matter what our politics, after the bombing nobody can oppose what… the president is doing." (Bernans, *North of 9/11* 17). He also refers to Bush as 'our President' (17) even though he is now a Canadian.

The most striking aspect of *North of 9/11* is Bernans' mode of approach to 9/11. He does not simplistically filter and narrow down its causes to fundamentalist Islam and its supposed displeasure with American or western culture. On the other hand, he puts 9/11 in the larger context of America's imperialist goals, its hegemonic interferences in the affairs of other nations, its corporatism and arms trade, and its acts of violence and foul-play in other parts of the world. He contests the American idea that 9/11 was the "worst act of terrorism on American soil" (Bernans, *North of 9/11* 18,*)* and criticizes America's steady and stupendous efforts to drill that idea into the mind and imagination of all, exploiting various forms of the media, particularly the television. The images of the tumbling towers, the flames, the smoke, and the dust have been so reiteratively portrayed by the US that people everywhere could be brainwashed into thinking that the attack was one of pure malignity stemming from the fundamentalist Islamic faith and that the US was an innocent victim. This projection of 9/11, Bernans implies, is designed to camouflage its connections to American history, to the events of the past in which America has been a pre-eminently guilty player. Sarah, for example, finds in 9/11 "a perfect

opportunity to underline the similarities between the terrorist bloodshed in New York and the US-sponsored Sabra and Shatila massacres" (Bernans, *North of 9/11* 19). Hassan Mohamed's sentiments are identical. He, too, cannot delink 9/11 from US political manoeuvrings around the world. He feels that the US cannot wash its hands clean of 9/11, shunting its accountability sheerly onto the shoulders of Bin Laden. The US, he accuses, has been, Laden's foster father. "The training and equipping of Bin Laden's network," according to him, "was co-funded by the CIA when he was fighting the Soviets in Afghanistan…" (Bernans, *North of 9/11* 27). Neither can the US, so Hassan thinks, exonerate itself and claim innocence when it comes to the conflict between Israel and Palestine. The US has always been a generous ally of Israel. Hassan is aware that the "US was implicated in the Sabra and Shatila massacres as well. Uncle Sam was giving more military aid to the Israeli military than to any other country in the world" (Bernans, *North of 9/11* 30). This pejorative view of the US, which Bernans points up through the words and thoughts of Sarah and Hassan, underlines the connections to 9/11 of other international tragedies and conflicts, Hassan has no misgivings about where the roots of 9/11 lie. He agrees that 9/11 is a disaster; it should not have happened. It has done to death hundreds of people and countless are its indirect victims. All of them are innocent, but the American government is not. For, using its military, it has inflicted acts of large-scale violence and woe on innocent human beings, not only on its own soil, but on other peoples' soil as well. Hassan laments that nobody will understand the connections between the World Trade Centre attack and America's gory misdeeds of the past. He tells Sarah that "there are a lot of connections,… but nobody will

understand." (Bernans, *North of 9/11* 29). Nobody will. Because the US is so dressing the 9/11 discourse as to blind people to the truth. Hassan asserts:

> People are being brainwashed to think this thing just came out of the blue for no reason, and the US is just a victim. They just see these images of death and destruction in New York. They see these innocent victims, and then they see an American flag. And the obvious conclusion is that the whole United States, even the Govt and the Army, is like this innocent victim. Nobody's going to understand" (Bernans, *North of 9/11* 28)

But Sarah refuses to concede Hassan's pessimistic vision. With her youthful idealism, she hopes that activists like they can, with concerted efforts, make the impossible possible and bring people to understand the historical antecedents to 9/11. When she reads, on the television screen the American State Department's description of the attacks as "the worst act of terrorism on US soil" (28), she is highly incensed. It is a pure exaggeration, at odds with the facts of American history. She thinks that she can easily disprove the Department's remark. She vehemently disputes it:

> … the worst act of terrorism? Really? What about the hundreds of thousands of slaves kidnapped from Africa and dragged to American soil against their will to be forced into degrading labour, raped, tortured, and murdered? Doesn't that count? What about the millions of native Americans killed in genocidal wars on American soil to make way for white settlers? Doesn't that count either? 28).

The State Department or CNN, she thinks, should issue a retraction. This clubbing of the 9/11 disaster with slavery, racist evils, and the decimation of America's aborigines reflects Bernans' sardonic and subversive view of America's steadfast propaganda about the Singularity of 9/11 by calling it "the worst act of terrorism on US soil" (28). When carefully scanned, the genesis and evolution of what is today the United States of America, the most powerful nation on earth, can turn out to be a macabre saga, a chronicle of vice and villainy, violence and brutality, murder, and massacre. The institution of slavery, the subjugation and annihilation of the natives by white European colonizers have all been, at the bottom, criminal acts of terror against the life, dignity, and property of human beings. In Bernans' view, 9/11 certainly cannot be considered the worst act of terrorism on US soil.

Bernans calls *North of 9/11* a historical novel. His use of episodes from US socio-political history from its colonial days to the present attests to this conception of the novel. What underlies this concern with history is his perception that no reading of the 9/11 attack would make adequate sense unless it is done with some awareness of certain issues and realities crucially accompanying the founding and building of the US. Bernans' description of the way Betty recounts to Sarah the story of the Caribbean black students' protest Professor Anderson's racist practices is worth noting in this context:

> Then she painted the historical background of the Anderson affair. First with broad strokes, then in intricate details … She started with the latest Concordia events and regressed ever backwards, painting larger and larger concentric circles. It wasn't just one racist Professor.

> The issues behind the occupation were much deeper. They had to be understood at the institutional level. But racism at the Sir George University couldn't be understood outside of the border historical context (Bernans, *North of 9/11* 65)

Betty's narrative strategies, it may safely be said, are precisely the strategies Bernans employs in his treatment of 9/11 in the novel.

In *North of 9/11*, Bernans undermines the politically motivated centre-staging of the WTC catastrophe, which the US had undertaken through media and other propaganda. This is done through an elaborate focus on another 9/11 day, which was disastrous to the Latin American Republic of Chile. On 11 September 1973, the democratically elected government under Salvador Allende was toppled with US support:

> The United States was the superpower that backed the military coup in Chile on 11 September 1973. On that day, bombs rained down on the palace of La Moneda in Santiago…. that day, a new monster emerged …: US-backed General Augusto Pinochet" (Bernans, *North of 9/11* 36)

The result was that thousands were arrested, herded like cattle into detention camps. Many of them were never to be seen again. This terrible chapter of Chilean history is recaptured by Bernans through the memories of the 36-year-old Carla, who, when she was a child, had come to Canada with her parents' fleeing persecution under Pinochet's regime. On the morning of 11 September 2001, unaware of the World Trade Centre attack, she comes to a church in Monreal to pray for her deceased

parents and all those Chileans who had lost their lives during Chile's days of terror. Memories of Chile now come to her mind, together with memories of her father. Jesus, her father, who was a trade union leader, was aware of America's imperialist interests in Chile and had told her about it. Carla vividly recalls her father's words:

> … THE MEN DOING THE BLOODY WORK WERE PART OF A LARGER PROBLEM. MANY OF THE SOLDIERS UNDER PINOCHET'S COMMAND LEARNED THEIR VIOLENT TRADE IN THE US MILITARY TRAINING IN PANAMA CALLED THE SCHOOL OF THE AMERICAS. (Bernans, *North of 9/11* 37)

Evidently, "the larger problem" is Bernans' euphemism for US imperialism, corporatism, and commercial capitalism, which are the driving forces behind its foreign policies. The terror unleashed by the US-backed Pinochet is mapped in the novel as an instance of the dark side of the international politics and programs of the US.

In the church, Carla meets Mrs. Murphy, who has been driven there by the horrifying CNN visuals of the WTC attack. Stunned to hear of the attack from Mrs. Murphy, Carla wonders: "How could anybody manage to inflict that kind of damage to such an important building in New York City" (Bernans, *North of 9/11* 36). As for Mrs. Murphy, she is too frightened and worried, particularly because she has, as yet no idea of whether or not her nephew, Brent is safe in New York. The interaction between Carla and Mrs. Murphy acquires special importance in the context of Bernans' debunking of the uniqueness of the US 9/11. At the outset of their encounter, Mrs. Murphy observes that in times of common disaster, people should

come together in faith and hope. But Carla, who is, at this point, unaware of the terrorist attack, fails to understand Mrs. Murphy's meaning. When Mrs. Murphy begins to clarify, saying, "Yes, I mean with bombing…." (Bernans, *North of 9/11* 35*),* Carla interrupts her, blurting out, "but that was 28 years ago" (35). The fact is that Carla takes Mrs. Murphy's reference to bombing as an allusion to the US-backed bombing, on 11 September 1973, of the La Moneda Palace in Santiago. This episode clearly shows that, in North *of 9/11,* Bernans purposefully depicts 9/11 as a day that means and echoes differently to different peoples. To the Chileans, it signifies, as it does to Carla, the bombing of the La Monera Palace, the overthrow of Salvador Allende, the assumption of power by Pinochet, and the atrocities that ensured. To North Americans, it signifies, as it does to Mrs. Murphy, the destruction of the WTC and the sorrows that it spewed. This paralleling of the Chilean 9/11 with the US 9/11 is part of Bernans' undercutting of the US portrayal of 11 September 2001 as a unique and distinctive US day, a day that deserves to be forever embedded in human memory as the most tragic day in the US history, a day of unprecedented harm and injustice done to the innocent US. Evidently, Bernans' import is that on the same day in 1973, the US had caused, though in a different form, greater harm, and misery to the Chilean people.

The church scene shows how the WTC disaster has impacted Canadian society. It is people's grief, fear, and sense of insecurity that has brought them to the Church, "the place of solace" (Bernans, *North of 9/11* 40), as Bernans calls it. The crisis has galvanized them to the fold of faith which serves as a source of relief and respite. Apart from this religious theme, the Church Scene also embodies the motif

of empathy and its social value. It demonstrates how thrown together in grief and fear people commiserate with one another revealing their common humanity. In the church, the devotees reach out to each other's suffering and seek consolation in each other's plight. They are a crowd of people, "weeping and consoling" (40) and finding themselves in one another. This process is what Jeremy Rifkin calls "empathic extension" (*The Empathic Civilization* 5*).* The strength to console and give moral support to each other flows from their deep sense of individual vulnerability and their desire for companionship. It is important to note that when the scene opens, Clara is full of sorrow, as harrowing memories of her Chilean past stream into her mind. The news of the fall of the Twin Towers adds to her cup of miseries. As for Mrs. Murphy, she, too, is in a similar state of mind. The television images of the burning and crashing Towers, together with her anxiety over her nephew's safety in New York have completely shattered her. However, Mrs. Murphy's reminiscences about Clara's parents, their departmental store, and their caring and good-humoured refusal to sell her cigarettes as they were aware of her cardiac complaints enliven Clara's spirits. On her part, Clara consoles and heartens Mrs. Murphy, saying that nothing untoward must have happened to her nephew. Relieved, Mrs. Murphy imagines that her nephew must be sitting safely somewhere in New York and watching the CNN telecasts. Carla, it is significant to note, is already the victim of a disaster, the US-sponsored coup and terror under Pinochet in Chile. The Chilean trauma persists in her and it is in such a state of mind that she responds to the WTC disaster. It may be noted that even though she has reason enough to feel the joy of revenge over America's tragedy, she does not feel any such joy. Instead, what wells up in her is human empathy for its victims. "She was filled

with empathic grief…." (Bernans, *North of 9/11* 39*)*. Empathy is a quality central to human nature. Jeremy Rifkin says: "Empathic distress is as old as our species, is traceable back into our ancestral past,…." (*The Empathic Civilization* 8). The church scene is a clear demonstration of empathic distress, of the expression and extension, in times of common suffering, of the latent human empathic potential. The scene is also notable for Carla's sentiments of revenge. What she calls for is justice-based, punishment for the evildoers. She thinks that "the criminals, responsible for the terror visited Chile, whether in the Chilean military, in the CIA, or the US government should be arrested and brought before an international court" (Bernans, *North of 9/11* 39). She rejects the idea of killing innocent people in the name of revenge. "Carla was convinced that justice could not be found by bombing the innocent people in the country whose government had served as the terrorists' training ground" (Bernans, *North of 9/11* 40). Carla's views are pivotal to Bernans' vision of terror and its perpetrators, be it the terrorist or the state.

In *North of 9/11*, Bernans takes a series of skeletons out of the cupboard of American history in his exposition of the 'larger problem' against which the WTC attack is to be gauged. Accordingly, he insistently puts his finger on the injustices and atrocities in terms of war and other acts that America is guilty of. One of his major concerns in the novel, therefore, is white racism. An interesting scene in the novel, which underlines the racist ethos, is the one in which Jack Murphy watches, in his office, the burning and falling Twin Towers on the television screen. Bernans portrays Murphy as a true specimen of affluent, corporate, materialistic, and racist America. The destruction of the WTC immediately reminds him of its construction

three decades ago and of the glory and grandeur in which it stood as a symbol of America's high status as a nation of power, wealth, and technological achievements. As a young man, he used to marvel at it:

> WHEN HE LOOKED AT THE TWIN TOWERS, HE SAW THEIR REAL MEANING. THEY WERE MORE THAN TWO NEW COLUMNS IN THE NEW YORK SKYLINE. THE TOWERS WERE QUINTESSENTIALLY MODERN: REFLECTIVE METAL AND GLASS, PERFECTLY UNIFORM, ERECTED BY THE MOST ADVANCED ENGINEERING AND CONSTRUCTION TECHNIQUES, REFINED OF ALL MATERIAL IMPURITIES THAT CAN BE SEEN IN BRICK OR CONCRETE. THEY REPRESENTED THE DAWN OF A NEW ERA. (Bernans, *North of 9/11* 42)

In this scene, too, as in many other scenes in the novel, Bernans effectively uses memory as both theme and technique. The sight of the WTC flames and billows of smoke brings to Murphy's mind a similar sight he had happily witnessed on the campus of Sir George Williams University in the year 1969. A group of Caribbean black students, who were supporters of the Black Power movement had taken over the Computer Centre on the 9th floor of the University's main building. It was part of their agitation against a white professor's racist discrimination in grading. They started burning and throwing out computer programs preserved on punch cards. In the hurly-burly, the fire got out of control. Murphy, who was a student, was among the crowds of students, firemen, and others gathered below. He recalls how happy he

felt when the white students who stood below watching the tragedy exulted over it, chanting: “WELL, IT SERVES THEM RIGHT, THE NIGGERS! …. LET THEM BURN…. LET THE NIGGERS BURN! LET THE NIGGERS BURN. (Bernans, *North of 9/11* 44). Murphy is a racist die-hard. The first question he asks Greg, his young black security guard on seeing the WTC violence is a clear manifestation of his prejudice toward Arabs and Muslims. He says: " Have they said who did it? Was it the Arabs?” (44). He concludes that “if it was a suicide attack, it had to be the Arabs” (44)

The relationship between Murphy and Greg also reveals Murphy’s racist mindset. If Greg is “a nice young black man” (Bernans, *North of 9/11* 44) in his eyes, it is sheerly because Greg, who is deeply conscious of his powerlessness in the white-dominated Canadian social structure, is always polite and subservient to him. It is Greg’s timidity that compels him to ignore the racist motives in Murphy’s comments on the Arabs. He knows that he can with proof disprove Murphy’s views by pointing out that the Unabomber attacks and the Oklahoma City bombing were the work not of Arabs, but of whites and that they all of them were suicide attackers. Greg also knows that if the Unabomber were a black man, he would certainly have been executed, not got off with life, as did the white Unabomber. He has his experience of the real contours of the black-white relationship as it exists and functions in the WASP Canadian society. So, he prudently keeps his silence on Murphy’s anti-Arab remarks. “In his experience, initiating arguments about racism was a way to get into trouble” (Bernans, *North of 9/11* 45). He is aware of the fate of his mother, Betty Phillip. The story of Betty Philip also underscores the ills of

racism. She was working as a nanny and taking courses at Sir George Williams University on Thursdays for a bachelor's degree. It was the time of the Caribbean students' protest against the racist Professor Anderson. A black liberation activist, she zealously jumped into the fray. Consequently, she was arrested. After a two-year-long trial, a penalty of one thousand pounds, and a written confession of her participation in the protest, she was set free. In the meantime, she had lost her job as a nanny. Her subsequent life as a waitress was full of hardships. Nevertheless, all through her life, even amid escalating misfortunes, she never lost her fighting spirit and her concern for blacks and their liberation.

Brenans' portrait of Greg is strikingly like Mulk Raj Anand's portrait of the untouchable youth Bakha in his novel, *Untouchable* (1935) *Anand's* Bakha is handsome and physically extraordinarily strong and well-built, but, yet he shrinks from attacking Pundit Kalinath when he learns that the priest had tried to molest his sister, Sohini. Through the figure of Bekha, Anand shows how continued oppression through the caste system and institutionalized untouchability operates on the mind and personality of the oppressed, depriving them of the will and the power to resist injustice and entrenching in them a timid and servile mentality. Greg's behaviour is akin to Bakha's. He does not want to do anything that might offend or displease his racist boss Murphy. He knows that Murphy is as prejudiced against the blacks as he is against the Arab-Muslims and that he is completely wrong and unfair in the aspersions he casts on Arab-Muslims and in denouncing Islam as a culture that promotes violence and suicide terrorism. Greg feels like objecting to Murphy's views but desists from it out of fear that it can land in difficulties. So, he suppresses

his moral indignation over Murphy's overweening racist contempt for the Arab Muslims, just as Bakha does his over Pundit Kalinath's arrogant mistreatment of his sister.

The figure of Jack Murphy is central to Bernans' treatment of 9/11, Canada, and the US in *North of 9/11*. He is an American immigrant in Canada, living and working there. With his wife Shirley Murphy and 19-year-old daughter, Sarah, Significantly enough, he does not want his pre-Canadian life to be known to others. There are "carefully constructed barriers in Jack's mind" (Bernans, *North of 9/11* 75), barriers to render his past invisible to others. It may be suggested that Murphy emerges not only as a character but as a symbol as well. The purposeful construction, after his Canadian success story, of barriers to erase his past is symbolic of America's efforts, after its success story as a nation, to conceal the negative facets of its socio-political history, particularly its history of violence. But America cannot wipe its past out of its memory. This is shown through Murphy's memories of the anti-Semitism and Judeophobia of his youthful American days. In the dinner scene, Murphy is shocked by his wife's reference, to his draft-dodging and his father's anti-Semitism, because he is afraid that it would lead to opening his shameful past before his daughter. Nevertheless, it jolts his memory, and he recalls the anti-Semitic frenzies of the 1950s and 60s. He also remembers the later American shift, in the 1980s, from anti-Semitism and Judeophobia to anti-Arabism and Islamophobia. "THE MEMORIES FLOODED PAST THE CAREFULLY CONSTRUCTED BARRIERS IN JACK'S MIND. ANTI- SEMITISM WAS AS AMERICAN AS AN APPLE PIE BACK IN SUBURBAN NEW JERSEY OF THE

1950S AND 60S" (Bernans, *North of 9/11* 75). Murphy cannot forget the negative stereotyping of the Jews prevalent in those days. The Jews were controlling Hollywood; they were steering up troubles in the southern United States; they were spies selling secrets to the Soviets; there was a Jewish – Communist conspiracy against the US; in alliance with the niggers, the Jews were turning Americans into Communists. They were, in the eyes of the church, "perfidious Jews" (Bernans, *North of 9/11* 75) and crucifiers of Christ. He remembers how different they seemed to him in his boyhood days.

> THEY WERE ALL DRESSED IN BLACK WITH THEIR BEARDS AND THEIR CURLS ON THEIR TEMPLES. THEY WERE DIFFERENT. THEY HAD THEIR SHOPS, THEIR LANGUAGE, THEIR CHURCHES. IT MADE PERFECT SENSE THAT THEY HAD SOME KIND OF PERFIDIOUS PLAN TO SABOTAGE THE REST OF US (Bernans, *North of 9/11* 75)

He also remembers how, gradually, over the years, his father's anti-Semitism stopped making sense to him and how he began to look kindly and amiably on the Jews. He even had a crush on a Jewish girl named Rachael. As for the Jews, they had begun to be assimilated into white American culture. He recalls that "IN ANY EVENT, AT SOME POINT, THE JEWS LOST THEIR PERFIDIOUSNESS AND BECAME MORE LIKE HIM" (Bernans, *North of 9/11* 45). By the 1980s, he had become an anti-Arab and an Islamophobe. As such, what used to morally infuriate him was the killing of the Israeli Jews by Islamic suicide bombers. As he sees it, "they were blown to bits by crazed suicidal militants with dark skin and beards,

citing strange religious texts" (Bernans, *North of 9/11* 75). To him, the Jews are, now, "People like us" (Bernans, *North of 9/11* 76) like the white Westerners. His "other" and archenemy now are Arab Muslims. "Arabs were," he thinks, "different, non-western, perfidious - and they were attacking people like us even if the victims were Jews. They wanted to destroy civilization. He had always suspected it, and 9/11 proved it" (76). It is interesting to note that in earlier times in the West, it was the Jew who was seen as being 'perfidious' but, ironically enough, it is the Arab-Muslim who is now seen as being "perfidious". Equally noteworthy is Murphy's idea of the Jew as victim and of the Arab-Muslim as victimizer. Like his father, Murphy has a "conservative head" (Bernans, *North of 9/11* 73). It is, therefore, a small surprise if he defends his father's anti-Semitism, saying that "being anti- Arab is nothing like being anti- Semite" (73). In other words, to be anti-Arab is right, to be anti-Semitic is wrong. Through Murphy's memory, Bernans throws open a window on an era when savage Judeophobia was rampant in America. He also reveals how America's Judeophobia had slowly been replaced by an equally savage Islamophobia, to suit American interests in the changing international political scenario. America's double standards in its approach to the Israel – Palestine conflict are also underlined by Bernans through Murphy. It is significant to note that while Murphy is wrothful that Jews are being killed by Palestinians whom he, as mentioned earlier, condemns as "crazed suicidal militants with dark skin and beards" (Bernans, *North of 9/11* 75), he consciously disregards the massacres of Palestinians carried out by Israeli soldiers. "Of course, Jack knew that Israeli soldiers also killed Palestinian children, women, and men in refugee camps and occupied territories. But somehow, those deaths seemed less significant, even if

there were four-time more of them (Bernans, *North of 9/11* 75). Bernans' unmistakable criticism is that America has been conniving, as does Murphy, at Israel's atrocities on the Palestinians.

To Jack Murphy, the US is a powerful, innocent country. The sentiments he mutters to himself, as he sees the televised images of the fall of the twin towers, may be noted in this context. He considers the 9/11 attack to be "A wake-up call to the sleeping giant. The lamb would become the lion. America would rise from the ashes and would lead a crusade against evils" (Bernans, *North of 9/11* 46). This idea of American innocence, symbolized by the "lamb", is what is chiefly contested by Bernans in the novel. Murphy, it may be noted, immediately links the attack with Arab-Muslims, who, he thinks, are opposed to Western civilization. He exclaims to Greg "I knew it was the Arabs, I knew it! Didn't I say it was the Arabs earlier?" (46). He believes that violence is embedded in Islam and that suicide terrorism is something organic to Islamic culture. "This whole suicide bombing is part of their cultural tradition" (46). A little later, he tells his panicky wife over the phone: "Pull yourself together, Shirley…. This is what the terrorists want you to do. They want you to panic. Don't let those Arab bastards win" (Bernans, *North of 9/11* 49).

Murphy's attachment to his family is, to some extent, formal. His concern is more with his family's affluence and lifestyle than with the emotional relationships that normally characterize familial life. "He was too busy making money they needed to maintain their lifestyle" (Bernans, *North of 9/11* 50). Whereas Mrs. Murphy is good at keeping up familial contacts and intimacies, Murphy is not. He only sees most of their relatives once every two to three years or so. In his pursuit of

corporate careerism, he overlooks even his intimacies with his wife. In the Dinner Scene, which takes place the day after the 9/11 attack, he remains too unconcerned, poring over newspaper reports about financial prospects and possibilities for corporate business. Annoyed by his behaviour, Mrs. Murphy asks him: "The thing about these strategic times is that they make you realize what's important in life. What's more important to you Jack? The image of the corporations you work for or your family" (Bernans, *North of 9/11* 70). Murphy's answer to his wife is noteworthy. "Those corporations pay for the food on our table" (70). This sums up the corporate rhetoric that corporatism is a creator of jobs and a provider of livelihood for millions. His left-oriented wife counters him, saying, "What good is the food your corporations pay for without a family to share it with" (70). His relations even with his parents have been of an awkward nature, particularly because of his father's resentment over his draft-dodging. What worries Murphy most is the likelihood of "turbulence in the market" (70). His thoughts are centred on how to help his aerospace manufacturers successfully weather "the tempestuous market" (70). He foresees problems that might result from the bankruptcy of American Airlines and United Airlines, whose carriers had been involved in the September 11 hijackings. However, at the end of the novel, Murphy realizes the preciousness of family when he senses that he will no longer have his daughter Sarah with him to share the food provided by his corporations. A major motif in the novel, it may be said, is familial happiness and stability. Bernans seems to be placing it above everything else, including state and corporations. The novel's ending is especially significant. It shows the state, which is an inveterate ally of corporatism, as a destroyer of family, not a sustained of family. It is this truth that dawns on Murphy

at the novel's close and makes him condemn the state's inflated concern with national security which, in effect, is the security of the ruling class, not the security of its citizens. To some extent, Bernans' vision of the state seems to be negative. All that the state always wants to do is to maintain itself, safe, secure, and powerful.

It is interesting to note that the Murphy family's dinner becomes a venue for a heated discussion on American terrorism. Recalling her encounter with Carla in the church the previous day, Mrs. Murphy puts her husband in mind of the 1973 Chilean coup and terrorism and of the vicissitudes that had overtaken Carla's family. The Chilean disaster was terrorist work. She contends: "Only this terrorism was supported by the United States." (Bernans, *North of 9/11* 71). A little later, she remonstrates with Murphy:

> You see, September 11th is the anniversary of another terrorist attack: a US-sponsored attack on the democratically elected government of Chile. Don't shake your head at me, Jack! It was sponsored by the US. Look it up. It's been declassified. And Carla was praying, for the victims of the attack. She lost an aunt and an uncle. Her family became refugees and fled to Canada. But she doesn't say 'oh, I can't eat American food because Americans are terrorists. Listen to yourself, Jack! You sound like your father (Bernans, *North of 9/11* 72).

What, in fact, urges Mrs. Murphy to give so passionate a retort to her husband is his professed aversion to cumin and Arab food on the ground that Arabs are terrorists, destroyers of the Twin Towers.

Murphy's vision of the Arab- Muslim, it may be suggested, is undergirded by Huntington's widely known, but controversial, view that the clash between the West and the Arab world is basically a clash of civilizations, of two world views, one Western and the other Islamic (Bernans, *North of 9/11* 86). The question of the ethnically and culturally different 'other' has always been an irksome one for the West. And it did surface with greater gravity and intensity after 9/11. As such, the prejudice and displeasure, with which the 'other' used to be viewed, assumed unprecedented proportions during the post-9/11 days. In *North of 9/11,* the racialization of the Arab-Muslim in the US as well as in Canada, is represented mainly through the figure of the American- Canadian Murphy. Bernans' suggestions are clear. In the West, the target of racist hate is susceptible to shifts, depending upon the times and the political exigencies, but racism is not, for it is something congenital to the white man. Those who, like Sarah, try to tamper with the racist status quo, promoting eclectic attitudes and lifestyles, will just be a minority, fighting a futile battle and, finally, coming to grief, as do Sarah and her activist associates. Murphy is a robust believer in authority and hierarchy. That's why he defends the police action against the activists, including his daughter, protesting, at the Monreal Summit of the Americas, against what Jayson Grote calls "the hypnotic and formidable global corporate economy" (*Cultural Resistance Reader* 369). At this protest, Jaggi Singh, an Indian expatriate, was arrested and detained for seventeen days "on the pretext that he was assaulting police officers with teddy bears" (Bernans, *North of 9/11* 76). Murphy argues that world leaders have always been protected from thugs like Jaggi Singh. His prejudice against Jaggi Singh is reflected in his accusation that "Jaggi Singh was doing a lot more than throwing

teddy bears" (Bernans, *North of 9/11* 76). Murphy hates activism. The activists at the Summit were, in his view, "thugs" (76). Bur, in his daughter's view, they were well-intentioned activists trying to stop "the so-called democratic governments from handing over all the power to a bunch of multinational corporations" (76). Murphy's curt response to his daughter's criticism of this consortium of state and corporations is to call her "a conspiracy theorist" (Bernans, *North of 9/11* 77), meaning that she is one of those who entertain the idea that the 9/11 attack is the result of an internal American conspiracy. Murphy's reference to conspiracy theory here is worth noting. James. B. Meigs observes:

> Conspiracy theories generally get a much more sympathetic reception overseas… where arguments that the United States engineered the deaths of its own citizens often meet with a positive response. International polls have shown that, in many countries, the evidence showing that Al Qaeda carried out the attack fails to persuade the majority of citizens (*Debunking 9/11 Myths,* xv).

David Dunbar and Brad Reagen point out that the conspiracists "content that the US government instigated the assault, or at least allowed it to occur to advance oil interest for a war agenda" (*Debunking 9/11 Myths* 1). Bernans attitude toward the conspiracist theory appears to be ambivalent. However, in holding America responsible for the five thousand New York deaths on the anti-American banner put up on Concordia's campus by a group of activists, he seems to be insinuating that there may be some truth in the conspiracy theory.

Murphy's amnesia toward Arab Muslims and their culture, which Bernans stresses throughout the novel, comes from what the American Protestant minister, Deirdre King Hainsworth, calls "our limited understanding of the religious and cultural complexities of the Arab community" (*Arabs in the Americas* 191). He adds:

> For many of us who served as pastors, this meant explicitly preaching and speaking against the immediate identification of the September 11 perpetrators as Arab, and then speaking out against scapegoating all those of Arab descent considering the attacks (*Arabs in the Americas* 193).

Murphy's mindset mirrors the widespread ignorance about Islamic culture, an ignorance that has always characterized not only America or Canada but the whole of the West as well. Hainsworth's comment on the rickety nature of post-9/11 Arab Muslim life experience may also be noted here:

> In the aftermath of the attacks on September 11, 2001, members of the Arab- American community in the United States were exposed to new scrutiny, suffered new discrimination, and faced new uncertainty over their ability to fully enjoy a safe place within American society. (*Arabs in the Americas* 191).

Murphy stands for the purity of the white community, even in matters of food. It may be noted that while having dinner with his family, he expresses his displeasure over the vegetarian loaf his wife has prepared. When she tells him that the vegetarian loaf contains cumin, his displeasure multiplies. His immediate reaction is:

"That's an Arab spice. Arabs use that spice." (Bernans, *North of 9/11* 71). Indeed, Murphy likes cumin; it is "one of his favourite spices" (Bernans, *North of 9/11* 77). But, after September 11, it has made dwindled, in his eyes into an obnoxious spice. His negative attitude even toward Arab culinary culture shocks his wife and daughter. To coax them, he tactfully says "… sure I like cumin…. But don't you think that it is a bit profane to be eating Arab food the day after the terrorist attacks? Wouldn't it be more respectful to eat a good American meal like steak and potatoes?" (Bernans, *North of 9/11* 71). A little later, when he starts eating the cumin-mixed vegetarian loaf, Sarah calls him "a hypocrite" (Bernans, *North of 9/11* 77). Bernans sarcastically likens Murphy, when he sits "chewing the unpatriotic mouthful" (Bernans, *North of 9/11* 78) to a "cow chewing its cud" (78). When Sarah accuses Murphy of "racism towards Arabs" (Bernans, *North of 9/11* 79), he replies that he is not a racist but is opposed to "the savagery of the Arab culture" (79). He continues: "I just don't appreciate their culture of jihads and suicide bombings that's killing thousands of my fellow Americans" (79). Murphy is convinced that 9/11 is the work of Arab terrorists. He tells his wife and daughter, "I am just admitting the obvious fact that the terrorists were Arab. All the terrorists were Arabs. They were from Saudi Arabia. It says so on the news. What more evidence do you need?" (Bernans, *North of 9/11* 80). Murphy's words here are also intended to suggest the profound impact media reports and representations can have on the popular mind. When Sarah counters her father, saying, "You can't blame an entire race for the attacks! That's so goddam racist." (Bernans, *North of 9/11* 71), he repeats himself in an affectionate tone: "Look dear, it's not that I think all Arabs are terrorists. But something in their Arab culture promotes suicide bombing as a

solution to political problems. And maybe we should not be celebrating that culture, especially now" (71). The post-9/11 Western notion that Islam promotes violence, and so justifies even suicide terrorism is what Bernans underscores through Murphy's reductionist attitude toward Arab Muslims and their culture. Bernans is obviously critical of this attitude and the severity of his criticism is summed up in Sarah's condemnation of her father as a Christian cultural bigot. Furiously, she tells him in his face: "You are a fucking bigot" (Bernans, *North of 9/11* 72). Mrs. Murphy, it may be noted, supports her daughter by calling her husband, "an effing bigot" (72).

In *North of 9/11*, America comes in for prominent treatment. The manifesto, which Sarah prepares as part of her activist group's proposed protest of American imperialism and corporatism, and Canada's complicity in them, is of interesting note here. It is strewn with anti-American slogans. It is significant to note that the name of Henry King, the famous US diplomat, is yoked in it to the name of General Pinochet, the notorious Chilean dictator whom America had put in power, and Kissing her is condemned with the words, "Bastard should rot in hell with Pinochet" (Bernans, *North of 9/11* 178) inscribed beside his name. The manifesto also denounces Geroge W Bush through an array of delightfully and sarcastically phrased slogans, like "Stop the Bushery," "No more Bush- shit," and "More trees than Bush" (178).

Bernans ironic gaze also falls on the post-9/11 flag-politics America had vigorously played to boost American nationalism and patriotism and to engineer its public's mind into a consensus with the Bush administration's domestic and

international counter-terrorism projects. In the chapter entitled “Wednesday, October 3, 2001”, Sarah exults to see that the banner with the American flag, which the American Students Association of Concordia University had set up, has been replaced with another without an American flag. Her sentiments on the disappearance of the pro-American banner are expressed in a noteworthy passage. “Gone was the US flag and the blind patriotism, mourning only American lives and ignoring the role of US imperialism in producing such a terrible tragedy” (Bernans, *North of 9/11* 181). It may also be noted that the fresh pennant put up by another activist group has as its background the picture of a “B. 52 bombers, dropping its deadly cargo” (181) symbolizing the American love of war and violence. It has also two inscriptions between which are given the statistics of the deaths caused by America in countries like Iraq, Nicaragua, Guatemala, El Salvador, Vietnam, and even in the city of New York. Prefixed to the bill of mortality is the text, “Our hearts go out to the millions killed because of US foreign policy”, and suffixed to it is the text, “Without justice, there is no peace” (181). The mortality list contrasts the meagreness of the five thousand New York deaths with the hugeness of the five million overseas deaths, including the deaths of six lakh children in Iraq and the deaths of forty lakh civilians in Vietnam. Besides, it ascribes the New York deaths to America’s flawed and reckless foreign policy. In fact, the new banner is a dauntless parading of what Bernans calls “the United States’ dirty laundry” (Bernans, *North of 9/11*182). The “dirty laundry”, as Bernans conceives of it, is composed of acts of war, coups, and sabotages, precipitating genocides and destruction.

Significantly, the banner episode shows the displacement of a pro-American banner with an anti-American one. This is, perhaps, intended to suggest the need for narratives to counter American narratives. History revolves around events, especially events of magnitude. But, sometimes, its production is marked by the suppression or erasure of certain events or some of their aspects. This, Bernans suggests, has been the case with the US narratives of its own history, including those about the 9/11 attack. The banner designed by Concordia's American Students Association, it is important to note, is devoted to "mourning only American lives" (Bernans, *North of 9/11* 177) It is biased, and it blatantly "ignores" "the role of American imperialism" (Bernans, *North of 9/11* 190) in bringing about "such a terrible tragedy" as the 9/11 attack. The banner has clearly been motivated by a pro-American vision, a vision that is advantageous to America. The absence of American military actions and their lethal consequences from the banner is perfectly in tune with the American strategy of concealing and erasing with crystal conning its own crimes. Chomsky's sarcastic comment on this strategy is in place here:

> But when we did it, it didn't happen, and the consequences didn't occur. And if anybody even dares to mention this, it just leads to hopeless tantrums, because you are not allowed even to mention the fact that the United State can just thoughtlessly carry out major crimes" (*Imperial Ambitions* 109).

What plainly undergirds it is the assumption that American lives do matter, while those of others do not. In contradistinction to the pro-American banner, the banner, which supplants it, brings to light what is absent in it. The pro- American banner is a

product of American students and appears on a University campus in Canada, an alien, though adjacent, country. As such, it signifies how America has been carrying out its 9/11 propaganda and discourses across the world. According to Chomsky, massive propaganda campaigns are so conducted as "to keep people from knowing" (*Imperial Ambitions* 102). In Chomsky's view, there are two kinds of propaganda. "Propaganda can be either explicit or silent". When silent about your own crimes, that's propaganda, too. And the reason for the propaganda, both kinds, is that people do care, and if they find out what's really happening, they are not going to let it continue" (*Imperial Ambitions* 102). The idea that the American grand narrative of 9/11 as an attack on a harmless, benevolent country by its fundamentalist Muslim rival needs to be seriously reviewed and countered is built into the very texture of Bernans' *North of 9/11*.

North of 9/11 inheres the view that while taking stock of the 9/11 attack, America should indulge in some self-scrutiny, so that it can obtain the right perspective on the real character and consequences of its own international behaviour. Incidentally, Bernans' view chimes with the Chomskyan assessment of America's overseas politics. Chomsky says: "American aggressiveness, however, it may be masked in pious rhetoric, is a dominant force in world affairs and must be analysed in terms of its causes and motifs" (*Imperial Ambitions* 335). *North of 9/11,* it may be said, *is* an attempt at this Chomskyan analysis. A proposition, that Chomsky makes in connection with America's Vietnam War, may also be noted in this context. "The first step," she says, "towards political sanity must be intensive self-examination, exposure not only of what we do and what we represent in the

world today but also of the attitudes that colour and distort our perception of our international behaviour" (*Imperial Ambitions* 245). Perhaps, what Bernans seems to be calling for is what Chomsky describes as "a significant reorientation of American international behaviour away from the policy of repression, 'restructuring' on American terms, disguised as… 'preservation of order"' (*Imperial Ambitions* 250).

Discussing the aftermath of 9/11, Fred Halliday notes "the need for a more measured political assessment of the USA" (*Two Hours that Shook the World 24*). Delightedly, he points out that "More and more people look to …the USA as a model society and a source of benevolent influence" (*Two Hours that Shook the World* 24). In a sense, *North of 9/11* is a "measured political assessment" of America. The irony, however, is that, in the assessing process, it inverts Halliday's deification of America as a "model society" and "a source of benevolent influence" (*Two Hours that Shook the World* 24). America, as etched in *North of 9/11,* indubitably emerges as a huge source of malevolence for the whole world.

The embedding of memories, which back the present with the past and the world seen differently from different perspectives by different characters are also at the heart of Bernans' novel. The spaces of memory and subjectivity are hollowed out from within the linear time to produce what Ann Banfield calls "arrested moments" (*The Phantom Table* 56). It is through such 'arrested moments that Bernans reconstructs the personal histories of his characters, like Carla, Murphy, Hassan, and others, and unearths America's aggressive history and links it with the 9/11 crisis. As the events of the novel accumulate, pulling the narrative ahead, it is simultaneously pulled backwards by excursions into the past. Chronological time is

represented by Murphy's wristwatch which he looks at frequently to make sure it or not he will arrive on time for the scheduled meeting at his office. This time is repeatedly disrupted in the novel by the recollections of its characters about their past. Through this monumental history, which secretes monumental time, Bernans exposes America's attempts to make 9/11 into an adamant wall that would block the world's view of its gory past, of its own devious and murderous acts over the years. It may be noted that when Carla refers to the American-backed Chilean disaster of 11 September 1973, Mrs. Murphy responds that she knows nothing about 9/11 and that she is talking about the disaster on the morning of 11 September 2001. Mrs. Murphy represents those who are blissfully ignorant or oblivious of America's past.

An important aspect of *North of 9/11* is Bernans' mapping of the Arab-Muslim experience in post 9/11 Canada. Indeed, it is a truism to say that Arab Muslims have had to go through a variety of bitter experiences in the West after the 9/11 attack. Their predicament is depicted, mostly through the figure of Hassan Muhammed, the 51-year-old taxi driver, who has all along been a pro- Palestine activist. He sees the images of the attack, televised by CNN, together with Sarah while having coffee at the Al Thaib Restaurant in the afternoon of the day of the attack. What immediately comes to his mind, on seeing the images, including those of the Muslims exulting in far-away Palestine, is the fear of a violent Canadian backlash aimed at the Arab-Muslim diaspora. Responding to Sarah's query about the probable perpetrators of the attack, he tells her:

> … It may very well have been a radical Muslim group. I don't know. Osama Bin Laden seems to be a likely candidate. But all Muslims

> and Arabs are going to pay the price. There is going to be a backlash. It will be worse than it was during the gulf war (Bernans, *North of 9/11* 26).

Sarah, however, does not see anything new in Hassan's fear of backlash, because, as she understands it, Arab Muslims have always been in a 'backlash' situation in Canadian society. Her thinking is that "if there was going to be a backlash after the World Trade Centre attack, then what had they been experiencing up to now? And how could the situation get any worse? " (Bernans, *North of 9/11* 27). Nevertheless, a possible backlash, she is aware, is a "force much bigger and powerful than that name" (Bernans, *North of 9/11* 31). It is something "formidable" (Bernans, *North of 9/11* 31). Hassan also feels that in the context of 9/11 and Bush's war on terror the backlash could certainly be a serious matter. As he thinks, "backlash was a powerful thing. And for the moment at least, it was too strong to fight" (Bernans, *North of 9/11* 34). Hassan's fears are genuine. For, he still remembers how ghastly the backlash had been during the Gulf War. Besides, after 9/11, the Canadian landscape has been instinct with a heightened sense of national security and of the need for more rigorous maintenance of law and order. To aggravate the situation, there has also been an escalation of negative attitudes toward the immigrant 'other', including minority groups like Sikhs of Indian origin and Muslims of Iranian origin. "Since September, the whole focus of the intelligence agencies has been radically altered in a decidedly Middle Eastern direction" (Bernans, *North of 9/11* 251). This Canadian concern with national security is well-epitomized in corporal Boisvert's dictum that "rules exist for public safety and public order" (Bernans, *North of 9/11* 248). At their

meeting in Murphy's office, the corporal tells Murphy: "Our concern is public order. And Public order is threatened when radical groups of whatever race or religion - but obviously since 9/11, we have concerns about Arab and Muslim terrorist or terrorist -connected or terrorist-supporting groups" (Bernans, *North of 9/11* 251). Murphy responds in agreement with Boisvert: "Of course. We are in a state of war" (Bernans, *North of 9/11* 249). In such a national and social context, it is a small surprise if Hassan becomes "somebody else" (249) "Since September 11 he had to become somebody else - somebody less dangerous. No more kaffiyeh around his neck. A clean, close shave always. No more political discussions with his fares…." (Bernans, *North of 9/11* 10). Since September 11, Hassan and other cabbies have been resorting to this strategy of assuming an altered personal appearance, so that they can become, in the eyes of authorities and native Canadians, "good Arabs" (Bernans, *North of 9/11* 11) and their business will not suffer. The car windows of one of Hassan's cabby friends are smashed by white miscreants hatefully shouting, "Arab go home" (Bernans, *North of 9/11* 11). Even a Sikh named Raj is targeted, even though Sikhs have not been accused of having anything to do with 9/11. Strangely enough, the Sikh's beard and turban turn out to be negatively connotative symbols. "To North Americans, Sikh men fit the image of terrorists" (Bernans, *North of 9/11* 11). Hassan and some of his Arab friends must put up with the humiliating and demoralizing gaze of suspicion and disapproval wherever they go. For instance, the white security guard at Murphy's office is not only rude to Hassan but deeply suspicious of him as well. The guard has trouble making out, whether the beardless, Kafiyyeh- less Hassan is Arab. He muses suspiciously: "Still, this guy looked like he could be Arab. Maybe a terrorist" (Bernans, *North of 9/11* 12). So, he

keeps a close, vigilant eye on Hassan as he leads him to Murphy's office. "The guard kept glaring at Hassan" (Bernans, *North of 9/11* 21)

Throughout the novel, there is an emphasis on the themes of US imperialism and economic corporatism, aligning them both to American foreign policy and the 9/11 catastrophe. Bernans uses Jack Murphy as an incarnation of these forces. In the eyes of Sarah, "American foreign policy was definitely bloody" (Bernans, *North of 9/11* 182). The Thobani episode is of interest in this context. Sarah rejects the view reported as expressed by the feminist Professor Sumera Thobani. "According to the *National Post*, Thobani had called all Americans 'blood-thirsty" (182). Sarah finds it hard to believe that Thobani could make such a sweeping statement denouncing all Americans as warmongers. To her, "Thobani was offering a more subtle critique of the US foreign policies" (Bernans, *North of 9/11* 183). The *National Post,* she thinks, has either misunderstood or purposefully distorted Thobani's words. Through the Thobani story, Bernans seems to be putting his finger on the role of the Canadian media in joining and abetting America's propaganda war not only against Islamic fundamentalist terror but also against all those, including academics, who tend to frown upon its policies and programs. The role of the media is also shown through the *National Post's* gross misrepresentation of a slender handbook that just sets forth the programs of action of the Students Union of Concordia University. The *National Post* calls it a "Pro-Intifada book", a "Blueprint" for terrorists, and a handbook that "Advocates Terrorism" (Bernans, *North of 9/11* 177). How such media stories take hold of the public mind is illustrated through Murphy. To Murphy, the *National Post's* reports are trustworthy. This leads him to contend that

academics have degenerated into mischief-makers. He tells Sarah, who is a Women's Studies student at Concordia University:

> If your Women's Studies professors at Concordia are anything like Thobani, I now understand why you're defending terrorists. Those professors ought to be fired. I'd like to see how long they last in the real-world sprouting crack like that. Damn tenure! Academic freedom shouldn't be a license to promote dangerous crackpot ideas (Bernans, *North of 9/11* 183).

Murphy's strictures are an index of the authoritarian, corporate attitudes to academic freedom of thought and expression. The strong and angry language in which he couches his criticism is symptomatic of the desperate effort corporatism is making to control academia and make it fall in line with its goals. This corporate interest in taking over education, he has shown and burlesqued through Sarah's dream vision described in the chapter entitled "Thursday, September 13, 2001". The dream vision is a crucial part of Bernans' negative treatment of corporatism in North *of 9/11*. It is a superb piece of satire on the control the corporate sector is trying to exert on the educational system. In her dream, her father Murphy appears as a teacher. On the third day after 9/11, when she comes to attend Professor Mrs. Martin's lectures on world issues, she sees Mr. Murphy in front of the class. When she asks him what he is doing there, he answers, "I am teaching the class today" (Bernans, *North of 9/11* 184). A little later, he tells the students that their professor Mrs. Martin is charged with indulging in anti-American activities and that her services have been terminated. He also tells them that she is appearing, on that day, before an inquiry

committee and facing trial. He also tells them that Canada is part of the United States and that's why Canada has been blessed with freedom and liberty. He announces that terrorists are evildoers, jealous of Canada as well as the West's blessings, and are trying to destroy their freedom and liberties. He emphasizes that the West, including the US and Canada, knows how to deal with them. When Sarah, in her capacity as a student, counters him, saying that she does not want to be part of the United States, he replies: "Then you are a terrorist" (Bernans, *North of 9/11* 106). His reply is evidently an echo of Bush's controversial statement that all those who are not with the US in its war on terror are with the terrorists. It is interesting to note that in the dream scene, Murphy is sarcastically designated "the headmaster," "a private school headmaster" (Bernans, *North of 9/11* 105) who believes in authority, discipline, and total control over his institution and students. It is important to note that Professor Mrs. Martin is dismissed, and replaced with Murphy, a corporate executive. Equally interesting is the fact that, while his talk is in full swing, most of the students sit in a leisurely, nonchalant mood, discussing hockey finals, and the latest Star Wars movie. The irony embodied in the carnivalesquely drawn dream scene is directed at corporate attempts to take over education and academic life. It also touches on the perils, which academics and intellectuals who were not pro- American, had to face in post-9/11 Canada. The observations of Taylor Noakes on the increasing influence of the corporate sector on the Canadian Education system are worth noting in this context:

> One of the pillars of our liberal democracy, a 'free' and public post-secondary education system, whose institutions are renowned as

> Bastions of free thought and expression, would become a new ground- zero for illegal, unethical, and ultimately the state's sponsored political terrorism and suppression. The new corporate University, directed from its boardroom by the titans of industry, finance, and government, would do its part in stamping out internal dissent and anyone, those students, who threatened the corporate image of the institution ("North of Sanity" 3).

Bernans satire in the scene also plays on Canada's subservience to America in all matters. Murphy's observation that Canada is part of America, and that America has been the giver of freedom and liberty to Canada reflects Bernans sarcastic view of Canada's souvenir as an independent state. Throughout the novel, Bernans views Canada as a surrogate state of America, not as a state that stands on its own and asserts its independent national status. Canada is nothing short of a stooge or satellite state of America, always playing a second fiddle to America in all spheres of activity including wars, counterterrorism, corporate ventures, and international relations and policies.

Through the Thobani incident, Bernans also shows the bond that exists between media and corporatism. *The National Post* etches Professor Thobani as a dangerous critic of American officialdom. To Murphy, she is an academic "sprouting crack", who should be fired. The attitudes of both the reporter and her father convince Sarah that anti-US views could be quite risky for the critics concerned. "Sarah was starting to realize that no matter what critics of American imperialism did or said …they would be dragged through the mud and treated as if

they were in league with Osama Bin Ladan himself" (Bernans, *North of 9/11* 184). Bernans is aware that in a socio-political scenario, where the 9/11 wounds are still green and the ghosts of rancour and hostility it has conjured up have not been laid to rest, anti- American sentiments would be suppressed with the tools of "public ridicule and social ostracism", which, as Sarah thinks, are "more effective than crude tear gas or rubber bullets" (Bernans, *North of 9/11* 185). The state has the machinery, powerful enough to safeguard its interests. As such, the activism of the idealist young is susceptible to failure and activists will have no other option than to retreat into invisibility. "How could activists do anything else but go into hiding." (Bernans, *North of 9/11* 184). It is important to note that the protest, staged, at the end of the novel, by Sarah and her associates with the simple motive of raising people's consciousness against the evils of corporatism, is ruthlessly put down by the Canadian security personnel. Sarah is shot dead, and her associates are arrested.

A certain degree of self-consciousness may be discerned in the novel, To put it differently, Bernans is aware of the criticism he is levelling against Canada and America. In his view, a state should be willing to take criticism in its right spirit, without being intolerant about it. This idea is brought out in a remarkable passage quoted from J. William Fullbright's book, *The Arrogance of Power* (1966). Significantly enough, the passage forms the epitaph to the novel's chapter entitled "Wednesday, October 2001":

> To criticize one's country is to do it a service and pay it a compliment. It is a service because it may spur the country to do better than it is doing; it is a compliment because it evidences a belief

> that a country can do better than it is doing. In a democracy, a dissent is an act of faith (*The Arrogance of Power* 25).

As with medicine, the test of its worth is not its taste. But its impact, not how it makes people feel right now, but how it makes them feel long term. Criticism, in short, is more than a right; it is an act of patriotism, a higher form of patriotism, I believe than the familiar rituals of national adulations (Bernans, *North of 9/11* 185*)*. The spirit, in which Fullbright sees criticism, is the spirit of which Bernans would like his criticism of Canada and America, and a series of other issues in the novel to be taken. His experience, however, has been quite different. The denial of permission, by Concordia University, to read excerpts from the novel on its campus illustrates this. Likewise, the denunciation of Bernans as "a political gadfly" by a reviewer may also be attributed to the displeasure, his ironic approach to the US and Canada had created.

North of 9/1 is a remarkable novel, that while dealing with 9/11 and its aftermath, weaves together a variety of themes. Bernans casts his critical and castigating eye on racism, corporatism, US imperialism and counterterrorism, Canada's complicity in US politics and policies, prejudiced treatment of immigrant minorities, and repression of activism and freedom of thought and expression. The emphasis that he puts throughout the novel on America's acts of violence. Right from the colonial period to the present and his vision that the 9/11 disaster is their cumulative results are daringly thought-provoking. The reasons Bernans gives for writing *North of 9/11* are of importance here:

I am more convinced than ever that the most dangerous terror, we face in the world – from Afghanistan to Canada, from Lebanon and Gaza to Israel, and from Iraq to the US—is the war on terror. That is why I wrote *North of 9/11*. I chose to write a fictional confession instead of an article, because the new post-9/11 reality is so surreal that fiction is the only way to really make it understandable. That is also why I wrote *North of 9/11* ("Confession of a 9/11 terrorist" 1).

Chapter 3

Bin Laden and Bill Lawton

Don DeLillo is an American novelist, dramatist, and essayist. Son of an Italian immigrant, he was raised as a Roman Catholic. His creative output has been quite prolific and impressive. His first novel, *Americana*, was published in 1971. His best-known novels are *End Zone* (1972), *Great Jones Street* (1973), *Ratner's Star* (1976), *Players* (1977), *Running Dog* (1978), *The Names* (1982), *White Noise* (1985), *Libra* (1988), *Mao II* (1991), *Underworld* (1997), *The Body Artist* (2001), *Cosmopolis* (2003*), Falling Man* (2007). Besides, several articles and essays, he has also written three plays, *The Day Room* (1987), *Valparaiso* (1999), and *Love-Lies-Bleeding* (2005).

Falling Man portrays the city of New York in the aftermath of the 9/11 terrorist attack on the World Trade Centre. It is centred around the family life of Keith Neudecker, an advocate who survives the attack, and his estranged wife, Lianne Glenn. The novel begins with Kaith walking away from the crumbling Twin Towers of the Trade Centre. A little later, he arrives at Lianne's apartment. A direct victim of the attack, he is under severe mental shock. The novel recounts Lianne and Keith's efforts to navigate the dislocation and loss following 9/11 and their futile attempts at rebuilding a stable and happy family life. Over the three years following his return to Lianne, their efforts to cope with life get intertwined with the lives of Justin, their son, Nina, Lianne's mother, a retired art historian long involved in an affair with Martin, an art businessman with a hidden terrorist past in his native

Germany, and several other minor characters. The novel is divided into three parts, the third part coming back to the beginning, and resuming the description of the fall of the North Tower, where Keith's law office is housed and from where he manages to escape. Each part is titled after a name that does not identify the real person who carries it. For example, in the third part, titled ‘David Janiak," Janiak is the Falling Man. In the novel, he figures as a performance artist, who, in the days following 9/11, shocks New Yorkers by enacting falls from off buildings.

The title of DeLillo’s novel, *Falling Man,* comes from this performance artist. Evidently, DeLillo’s depiction of this character has been inspired by Richard Drew’s well-known photograph of a man falling from the Twin Towers, which appeared in the *New York Times* and several other newspapers on September 12, 2001. It is important to note the omission of the definite article, "the," in the novel’s title. It is a stylistic device intended, perhaps, to suggest a variety of falls. The fall includes everything from the falling material objects, which Keith sees during his escape, to the men and women who jump and fall from the Towers. From a metaphoric point of view, it also includes the novel’s characters who, like Keith, the terrorists Hammad and Mohamed Atta, and Keith’s girlfriend, Florence, fall, ethically and spiritually, in life. The omission of the definite article is analogous to its omission in the title of Ralph Ellison’s novel, *Invisible Man*. Through this strategy, Ellison universalizes the invisibility of man’s basic human identity, the invisibility of every human being as a human being to every other. Similarly, DeLillo seems to be suggesting that man everywhere has fallen because of his vicious deeds. Like the other images of people jumping down or falling from the

burning Twin Towers, Drew's picture, though a masterpiece of photographic art was immediately declared taboo in the mainstream American media. The objections raised were grounded on principles of moral decorum. In his account of ministering at "ground zero" immediately after the attack, James Martin refers to rescue workers expressing the popular sentiment that these images were disquieting to the bereaved and should not, therefore, be shown. They said that "the families of the victims have had a hard enough time, and what point would there be?" (*We Need to Build a Bridge* 4). By September 13, such photographs, including Drews', were "relegated to the Internet underbelly, where they became the provenance of shock sites that also traffic in the autopsy photos of Nicole Brown Simpson and the videotape of Daniel Pearl's execution" (Junod 1).

Brian Coniff has also commented that even a decade after taking the photograph, Drew had said that "some people are turned off by this picture because it could be their fate" ("DeLillo's Ignatian" 7). In *Falling Man*, DeLillo retrieves and repeats Drew's disturbing image. In doing so, he interrogates the social and psychological processes by which America recovered a sense of "normalcy" after the chaos of 9/11 and suggests that these processes avoided or obscured opportunities to find meaning. Janiak, the fictional performance artist, demonstrates the power of art to disturb and disrupt conventional categories of thought in the hope of finding more meaning. In place of the horrified public withdrawal from Drew's photograph, DeLillo substitutes an arrested moment, which compels viewers to think about the cataclysmic 9/11 in novel and unfamiliar terms. His use of Drew's falling man is intended to suggest the art of photography, the medium Drew uses to narrate

the 9/11 havoc. Janiak, it may be noted, uses a different medium, the performing art, to memorialize it. There are also personal narratives about 9/11. DeLillo implies that, like the art forms, these, too, are important in understanding an event like 9/11. In the novel, Keith and his wife Lianne react to the 9/11 trauma in different ways. Lianne is, in fact, a doubly traumatized woman. She has to go through the pre- 9/11 trauma of her separation from Keith, as well as through the trauma resulting from the 9/11 catastrophe. However, in the course of time, she recovers from both. But Keith fails to heal and remains a drifter with little ethical mores or moorings.

"It was not a street anymore, but a world, a time and space of falling ash and near night" (DeLillo, *Falling Man* 3). This is the opening sentence of *Falling Man*, powerfully and suggestively encapsulating Keith's psychic state, and experience of the dismal environment around the World Trade Centre, as he escapes into the street from the North Tower where his office is housed. What he sees as he looks around is a world of falling things, falling people, and falling towers. DeLillo's description of the scene is worth noting in this context.

> The roar was still in the air, the buckling rumble of the fall. This was the world now. Smoke and ash came rolling down streets and turning corners, busting around corners, seismic tides of smoke, with office paper flashing past, standard sheets with cutting edge, skimming, whipping past, otherworldly things in the morning fall (DeLillo, *Falling Man* 3)

A little later, continuing the description, DeLillo writes:

> The world was this as well, figures in windows a thousand feet up, dropping into free space, and the stink of fuel fire, and the steady rip of sirens in the air. The noise lay everywhere they ran, the stratified sound collecting around them, and he walked away from it and into it at the same time (DeLillo, *Falling Man* 5)

As he walks on, Keith "heard the sound of the second fall... That was him coming down, the north tower" (DeLillo, *Falling Man* 8). It is a claustrophobic world, filled with images of falling. In the novel, DeLillo subtly links Janiak's enactments of fall to Keith. He also associates, though vaguely, the figure of Drew's falling man with Keith. On the day of the terrorist attack, while struggling to flee the North Tower, Keith also tries to rescue a friend. He fails and the friend dies in the debris. DeLillo drops a quick hint that, at this juncture of panic and commotion, Keith catches a glimpse of the falling man photographed by Drew. For Keith, it has been an immensely tragic and depressing moment in the Tower. Not surprisingly, it is this moment, more than any other, which he finds himself trying to understand, and trying to escape, for the rest of his life. Lianne also has her encounter with Janiak, the performing artist. When he drops, in front of her, from an elevated train platform on 100th Street, she thinks that "he was a falling angel, and his beauty was horrific" (DeLillo, *Falling Man* 222). She feels an inner urge to speak to him, but she resists it because he is on "another plane of being, beyond reach" (DeLillo, *Falling Man* 168). Instead, she focuses her gaze on a derelict who has been frozen "in a pose of his own" (DeLillo, *Falling Man* 149) by his intense concentration on the performance.

> His face showed an intense narrowing of thought and possibility. He was seeing something elaborately different from what he encountered step by step in the ordinary run of hours. He had to learn how to see it correctly, find a crack in the world where it might fit" (DeLillo, *Falling Man* 149).

For DeLillo, Janiak's performances are not mere remembrances of 9/11; nor are they mere disruptions of people's everyday routine. It may be noted here that Lianne conjures him as a "falling angel" possessed of a "horrific beauty". The idea that informs Lianne's vision is that art may have its imperfections, but it is a thing of beauty and has a benign role to play in the world. It is Janik's art that directs Lianne's attention to the derelict with his frailties and his basic and irreducible humanity. It may also be noted that the derelict, on his part, sees in it an occasion for thought and possibility, and something different from his ordinary life experience. Once he learns to see it correctly, he will see where in the world it fits. The suggestion, obviously, is that art, when correctly perceived, will turn out to be useful, not irrelevant, to the world.

In his eloquent and impassioned 2001 essay, "In the Ruins of the Future", DeLillo enumerates the reasons, as sees them, behind the 9/11 attack. Touching on the pre-9/11 discourses, on capital markets, corporatism, the speed of the internet, the utopian glow of cyber-capital, and the global consciousness, he writes:

> Today, again, the world narrative belongs to the terrorists. But the primary target of the men who attacked the Pentagon and the World Trade Centre was not the global economy. It was America that drew

> their fury. It was the high gloss of our modernity. It was the thrust of our technology. It was our perceived godlessness. It was the blunt force of our foreign policy. It was the power of American culture to penetrate every wall, home, life, and mind. ("In the Ruins of the Future"1)

This essay, which closes with the ironic "Allahu Akbar. God is great" ("In the Ruins of the Future" 3) can be discerned the strong foundation and genesis of his *Falling Man.* The essay also underscores the need for counter-narratives of the 9/11 attack. The Bush administration was feeling nostalgic for the cold war. This is over now. Many things are over. The narrative ends in the rubble and it is left to us to create the counternarrative: He points out that there are countless stories, crisscrossing New York, Washington, and the world, about 9/11, about where people were, whom they knew, and what they had seen or heard. There are stories of heroism and encounters with the dread, and missing persons besides stories of coincidence, fate, or premonition. There are also stories of the escape, improvised memorials, of flags, flowerbeds, and votive candles, of lampposts, hung with paper aeroplanes, with passages from the Koran and the Bible, and with letters and poems. There are also photographs telling tales of missing persons and other 9/11 matters. These are all, in DeLillo's view, counter-narratives. In a humorous vein, DeLillo notes: "For the next 50 years, people who were not in the area when the attacks occurred will claim to have been there. In time, some of them will believe it. Others will claim to have lost friends or relatives, although they did not" (In the Ruins of the Future" 4). Remarking on this, DeLillo adds:

> This is also the counternarrative, a shadow history of false memories and imagined loss. The internet is a counternarrative, shaped in part by rumour, fantasy, and mystical reverberation. The cell phones, the lost shoes, the handkerchiefs mashed in the faces of running men and women. The box cutters and credit cards. The paper that came streaming out of the towers and drifted across the river to Brooklyn backyards, status reports, résumés, insurance forms. Sheets of paper-driven into concrete, according to witnesses. Paper is slicing into truck tyres, fixed there (4).

Such counter-narrative elements, it may be said, are a notable presence in *Falling Man*. For instance, On 11 September 2001, when Keith leaves the towers, the first sign of life he notices is a tai chi group practising martial arts, as if everything that has happened on the day, and they themselves, "might be placed in a state of abeyance" (*Falling Man* 8). Also, the next morning, when he wakes up, he vaguely hears a type of music coming from one of the lower floors of his apartment complex. As he listens intently, he also hears the incantation of "*Allah-up Allah-uu*". It makes him visualize a devotional scene of "men in chanted prayer, voices in chorus in praise of God" (DeLillo, *Falling Man* 35). Similarly, Lianne has a story of people who have taken to poetry after 9/11. She tells Martin, "People read poems. People I know, they read poetry to ease the shock and pain, to give them a kind of space, something beautiful in the language... to bring comfort or composure" (DeLillo, *Falling Man* 39). Lianne also has the story of three non-Muslim Americans who have begun reading the Koran. She has personally talked to two of them and she

knows the third. “They’d bought English-language editions of the Koran and were trying earnestly to learn something, find something that might help them think more deeply into the question of Islam" (DeLillo, *Falling Man* 202). Runners appear nearly everywhere in the novel. On his way from the scene of destruction in Lianne’s apartment, Keith sees them run on the street, sidewalk, roadway and tracks or rest in the park. Lianne is also a runner. Sometimes, she runs along the riverbank in the early hours of the morning, fondly and jokingly thinking of training for a marathon. She sees long-distance running as a “spiritual effort” (DeLillo, *Falling Man* 233). It may not be presumptuous to suggest that these images of variegated human activities and their persistent, undeterred flow, with which the novel abounds, are counter-narratives in themselves.

The representation of religion in *Falling Man* is of considerable significance. When Lianne thinks of God, what invariably comes to her mind is her father Jack Glenn and his attitude to Catholicism. Jack killed himself when Lianne was twenty-two. He was in the early stages of Alzheimer's. Strangely enough, "he did not want to submit to the long course of senile dementia" (DeLillo, *Falling Man* 40). Lianne deliberately avoids learning more about his death, since she knows that the details might be "unbearable?" (DeLillo, *Falling Man* 41). Nearly two decades after Jack’s suicide, she volunteers to direct a writing workshop for Alzheimer's patients. Sometimes, their discussion turns to 9/11 terrorism and questions of theodicy like "Where was God when this happened?" (DeLillo, *Falling Man* 60). Soon enough, Lianne senses that "She needed these people…. There was something precious here, something that seeps and bleeds. These people were the living breath of the thing

that killed her father" (DeLillo, *Falling Man* 62). It is this analogue between her father and the Alzheimer's patients that makes her deeply feel the need for these afflicted men and women.

The religious conversation between the Alzheimer's patients demonstrates how powerfully Lianne's association of Catholicism with her father has hindered her own belief. After all, the "thing that killed her father" (62) was not the disease, but despair at "sickness " that was more mental than physical. Lianne's memories constantly raise the question of how her father's faith had failed, so abruptly and totally, to sustain him in the face of his illness. Jack's life had been animated by an apprehension of something beyond himself, an eternal ‘principal being?' Lianne remembers him describing this ‘force’ at a party one night when she was a girl:

> Human existence, that was his subject this evening, on the deck of somebody's beat-up house in Nantucket. Five adults, the girl on the fringes…. She loved the sound of that, like chanting verse, and thought of it now, alone, over coffee and toast, and something else as well, the existence that hummed in the words themselves, was and is, and how the chill wind died at nightfall (DeLillo, *Falling Man* 231)

Meghan Rourke’s observation that human existence “had to have a deeper source than our own" (“In Search of the Elusive” 2) is quite in place here. Jack can eloquently discuss this "divine source" of life, in language that captivates his daughter by virtue of its power to ring “like chanting verse” and to convey a sense of the Divine.

> She thought of her father. She carried her father's name. She was

> Lianne Glenn. Her father had been a traditional lapsed Catholic, devoted to the Latin mass as long as he did not have to sit through it. He made no distinction between Catholics and lapsed Catholics. The only thing that mattered was tradition, but not in his work, never there. His designs for buildings and other structures (*Falling Man* 62)

When Lianne listens to her Alzheimer's patients, particularly as they discuss God's role or existence in the context of the World Trade Centre disaster, she inevitably thinks of them as "the living breath of the thing that killed her father" (DeLillo, *Falling Man* 62). Indeed, they share Jack's disease. But, precisely at the point where he failed, they persevere, though struggling with beliefs in a world ridden with terror and illness. In a sense, they are living doubly- assaulted lives, the sudden terrorist assault on their city and the gradually growing assault of Alzheimer's on their minds. Listening to them, Lianne finds herself longing for her father's belief in a "deeper source" (62). At the same time, she also yearns for something more immediate than his Catholic nostalgia. What she, in fact, needs is a community of the faithful who earnestly seek meaning in both life and cataclysmic events like 9/11. As such, she looks up to Catholicism in a way her father was never able to do. It is, therefore, small surprise that the author she most vividly remembers reading, while at college, is the existentialist philosopher, Soren Kierkegaard. “She loved Kierkegaard in his uniqueness, in the glaring drama of the translation she owned, an old anthology of brittle pages with ruled underlinings in red ink, passed down by someone in her mother’s family” (DeLillo, *Falling Man* 105). She "read and re-read into the deep night in her dorm room" which seemed a “mass of papers, clothes, books and tennis

gear that she liked to think of as an objective correlative of an overflowing mind" (DeLillo, *Falling Man* 105). DeLillo depicts Lianne's interest in Kierkegaard as a profound intellectual and spiritual encounter between a college student and a superlative thinker. It is this encounter that mostly enables Lianne to approach God intelligently and imaginatively.

The theme of religious faith appears most clearly in a conversation between Keith and Florence Givens, a fellow Trade Centre survivor. Keith discovers that, as he was leaving the burning towers, he had by mistake picked up Florence's briefcase and carried it away. He returns the briefcase to her. This marks the beginning of a brief affair between them. Whenever they meet, they recall their 9/11 traumas to overcome them. They also have sex, which seems to help, but not much and not for long. At one point during their occasional interactions, their conversation veers on God and religiosity. Florence tells Keith:

> I went to St. Paul's yesterday. I wanted to be with people, down there in particular. I knew there would be people there. I looked at the flowers and the personal things people left, the homemade memorials. I didn't look at the photographs of the missing. I couldn't do that. I sat in the chapel for an hour and people came in and prayed or just walked around, only looking, reading the marble plaques, In memory of. Rescue workers came in, three of them, and I tried not to stare, and then two more came (DeLillo, *Falling Man* 90)

Florence goes to church, occasionally. She talks to God and generally tries to "obey the rules of God's universe" (DeLillo, Falling *Man* 90). Like so many other

characters in the novel, she worries that a more enduring and deep-rooted commitment to traditional religion will align her with the terrorists. During a conversation with Keith, she interjects,

> Whose God? Which God? I don't even know what it means, to believe in God. I never think about it." "Never think about it." "Does that upset you?... "I always feel the presence of God. I talk to God sometimes. I don't have to be in the church to talk to God, I go to church, but not, you know, week in, week out (DeLillo, *Falling Man* 81).

In other words, she goes to Church, but not, as Keith puts it, "Religiously," (DeLillo, *Falling Man* 81). She believes in God, but not the God of any specific religion. Hers is a liberal and broad-minded theistic approach that sees God only as a power, a force, or a grand principle and rejects not only the idea of a specific demarcating identity of God but also the varied and differing cultural paraphernalia of customs and observances practised for the expression of devotion. It is a religious vision that is denuded of parochialism, fanaticism, and narrow-mindedness and is capable of an unalloyed, generous, and tolerant acceptance of the conflicting, cacophonous faiths of the contemporary world. As Florence recovers from the shocks of 9/11, her effort to draw solace from the Christian faith in tune with her vision of God is like her effort to establish a durable, intimate relationship with Keith. Like the memorial at St. Paul's, and like their sexual interludes, even their most heartfelt conversations are inadequate to sustain meaning or stop its destruction all around them. Keith’s joke about Florence’s irreligious churchgoing, therefore, assumes greater significance in

the context of the novel's treatment of religion. Like Florence, just everyone in the novel tries to practice religion without being too rigid, too possessive about it. This is an index of the novel's hesitations or reservations about religious practice. Lianne has always desired but feared the idea of God, which she had sensed years earlier in her father's exposition of religion. So also, she hesitates before the Koranic idea of God she finds in a leaflet distributed by a Muslim woman. However, she arrives at a resolution of her spiritual dilemmas at a Mass in a Catholic church. She participates in the Mass. "She followed others when they stood and knelt and she watched the priest celebrate the mass, bread and wine, body and blood. She did not believe this, the transubstantiation, but believed something, half fearing it would take her over". (DeLillo, *Falling Man* 203). And it does take her over but in her own fashion. Her presence in the church relieves her of most of the fears and anxieties she had all along felt about religion and her inward longing for it. She now perceives the quintessential socio- psychological significance of faith. She realizes that the day-to-day elements of religious practice, like the congregation, the church, the Mass itself, can be her means of rendering God less remote and less intimidating. God is not the "principal being" of her father's failed faith; nor is he the terrorist's annihilating transcendence. He is a simple presence that calms "the nonstop riffs of the waking mind" (DeLillo, *Falling Man* 233). Indeed, there is a certain amount of identity between the religious conception of Lianne and Florence that they both of them have seen the core of religion, its message of peace, and spirituality. It may be said that DeLillo endorses their view of religion which is undergirded by the idea of tolerant coexistence of different cultures. The world is full of people and there are different world views. One may go to one's church, mosque, temple, or synagogue, but it is

done with the kind of attitude articulated by DeLillo's Florence, the world will be a safer safe to live in, a place bereft of violence like 9/11 and wars like the Afghan and Iraq wars that arose from it. At least religion will cease to be a cause for mortal contest and compacts.

DeLillo's play on the names, from which the titles of the three parts of the novel are derived, is of interesting note. It is indicative of the problem of suspense and undecidability, uncertainty and unknowability which, sometimes, accompany the question of identity. Each name, as pointed earlier, refers to someone who does not exist under that name, who may be someone else entirely, or who bears a double identity. This is shown through what may be called the Bill Lawton comedy in the novel.

Part one of the novel is called "Bill Lawton". In it, the Al Qaeda terrorist, Bin Laden becomes Bill Lawton. In fact, Laden does not directly appear in the novel. He is misnamed Bill Lawton because of Keith's little son. Justin mishears his Arab name as Bill Lawton and repeatedly calls him so, spreading it among his friends. It is significant to note that the name Lawton is Anglo- American, not Arab, or eastern. Lawton is a character who does not exist, except in the stories told by Justin and his friends, children trying to make sense of the world and of what they see in it. Bill Lawton is their version of Bin Laden. This Laden- Lawton confusion is suggestive of the difficulties involved in knowing the 'other' fully whether he is inside or outside the United States.

The second part is entitled "Ernst Hechinger". Ernst Hechinger is, in fact, a German who was, in the 1960s a member of the German student activist group

known as Kommune One. The real name of Martin Ridnour, who appears in the novel as the long-term lover of Lianne's mother, is Ernst Hechinger. During a conversation with her daughter Lianne, Neena tells her of an old German poster depicting “nineteen names and faces”, the terrorists wanted for murder, bombings, and bank robberies. Martin’s picture is not on it, but, still, he keeps it. Lianne’s mind, making her emphatically repeat it. The fact is it immediately reminds her of 9/11 and the nineteen Arab terrorists involved in it. DeLillo’s concern with the dualism of identity implies such important questions as ‘Can a non-terrorist like Bill Lawton be turned into a terrorist like Bin Laden or a terrorist like Bin Laden into a non-terrorist like Bill Lawton?’ What is the source of terror.?

In the third and final part, entitled ‘David Janiak’, DeLillo plays with the nickname, ‘falling man’. The performance artist who figures in the novel is popularly known as ‘falling man’. His real name, which is David Janiak, is revealed only quite late in the novel. Lianne sees his performances but does not fully comprehend his motive or meaning. Why is he doing it? What is he trying to say? Such questions intrigue her. His performance involves suspending himself from public structures, in a pose like that of the falling man in Drew’s photograph. Drew’s man falls to his death, but the performance artist does not, because he has his safety harness. Later, he dies, too, in a far-off village and none knows how. It is not until his death, reported in newspapers, that Lianne searches his biographical details and finds that his real name is David Janiak. DeLillo's "play with names and pseudonyms is indicative of a slippery sense of identity" (Versluys, “Out of the Blue” 61) and "identity is loosened from its customary anchors" (61). "This slippery

sense of identity is built into the structure and the language of the novel since all three parts have misnamed titles, even though readers can only know this in retrospect" (“Ethics of Counter Narrative” 1). Keith is radically different from all these title-giving characters in the sense that he is not marginalized and possesses a definable identity as a white, US-American, atheist male. He is Keith Neudecker throughout the novel except that in some cases when he gets a mail with his name misspelt at which time, he makes corrections. This act of correction is significant and starts much earlier than the attack. Correcting his name seems normal and reasonable and the episode depicting this act seems trivial as it has no direct connection with either the terrorist attack or its traumatic effect.

> I argue that it is pivotal to our understanding of Keith as the character who is most troubled with issues of identity and the most traumatized, both before and after the attack. The act itself certainly demonstrates Keith's clear sense of and desire for definable identity, as is shown in his thought that "it wasn't him, with the name misspelt" (DeLillo, *Falling Man* 31).

Indeed, one's name with its distinctiveness can help one secure a sense of identity or to use Paul Ricoeur's words "the privilege accorded the proper names assigned to humans has to do with their subsequent role in confirming their identity and their selfhood" (DeLillo, *Falling Man* 29). Keith certainly also knows something is wrong with his identity in the present-day world when he chooses to make corrections: he disregards commercial junk mail on the basis that it "was created for just this reason, to pre-sort the world's identities into one" (DeLillo, *Falling Man* 32). Ironically, his

repeated correction is by itself ineffective: instead of complaining and making corrections to the sender, he simply corrects them on the envelopes, which means nothing if he intends to get a grip on his identity or as he perceives this. In this sense, Keith is a present-day Sisyphus. And Keith knows it: he knows he cannot correct things even if this is important enough to him to make it "an act he was careful to conceal" (DeLillo, *Falling Man* 32). For Keith, nothing can change him and his state of falling, not even so radical an event as 9/11 with the official narrative and mainstream ideology remaining the same. Of course, there are changes everywhere, as Lianne says that "everything now is measured by after" (DeLillo, *Falling Man* 138). In certain respects, Keith changes too; he abandons his apartment and stays with his family. He can now take the responsibility of taking care of and playing with his son and realizes that life is "meant to be lived seriously and responsibly" (DeLillo, *Falling Man* 137).

After escaping from the tower, Keith starts to see things differently: "He began to think into the day, into the minute... He began to see what he was doing. He noticed things, all the small lost strokes of a day or a minute" (DeLillo, *Falling Man* 65). For Keith, the whole world and himself seem de-familiarized: "Nothing seemed familiar, being here, in a family again, and he felt strange to himself or always had, but it was different now because he was watching" (DeLillo, *Falling Man* 65). This shift in perception may well be interpreted as a symptom of the 9/11 trauma, trauma understood as "a mind-blowing experience and that destroys a conventional mindset and compels (or makes possible) a new worldview" (Gray, “After the fall” 27). Lianne hopes for Keith's redemption not only from the trauma of the terrorist attack,

but also for what he was before 9/11 "Everything seemed to mean something. Their lives were in transition, and she looked for signs" (DeLillo, *Falling Man* 67). And the way, Kaith conducts himself within the family signifies that he has taken on his ethical identity. Human ethical identity, as Nie points out urges an individual “to assume due duty and responsibility” (“Introduction to Ethical Literary Criticism” 263). Unfortunately, Keith's redemptive changes and Lianne's hope are both temporary. Two years before the attack, Keith had left home, rented an apartment near the World Trade Centre and taken up poker playing as a pastime with four other males, a pastime that "has long been considered the paradigmatic man's game" (263). Three years after the attack, Keith has left home again, adrift in Las Vegas as a professional poker player. Also symptomatic of trauma is Keith's appeal to violence when he meets Florence at a department store. Suspecting two men are talking about Florence, he walks over and fights with them: "He was angry now. The contact sets him off and he wanted to keep going... If anyone said a harsh word to Florence or raised a hand to Florence, or insulted her in any way, Keith was ready to kill him" (DeLillo, *Falling Man* 133). Obviously, the behaviour chimes with the poplar idea of masculinity. In fact, as Lianne recalls, Keith has a strong impulse toward violence and aggression. This has been so even before their separation: "He walked through the apartment, bent slightly to one side, a twisted guilt in his smile, ready to break up a table and burn it so he could take out his dick and piss on the flames" (DeLillo, *Falling Man* 103-104). This shows that he had been traumatized even before 9/11. Trapped as he is in the culture and its notion of masculinity, Keith is doomed to fail in his regenerative process, and to keep going as a drifter as a

typical US-American male, who is powerless to rectify himself and recapture a happy familial life.

A striking aspect of the novel is DeLillo's concern with media representation of 9/11 and its effect. Like most other US-Americans, Lianne experiences the event only through the media. She reads newspapers avidly for information of the dead: "She read newspaper profiles of the dead, everyone that was printed. Not to read them, everyone, was an offence, a violation of responsibility and trust. But she also read them because she had to, out of some need she did not try to interpret" (DeLillo, *Falling Man* 106). She watches the videotaped footage so repeatedly the planes and the images of the devastation have almost become part of herself: "this was the footage that entered the body, that seemed to run beneath her skin" (DeLillo, *Falling Man* 134). Lewis Gleich observes, "For Lianne, 9/11 is what Jean Baudrillard calls 'an image-event,' an event intended for and consumed by the 'instantaneous worldwide transmission of images'" ("Ethics in the Wake of" 2). But, mere facts, information, and images, although important, will not help people understand the event. DeLillo makes this point clear in his 2001 essay:

> The event dominated the medium. It was bright and totalizing and some of us said it was unreal. When we say a thing is unreal, we mean it is too real, a phenomenon so unaccountable and yet so bound to the power of the objective fact that we can't tilt it to the slant of our perceptions ("In the Ruins" 35).

Lianne knows the problem with 'mere facts' when she tells Martin Ridnour that she does not read poetry "to bring comfort or composure. I don't read poems. I read

newspapers. I put my head in the pages and get angry and crazy"(DeLillo, *Falling Man* 42). To this Martin responds that she should try something different, that she should “study the matter. Stand apart and think about the elements (42).

Despite her reliance on media, it is Morandi's still life paintings and Janiak's performance art that finally help her stand apart. The novel mentions, several times, Morandi's paintings, especially the two still life paintings in Nina’s apartment. Lianne has her impressions about them: "These were groupings of bottles, jugs, biscuit tins, that was all, but there was something in the brushstrokes that held a mystery she could not name" (DeLillo, *Falling Man* 12). What is of central concern is how the ‘mystery’ is resolved. Martin tells Lianne that he keeps "seeing the towers in this still life," at which Lianne looks together with him, and "saw what he saw” (DeLillo, Falling *Man* 49). Nina, an art historian and Morandi expert, refutes their interpretation, arguing that the still life comes "out of another time entirely, another century" and, therefore "rejects that kind of extension or projection" because "These shapes are not translatable to modern towers, twin towers" (DeLillo, *Falling Man* 112). To analyze whose ways of seeing is correct will be pointless. What matters is that Martin and Lianne's interpretation implicates the ethical power of Morandi's still life with its abstraction and non-referentiality to the real world. In his response, Martin makes it clear that he will look and find (DeLillo, *Falling Man* 112). The ethical power of the paintings stand in contrast to the overwhelming power of media representation of the 9/11 attacks and of Drew's image of "The Falling Man" with their real-world referentiality. It is a power that consumes the beholder and leaves no other reaction than to put one's "head in the pages and get

angry and crazy" (DeLillo, *Falling Man* 42). Janiak's performance art functions similarly for Lianne, in that it helps her stand apart and muse. In depicting Janiak as an outsider, DeLillo seems to be advocating the ethical imperative of staying outside, in one way or another. Lianne's first encounter with Janiak's performance is transient, only vaguely reminding her of his similarity to the falling man in Drew's photograph: "A man was dangling there, above the street, upside down. He wore a business suit, one leg bent up, arms at his sides" (DeLillo, *Falling Man* 33). In her second encounter, she closely and fully witnesses Janiak fall upside down with a safety harness barely visible from the platform in front of a passing train. Janiak becomes an outsider in that he chooses to marginalize himself by using performance art, a mode of expression outside the mainstream media and its representation of reality. And, he stays doubly outside when he refuses any prearranged, media represented, or commercialized performance, separating himself from other performance artists.

The suspension of time and certainty is central to the novel, and to the experience of its characters. Neither Keith nor Lianne recovers fully from the aftermath of that of 9/11. Likewise, the lives of all those, who share the fictional space with them, are out of joint. What is true, and what is made up? What is true, and what is just a performance? This cannot be answered by the characters. Indeed, their uncertainty and loss permeate the novel. This is exemplified in Keith and Lianne’s son, Justin, a child who believes that the Towers did not fall, who attempts to communicate only in words of one syllable, and who has lost faith in the idea of truth or transparency or being safe in the world. Other characters struggle to make

sense and to reshape their understanding of truth. One such is Nina, Lianne's mother, a retired academic and art historian who is now struggling with her body's frailty and facing the end of her life. Another is Florence Givens, a fellow survivor of the Towers who shares a sort of friendship, and a brief sexual relationship, with Keith as each struggle to find a way back into their bodies, back into their being alive. These tentative moves towards life are mirrored in reverse by the members of a writing group facilitated by Lianne. All are approaching late-stage Alzheimer's. Under directions, they write down the fragments they can draw out of their memories. These fragile attempts to recover their lives through a kind of testimony lead nowhere as those same lives, incarnated in their ageing bodies, and represented in their disappearing memories, slip away. Identity is a tactic used in the novel, and its effect is to problematize relationships, causality, responsibility, and presence. In the novel, the only connection is that which is enabled by blood. Blood marks several the rare moments of connection between characters: Keith assaults strangers in a furniture store; Lianne hits a neighbour who has been playing Arab music; the young terrorist, Hammad, watches his blood on his shirt sleeve as the plane approaches the Tower; it is the blood of Keith's world, as he struggles to survive the impact of the plane, and to save his friend. An alternative view on death and its domain is offered by Hammad, the terrorist through whom part of the novel is focalized. Though rendered by DeLillo, his characterization does not descend into stereotype or farce. There is sympathy in his delineation, and there is also in its recognition of the complexities involved in his motives or choices. Though Hammad does stand for death, not for life, it is not a simple choice for him. He remains dubious about the claims of religious fundamentalism, and the value of jihad when

associated with death (DeLillo, *Falling Man* 80). Though he is captivated by Amir Mohammed Atta's arguments, "He had to fight against the need to be normal. He had to struggle against himself, first" (DeLillo, *Falling Man* 83). Indeed, perhaps his very last gesture, pure futility, and pure normality, is to fasten his seatbelt seconds before his plane hits the tower (DeLillo, *Falling Man* 239). Though he does finally take up the suicide mission and go to his own and others' death, it is not an easy or inevitable path for him; well into the planning for the attack, Hammad wonders, "Does a man have to kill himself to accomplish something in the world?" (DeLillo, *Falling Man* 174). Hammad, it may be said, never fully buys into the logic of the attack. Nevertheless, he steers himself to go ahead with the mission: "He didn't think about the purpose of the mission. All he saw was shocked and death. There is no purpose, this is the purpose" (DeLillo, *Falling Man* 177). Through the figure of Hammad, DeLillo incisively elucidates how, perhaps, brainwashing operates on a young unsophisticated mind like Hammad's. The mindset of a terrorist is more complex than it might seem.

A terrorist is not just a terrorist; a survivor is not just a survivor. Each is a human being with connections, cultural contexts, personal imperatives, and a personal history that render them entirely distinguishable from others and that, despite social discourses and practices, produce doubts and confusions, and always a singular identity. Despite his doubts Hammad chooses and accepts death, not only his own, but other's as well. In this he becomes one of the doubled characters in the novel, much as Bin Laden is confused with Bill Lawton, much as Ernst Hechinger doubles as Martin Ridnour, so too there is a sort of doubling, or negative mirroring,

first between Hammad and Amir, as he begins to parrot the teachings of that man, but also, and importantly, between Hammad and Keith. This doubling poses a question that is a subtle, but present, feature of the narrative: how much of me is the other? The mirroring of Keith and Hammad is seen in their mutual reluctant acceptance of the hand they have been dealt; in their relative passivity; and oddly, in their acceptance of death, though it comes from different sources. Hammad is young and convinced, despite himself that we are willing to die, they are not (DeLillo, *Falling Man* 178). Keith is older, and though not necessarily willing to die, he is not afraid to face it again; indeed, he attributes the gulf between himself and his wife to the fact that Lianne 'wanted to be safe in the world and he did not (DeLillo, *Falling Man* 216). Both Hammad and Keith spend considerable time in their heads, alone in thought if not in actuality. They are both drawn to risk-taking, they both manifest lack of care for themselves and others. But the most significant moment of mirrored identity comes at the instant the aeroplane slices through the first tower, and this mirroring is represented by the sleight of hand of a hanging pronoun. This part of the story is initially focalized through Hammad, who is sitting in the plane, catching his breath after the struggle to control the cockpit, becoming aware that he was injured in the struggle, convincing himself that his death is worthwhile. We see only what he sees, feel what he feels and fears, as the plane approaches the Tower; thus, for over two pages the pronoun 'he' means Hammad. Then, in mid-sentence, the 'he' shifts its referent, and comes to stand in for Keith Neudecker. Instead, of 'he'(Hammad) watching a bottle spin across the floor of the jet, 'he'(Keith) is walking, propelled by the force of the plane's impact, into a wall (DeLillo, *Falling Man* 239). The 'he' that was Hammad, all sensation and in the plane, is now Keith,

all sensation and in the building, both at the edge of death, both aware and unaware at the same time. ‘He’, Hammad, is instantly dead, we must assume, while he, Keith, in shock, is finding his way to the office of his friend Rumsey, trying to save his life.

DeLillo presents three falling men in his novel. Keith Neubecker is already a falling, failing man before the first plane hits the north tower. He is estranged from his wife and son; he has no enthusiasm for the white-collar job he occupies and to which he does not return after the attacks, and his relations with his poker-playing co-workers are largely perfunctory, even descending into a pointless hockey-rink brawl with the bachelor Rumsey (DeLillo, *Falling Man* 123). If we hope that Keith in his descend from the tower, arm broken, shirt speckled with Rumsey's blood, and absently clutching Florence's briefcase, will be redeemed by his brush with death and calamity, find new purpose in life, and consider every day a providential gift to share with his family and the world, we are going to be disappointed by DeLillo’s novel. And indeed, some reviewers were dischuffed that Neubecker's affair with Florence, his pursuit of high stakes poker in Las Vegas, and his inability to secure an intimate bond with the family to whom he has returned in default of any other safe house, do not hold out personal redemption as the antidote to so much suffering. In the three years that the novel follows Neubecker, he does not demonstrably become a more sympathetic or more ethical man than before his tragedy. He lacks a tragic hero's catharsis. Neudecker's failed recovery measures the depth of his traumatism, and though he recuperates from his physical wounds, he does not find satisfactory amends for his psychological loss. Irrevocably touched by 9/11, he cannot be made whole—and in that he is like most other survivors, the families of victims, and

witnesses to the event. The novel begins and ends with harrowing descriptions of Neudecker's descent from the north tower, thus framing the entire intervening discourse as a meditation on that moment. In both the initial account and its reprise, a shocked Neudecker notes the anomaly of a shirt that "came down out of the high smoke, a shirt lifted and drifting in the scant light and then falling again, down toward the river" (DeLillo, *Falling Man* 4). The white shirt that appears to defy gravity serves as an icon of all those who stepped out into airy nothingness while yearning for an impossible rescue.

The floating shirt recapitulates Drew's photograph of the falling man in his white tunic, but it functions as a synecdoche for all those who leapt to their death, a number neither acknowledged nor recorded in the official accounts of the 9/11 disaster. So horrible is it to hold in mind those bodies impacting with the force of cannon shot—at least one firefighter was killed instantly by a falling man (Junod 5) that the image of the shirt adrift is near all the traumatized viewers can bear to register. As he holds the dying Rumsey on their shattered and smoking floor in the World Trade Centre, Neubecker observes that "something went past the window, then he saw it. First, it went and was gone and then he saw it and had to stand a moment, staring out at nothing, holding Rumsey under the arms. He could not stop seeing it, twenty feet away, an instant of something sideways, going past the window, white shirt, hand up, falling before he saw it" (DeLillo, *Falling Man* 242). In this recapitulation of the image, the iconic shirt appears to make an imprecation, beg reversal of fortune, or seek rescue in defiance of physical laws. The novel ends with a third account as Neubecker sees "a shirt come down out of the sky. He

walked and saw it fall, arms waving like nothing in this life" (DeLillo, *Falling Man* 246), as indeed it is. The photograph was given a name and the falling man's identity was investigated in Tom Junod's essay, "The Falling Man" published in Esquire. His white shirt or tunic and black slacks and high-top shoes appear to reflect as a human counter-image the black and grey striping of the two towers' exterior columns. Junod speculates that the Falling Man was a team member of Windows on the World, Jonathan Briley, whose appearance, and clothing as a restaurant team member conform to that of the falling figure, and whose body was found miraculously intact near the site of what had been the north tower. Drew was able to take more than a dozen photographs of the falling bodies from the towers before the collapse of the south tower flushed him from his post to the safer confines of his office at Rockefeller Centre. Immediately examining what his telephoto lens had captured, he identified one frame in the sequence of pictures. "That picture," he tells Junod, "just jumped off the screen because of its verticality and symmetry." In documentary photography, the iconic value of the frame depends partly on the historical significance of the moment that it captures and partly on the aesthetic form of the photograph itself. The falling man is suspended equilaterally between the darker façade of the north tower to the left and the lighter façade of the south tower to the right. That contrast of light and dark is recapitulated by the steel columns of each building and by the man's black and white attire. Though he falls nearly a quarter of a mile buffeted by winds that tear his clothing to unidentifiable shreds, the camera lens seizes him at the moment in which he is exactly inverted, head first, as he plummets to the ground. The viewer is transfixed as well by the contrast between what appears to be the Falling Man's balletic posture, upside-down end releve and

the horrific demise that will occur some ten seconds later; that is, between the apparent self-composure and the determination of the unnamed jumper and the panicked free fall that was brought about by his impossible choice between death by incineration and death by the high-velocity impact on the street below. Although Drew's photograph ran in many national newspapers on September 12, it was suppressed from further publication in deference to those who argued that it exploited the death of the unidentified man. Despite Junod's valiant efforts of investigative journalism, the Falling Man remains unidentified; we will thus not be able to establish the indexical value of Drew's photograph. "Instead, we turn to the iconic value of the photograph that invites aesthetic and ethical interpretations" (DeLillo, *Falling Man* 246). Drew's Falling Man photograph, the verticality of its figure, suggests a latter-day laocoön. In its poise, we apprehend neither a desperate leap nor an accidental fall, but rather a graceful suspension between two equally disagreeable alternatives. The Falling Man is the visual manifestation of Heraclitus's bending bow, or Zeno's arrow forever suspended in its flight toward its target. The families of the 9/11 victims expressed outrage that photographs of the jumpers were published, partly because these pictures violated the respect and due mourning that should be accorded to them and partly because they appear to render their death suicide. Especially as the facts are in dispute, we are driven to ask what the psychological motives of that fatal leap might be. Just as Lessing's Laocoön debates the relative evocation of pathos in Virgil's poetry or the Rhodian sculpture, we may ask whether it is the photograph of the falling man or DeLillo's literary treatment of this icon of 9/11 that best renders the pathos of the moment.

The third and eponymous Falling Man of the novel is a performance artist, identified in his obituary as David Janiak, who suspends himself from bridges and buildings in the very same position as the man in Drew's photograph. Lianne first encounters his performance at Grand Central Station some ten days after the attack. His stylized dive over the jostling crowd of new York commuters is likewise unannounced; no doubt the frayed nerves of the unwilling audience are further jangled by his surprise fall. She looks overhead to see him:

> upside down, wearing a suit, a tie and dress shoes. He brought it back, of course, those stark moments in the burning towers when people fell or were forced to jump… People were shouting up at him, outraged at the spectacle, the puppetry of human desperation, a body's last fleet breath and what it held. It held the gaze of the world, she thought. There was the awful openness of it, something we had not seen, the single falling figure that trails a collective dread, the body comes down among us all" (DeLillo, *Falling Man* 33).

The outrage expressed by an audience held captive by Falling Man's performance is comparable to the public response of censure regarding any photographs of the jumpers after 9/11. Perhaps it is too soon, as DeLillo surmises in "In the Ruins of the Future," for a cogent artistic expression dealing with the tragedy. In so far as the artist must imagine a suitable audience for his or her work, Falling Man not only invokes the desperate misery of the World Trade Centre's victims—who were, after all, a representative cross-section of business-suited professionals, employees at work in the buildings, and the emergency responders who rushed, like Bruce

Springsteen's anthem notes, "into the fire" but also the shock and terror registered by unprepared bystanders. We are, with disastrous consequences, still held in the grip of a "collective dread," the fear that fuels the ongoing War on Terror.

However, Lianne's response is differentiated from that of the appalled crowd, and it is through her point of view that DeLillo states his case for the necessity of an artistic response to tragic events. She believes that Falling Man invites "the gaze of the world" (DeLillo, *Falling Man* 31), so now Lianne believes that we must look at Falling Man and interpret his performance. To all those who contend that we must, in respect for the dead, avert our gaze, Falling Man counters that the terrible gaze is necessary: only thus can the awful terror of an impossible exchange of death for death instead of death for life be confronted; only thus can self-annihilation, become self-sacrifice; only thus is the 'collective dread' of victimization overcome.

There are ancient proscriptions against the shattering of a corpse, sparagmos in Greek, defilement of the body that permits no chance for proper burial. That was the fate visited on nearly all the victims of 9/11, whether they remained in the towers to become one with the ash and particulates in the buildings' collapse or whether they fell from such a dizzying height. The performance of Falling Man reminds his audience that such a death violates a primal code of religion and ritual. The "performance artist known as "Falling Man" is DeLillo's invention (DeLillo, *Falling Man* 33), but he is, again, an antonomasia for every artist who attempts to answer the question of what purpose art, as opposed to journalism, serves in the face of egregious, public tragedy. as the figure of the artist in the novel,

Falling Man is not meant as a static memorial to those "People falling from the towers hand in hand" ("In the Ruins" 39) but as a provocateur a guerrilla artist of the counter-narrative in history. After the loss of religious belief or at least a commonly shared belief, perhaps art can provide expiation for the atrocities committed by human beings against one another. The leapers were neither heroes nor martyrs. Some families were loath to identify their kin out of fear that they would be condemned in Christian theology to an Inferno of the suicides. Like the figure in Drew's photograph, Janiak's performance is mute; however, he emphasizes the deliberateness of the leaper's action, taking a last look at the conflagration behind and the open sky in front, and thus reclaiming in one's death a final act of personal freedom, a counter-narrative to extremist religious fundamentalism by which each terrorist had convinced himself a holy martyr.

The two appearances of Falling Man in the novel are observed by Lianne not by a survivor of the towers' collapse, Keith, but by his wife who serves as a witness to the enormity of the suffering, head craned upwards to view the suspended figure. As a professional book editor, Lianne provides the critically receptive faculty for whatever interpretation might be given to the performance. When she is again the accidental witness to Janiak's plunge over the commuter train tracks near 125th Street, she registers the "jolt, the sort of mid-air impact and bounce, the recoil, and now the stillness, arms at his sides, one leg bent at the knee. There was something awful about the stylized pose, body and limbs, his signature stroke" (DeLillo, *Falling Man* 168). As a performance artist, Janiak intends to shock the bourgeois sensibilities of his unwitting audience, but if that seems callous, he does so in a

manner that causes irreparable harm to his own body. His pose not only reflects the figure of suffering, but it is also the assumption of some small quotient of that pain; his repeated falls without pulleys or bracing contribute to his premature demise at age 39. Lianne reads his obituary:

> There is some dispute over the issue of the position he assumed during the fall, the position he maintained in his suspended state. Was this position intended to reflect the body posture of a particular man who was photographed falling from the north tower of the World Trade Centre, head first, arms at his sides, one leg bent, a man sets forever in free fall against the looming background of the column panels in the tower? (DeLillo, *Falling Man* 194).

In an apparent reference to the photograph taken by Drew, she notes the similarity in their posture. However, Lianne responds to Falling Man's performance much as we readers respond to the novel by venturing a further interpretation: falling headfirst one leg bent this is the figure of the hanged man in the Tarot deck. The imminent demise of the man may lead us to interpret this character as an appalling figure of death. But this "trump card in a tarot deck, Falling Man, name in gothic type" (DeLillo, *Falling Man* 221) from the Major Arcana of the Tarot is more properly regarded as a figure of suspension, not termination. It signifies a time of trial or meditation and evokes selflessness and sacrifice.

The analogies between Justin and Hammad are interestingly portrayed in the novel. If Justin moves beyond his semi-mesmerized state and becomes more pluralistic, Hammad begins to retreat into the terrorist identity Amir and other Al

Qaeda agents have instilled in him. Wandering the streets of Nokomis, Florida, Hammad realizes that:

> Hammad pushed a cart through the supermarket. He was invisible to these people, and they were becoming invisible to him. He looked at women sometimes, yes, the girl at the checkout named Meg or Peg. He knew things she could never in ten lifetimes begin to imagine" (DeLillo, *Falling Man 151*).

The brief respite from his conditioning is a latent reminder of his individuality, echoing the earlier scene where Hammad leered at his female roommate. However, such sexual urges are subsumed by an extremist body politic that demands, as Steven Kull writes, a feeling that "the United States has betrayed the Muslim people by violating its principle of relations based on respect, tolerance, and the constraints of international law" (Feeling *Betrayed* 4). As Hammad's fellow agents indoctrinate him into this mentality, the resistance against his ordained mission falls away and leaves only a self-inflated sense of cultural superiority. In his reverie, he lords over the American women and sees all American society as a system that he cannot penetrate, and so he dedicates himself to ruining it. The American people are thus shorn of individuality, with Hammad operating under the belief that they wish him the same harm he intends to deliver unto them. This second section demonstrates a new rhetorical strategy in Hammad's re-education, that of a monologic collective. Whereas Hammad's first section concerns itself principally with Hammad, the narrative here represses that sentiment, reconstituting the individual as part of a vast enclave, so that:

> they felt the magnetic effect of the plot... The plot closed the world to the slender line of sight, where everything converges to a point. There was the claim of fate, that they were born into this. There was the claim of being chosen, out there, in the wind and sky of Islam. There was the statement that death made, the strongest claim of all, the highest jihad" (DeLillo, *Falling Man* 153).

Even as DeLillo returns white Noise's consideration that "all plots tend to move deathward" (DeLillo, *Falling Man* 26), such a concept is here interpolated at the authoritarian level. There is no singular subject in these revelations; rather, the collective hive subsumes the singular subject. The collective named by "them" signifies a vague but abundant number. Hammad has been reconstructed to lack a personal or questioning identity so that the voice that offered entry into understanding extremism has now been assimilated into a larger mass movement, awfully close to the feared other of nativist American ideology. Even though Hammad's assimilation into orthodoxy is incontrovertible, such a process is not simplistically conceived. With this contention in mind, Pohlman's claim that the falling Man's terrorist narrative "presents a singular image of the terrorist that offers none of the self-reflexive ambivalences that characterize other passages" is problematic (DeLillo, *Falling Man* 54). Embedded in this second section are remnants of Hammad's questioning identity, fragments that diverge radically from the dictum of Amir and Al Qaeda's rhetoric. Hammad ruminates on these doubts in short stretches, "[b]ut does a man have to kill himself to accomplish something in the world?" (DeLillo, *FallingMan*174). Just as the first section included

inflammatory passages from Amir, without any further reflection from Hammad, DeLillo now reverses the trajectory, so that Hammad's voice strains against the vacuum to which it has been confined. This second strategy is more clearly nonconformist than the first.

Hammad's ontological concern is repeated soon after, before retreating to the margins, but the inkling is enough to suggest a counternarrative in which Hammad still doubts the self-sacrificial ideology of Al Qaeda. Given this countervailing force, Hammad is more divisive in chronicling the hierarchy, he obeys than might be first considered. He reiterates the language of a monolithic plot soon after, noting how "[t]he plots shapes every breath he takes. This is the truth, he has always looked for knowing how to name it or where to search" (DeLillo, *Falling Man 176*). Because the plot takes on qualities beyond names, it becomes something incommunicable and, therefore, ineffable. In this light lies the residue of resistance, for these moments offer something that can be read as both a factual and counterfactual element, as will soon be highlighted with Hammad and Keith. These moments of resistance expose how dialectical inquiries have been otherwise sublimated, gently removed by the radicalism of Al Qaeda ideology. Furthermore, they reveal how even here, despite the semblance of an individual voice, suggested by a return to "he" rather than "they," the lone voice remains subsumed by the collective directing the plot. This movement away from dialectics continues rhetorically with the final pages of Hammad's second section and assumes the propagandists' structure of binary oppositions. Such narrative dependency on binaries suggests the fullness of the brotherhood's training, for the sloganeering adopted, assumes the place of real

ideological engagement. Hammad prepares for the last days by reflecting on how "[t] here is no purpose, this is the purpose," and later, "We are willing to die, they are not" (DeLillo, *Falling Man*177 -178). This approach to ontological questioning offers counternarratives through the very lack of decision underscoring the assertion. For example, the aphorism "There is no purpose, this is the purpose" serves as a Beckettian inscription of the defeat where the assertion of a purpose is only raised to mask the fact of an empty mission. This rhetorical gap suggests a secondary economy of resistance retained in the art of Hammad's binary slogans. Likewise, the contention that "they are not" willing to die finds contrapuntal evidence in Keith's slow disintegration into stasis and death. As such, Hammad's final assertion that "[t] his is our strength, to love death, to feel the claim of armed martyrdom" (178) equally applies to Keith's final scenes in Las Vegas, where he martyrs himself to nothingness because he has become too ingrained in an ideology of repressive silence to pull himself out of it. Such parallelism further disproves the concept that acceptance of one's imminent death is the terrorists' strength only, again placing the terrorist and the American on an equal, albeit self-destructive, footing. Hammad's erected binary, then, collapses under a dialectical reconsideration. Falling Man frames Hammad and Keith as headed toward similar fates, Justin discovers newfound wonder in the world and its polyglot of political voices. Escorted by Lianne, Justin wanders through a political demonstration in downtown New York in 2003, soaking in all the abundant displays of protest. Now, ten years old, Justin proves ever willing to consider the depths of a dialectical worldview, as when "Justin took a leaflet from a woman in a black headscarf" (DeLillo, *Falling Man*181). This easy compatibility has been earned through the eerie 'otherness' that

undergirded his prior years. Justin is attuned to the grievances of the 'other', grasping how those oppositional voices are now trying to create their own public space. This is a radical divergence from his mother, who was only "here for the kid, to allow him to walk amid dissent, to see and feel the argument against war and misrule. She wanted, herself, to be away from it all" (DeLillo, *Falling Man*182). Justin, rather than retreat into political and psychological stasis, as his father does, or adopting a manner of traumatic avoidance and relief in religion, as his mother does, commits to the root causes of difference and seeks to understand and empathize with them. By taking the leaflet, Justin transcends the limits of national orthodoxy and the political expression found in all the novel's other characters, mediating between dialectics, and granting full attention to the possibility of growth. Significantly, this developmental act occurs in the youngest falling Man's characters, intimating first a generational divide that hints at how the older generations will be unable to move beyond the static political narrative that has overwhelmed the nation under President Bush's administration. This act reveals, how the younger generation will be the one most to commit to understanding the Muslim people and their respective ideologies. Similarly, those Muslims who diverge from the rigid ideologies of extremism, such as the woman in the black headscarf who endeavours to open true dialogic communication with Justin and other interested Americans, commit to respect and tolerance. Justin, then, is not indiscriminatingly or passively assimilating Islamic culture, but rather asserting his agency in becoming an active explorer concerning the tradition and heritage of people. Amid the general resistance that has amassed at this protest, where leaflets are distributed "on behalf of peace, justice, voter registration, paranoid truth movements" (DeLillo, *Falling Man* 183), Justin centres

his attention on the most radical of agendas as a post-9/11 New Yorker. Despite his young age, he commits to a genuine investigation of Islam that threatens the ideological stability around him, including his mother's. She notes how "he came to rest in tiny sumo squat. He sorted through his literature, spending some minutes looking at a particular leaflet. She saw the word Islam on the top of the middle page in the fold, followed by an 800 number" (DeLillo, *Falling Man* 183). Lianne fashion, Justin in this instance, as one who is conversant in multiple cultural identities, mediating between them seamlessly. His polyvocal nature concerning culture allows him access to Japanese tradition vis-à-vis the sumo reference and evokes similar comfort with Islamic tradition as he begins to read aloud from the leaflet. His resistance to a monologic political economy is evidenced when he starts with the principle that "[t] here is no god but Allah and Muhammad are His prophet" (DeLillo, *Falling Man* 183), and later repeats the phrase in broken Arabic. His adoption of multiple cultural identities, wherein he comes to identify with them and sympathize with the religion that the terrorists used to validate their ideology, acts as the first step toward mobilizing a new depth of cultural resistance against the fear of Islam. This adoption moves far beyond regressive governmental sloganeering and instead seeks to truly claim multicultural understanding. Justin's resistance to governmental ideology is an ethical foray that Lianne advocates, but she remains trapped in her avoidance, unable to find Justin's equilibrium in the dialogic embrace of Islam and other cultural identities. Thus, Lianne exhibits nervousness toward Justin's newfound embrace of a language and culture, for she notes how he recited the line in Arabic, by syllables, slowly, and she reached down for the leaflet and did her version, no less uncertain, only quicker. There were other words he handed up to

her and she pronounced or mispronounced them, and it made her uneasy, small as it was, reciting a line, explaining a ritual. It was part of the public discourse, the pouring forth, Islam with an 800 number. (DeLillo, *Falling Man*185) Although Lianne views this progression of Islam into the public discourse with discomfort, DeLillo intimates that this is merely her cultural perspective and is not, a priori, a deficiency. Indeed, the model of progress and revelation is precisely to be found in Justin's assiduous commitment to cultural exploration. He is not approaching the language or culture as one of the masses, but rather as one "nearly wholly other," to return to Berger's language, trying to understand another. Justin's adventures in Arabic is not a blithe or carefree stunt; instead, it is the synthesis that triangulates the novel as thesis (Justin) and antithesis (Hammad) finally converges. This movement toward synthesis is further supported by the sections with Lianne and Justin afterward, where any sense of familial alienation or disconnection fades away and leaves only contentment. Justin's cultural breakthrough, which is understood by his mother, leads to their most pleasant and open conversation, as the narrator observes "[t] hey were enjoying this, a little tease and banter," and later "[t] hat night she sorted through her father's collection of jazz records downloaded by [Flinders University of South Australia] at 21:54 30 January 2015, 608, Critique and played a side or two for Justin" (DeLillo, *Falling Man*186-187).

Despite Lianne's initial unease, the growth that Justin displays as he acquaints himself with Islamic cultural heritage mirrors itself in a blossoming playfulness between son and mother. Given the static and incommunicable divide that had framed their relationship throughout most of the novel, whether because of

Justin's wholly silent or just estranged temperament, this new consideration frames the novel as one that aspires toward more than a cultural identity of stasis. Justin is resisting the forms of narrative that his parents employ, grounded as they are in paralysis, and instead invigorates himself in a fluid consumption of both Eastern and Western ideologies. As such, Justin's narrative arc provides the final rebuke against the ideological stillness that frames much of Hammad's final narrative section. Hammad's mentality, no longer allowing any individual subterfuge or resistance, instead retreats into the maxims that have been drilled into him by Amir and the others: Recite the sacred words. Pull your clothes tightly about you. Fix your gaze. Carry your soul in your hand. (DeLillo, *Falling Man* 238) Hammad's rhetorical listing denies any introspection or dialectical quality, as the fanatic withdraws safely into a monologic screen that combats any lingering doubt or worry. While Hammad and Justin had exhibited qualities that made them both nearly wholly other, only Justin fulfils the promise of successfully mediating between cultural identities and perspectives. Of all the characters in the novel, no one else, whether American or Muslim, exhibits this grace to move within cultural frameworks. Lianne cannot find the ease in herself to read Koran; Keith deteriorates in an apolitical vacuum and is interested only in capitalist gambling, and Hammad surrenders to his circumscribed reality after first considering a pluralistic worldview. In a political climate, where otherness is derided by the Bush administration as a geopolitical reality grounded in envy and lust for American ideals, and of which Atta's attitude is a mirror image, *Falling Man* discounts such claims by asserting that only a political individual will be able to properly cope with the emergent post-9/11 cultural conditions. As Justin gains more access to other cultural perspectives, attempting Arabic and

contemplating the fundamental edicts of the Koran, he reveals himself as the central character in *Falling Man*, for he is the figure who most changes, who most grows and discovers the flexibility to live in this wholly changed world. Just as DeLillo removed himself from his earlier position as an author who remained silent and apart from the national consciousness in the mid-1990s, giving readings and directly addressing international causes, so, too, does Justin discourse with and confront the Otherness that confounds America. Justin's progression into an international identity, then, signifies the second stage in post-9/11 fiction, where characters thrive when they have grounded in a political, international perspective. Justin is the only figure who succeeds in attaining the kind of fluid ideological conception needed to navigate geopolitical conflict. All the other characters retreat into their circumscribed worldviews, choosing safety and security rather than the risks and the perils attendant on change or growth. This retreat on the part of the older characters invariably stems from their feelings of comfort with their own cultural tradition and with conformity to its norms and standards. Justin is growing up and maturing in a society with its diverse cultures that have come from different regions of the globe. The cultural catholicity he displays is, therefore, in consonance with his situation. Whereas the outlook and attitudes of the other characters remain static, they are fluid. It is this fluidity that cements his success in the midst of the traumas of 9/11.

Chapter IV

God and Devils

John Updike is one of the best known and most prolific of American writers. His literary oeuvre comprises more than twenty novels, collections of poetry, short stories, and essays. He is known for his careful craftsmanship, his subtle and realistic depiction of the small-town, middle-class life of Protestant America. His first novel, *The Poorhouse Fair*, was published in 1958. The novels *Rabbit Run* (1960), *Rabbit Redux* (1971), *Rabbit Is Rich* (1981), and *Rabbit at Rest* (1990) are four of his most celebrated novels of which the latter two had won him Pulitzer Prizes.

Terrorist (2006), which was evidently inspired by the 9/11 attacks on the World Trade Centre in America, is his twenty-second and penultimate novel. Originally, Updike had on his mind a young Christian fundamentalist as his protagonist. Subsequently, he abandoned the idea and wrote the novel with a young Muslim fundamentalist as the protagonist. As Anna Hartnell observes, "… *Terrorist* was initially conceived as a novel about Christian fundamentalist violence - Islam was later substituted as somehow more appropriate to today's world…." (*Writing Islam* 143). In fact, Updike, together with his wife, Martha, had seen from the viewpoint of a tenth-floor apartment in Brooklyn Heights, where he was visiting some kin, the collapse of the first tower. Later, he expressed his feelings about the "great and horrendous" ("Tuesday and After" 10), a sight he had seen in a Talk piece for *The New Yorker*. This Talk piece ends on a note of resiliency and

optimism. The next morning, when he looked at the sky, he saw "the fresh sun", and boats tentatively moving in the river. The World Trade Centre ruins were still sending out smoke. But, to him "New York looked glorious" (10). The same note of optimism may be discerned at the end of *Terrorist*, too, which shows the conversion of a young Islamic terrorist into normative American life. Indeed, for some years before the occurrence of 9/11, Updike had been toying with the idea of aerial terrorism. This is evidenced by his use of the Lockerbie bombing as a leitmotif in *Rabbit at Rest*. Similarly, in a poem entitled "Icarus", written a little over a year before 9/11, he draws the picture of a sweaty, swarthy gentleman of Middle Eastern origin, sitting in an airplane with "a bulky black briefcase", looking at his watch and frequently closing his eyes in prayer. The gentleman is, apparently, harmless, but there is something vaguely ominous about him:

> O.K., you are sitting in an airplane and
> the person in the seat next to you is a sweaty, swarthy gentleman of Middle Eastern origin
> whose carry-on luggage consists of a bulky black briefcase he stashes,
> in compliance with airline regulations,
> underneath the seat ahead.
> He keeps looking at his watch and closing his eyes in prayer,
> ("Icarus" 1-7)

As Updike's biographer, Adam Begley puts it, "The combination of terrorists and airplanes had been vivid to him for at least a decade" (*Updike* 466).

Terrorist is, undoubtedly, a significant novel about suicide terrorism, perhaps, the most formidable and mystifying form of terrorism. Accordingly, its focus is on the gradual making, and the eventual unmaking, of the mindset of a young, would-be suicide terrorist, named Ahmad. At the close of the novel, the protagonist Ahmad eschews the path of terrorism, he had willingly chosen and returns, reformed and enlightened, to the thick and thin of American life. According to Anna Hartnell, Terrorist is Updike's attempt "to take on Islam in the wake of 9/11". She further observes:

> In *Covering Islam* (1981), Said explains that a monolithic 'Islam' has long served as a watchword for violence and terrorism in the western media. The violent penetration of US space occasioned by the 9/11 attacks served to make hyper-visible a narrative that has for decades demonized Islam as anti-modern and anti-western (*Writing Islam* 135).

It is this negative vision of Islam that serves as Updike's springboard for imaging his protagonist, Ahmad Mulloy-Ashmawy, as a radicalized and intolerant Muslim who is totally out of sympathy with American culture and who is, therefore, ready to be a terrorist and an Islamic martyr. Ahmad is a teenager, an eighteen-year-old Arab-American, tall, and well-built. He is the son of a Catholic Irish - American mother and an Egyptian Muslim father. When the action begins, he is a final year high school student who lives in New Prospect, New Jersey, with his red-haired, 40-year-old mother, Terry Mulloy, a nursing aide, and an amateur painter who lives a bohemian life and finds but little time to devote to her only child. It is important to

note that Ahmad's is a single-parent family. His radicalization and his evolution into a terrorist are, to some extent, tied up with his familial milieu and background. In his book, *The Mind of the Terrorist*, Jerrold M Post notes that " there is a growing population of discontented Muslim emigres who have been… radicalized within their host country, from whose culture they feel excluded and alienated" (*The Mind of the Terrorist* 225). He further comments that:

> There is an increased radicalization and recruitment of terrorists from the second and third-generation emigres to the global Salafi *jihad*…. Although most Muslim immigrants and refugees are not stateless, many suffer from an existential sense of loss, deprivation, and alienation from the countries they live in…. They are then exposed to extreme ideologies that increasingly radicalize them and can foster entering the path of terrorism. (225)

These are the homegrown terrorists, young second - even third-generation residents of Western countries driven by alienation and possibly inspired by the global Salafi jihad but carrying out these attacks independently of it.

At a counselling session with Jack Levy, Ahmad confesses with suppressed pain and indignation:

> I am the product of a white American mother and an Egyptian exchange student; they met while both studied at the New Prospect campus of the State University of New Jersey... My father well knew that marrying an American citizen, however trashy and immoral she was, would gain him American citizenship, and so it did, but not

> American know-how, nor the network of acquaintance that leads to American prosperity. Having despaired of ever earning more than a menial living by the time I was three, he decamped. (Updike, *Terrorist* 34-35).

His parent's marriage was a marriage of convenience and it collapsed when his father could not succeed in realizing his American dream of success and prosperity. Ahmad's self-mocking reference to himself as 'a product', not as a son or child, of this marriage, is an index of his low self-esteem and his bitter sense of detachment from his family. It is this familial fracture that leads Ahmad, at the early age of eleven, to the mosque and the creepy, sinister, fundamentalist Imam, Sheikh Rashid.

Besides his mother and Sheikh Rashid, the others, with whom Ahmad's life is closely connected, are Joryleen Grant, his Afro- American schoolmate, Charlie Chehab, his boss at the Excellency Home Furnishings, and Jack Levy, his high school guidance counsellor. Shaikh Rashid gives Ahmad Islamic lessons and, in the process, whets not only his faith in God, but his jaundiced view of people of other religious persuasions. Ahmad adamantly believes that all those, who are not Muslim, are unclean and devilish. Equally pejorative is his idea of women. This is what makes him shy away from the graceful Joryleen and her amorous advances, even though, deep down in his heart, he has taken a fancy to her.

> Women are animals easily led, Ahmad has been warned by Shaikh Rashid, and he can see for himself that the high school and the world beyond it are full of nuzzling-blind animals in a herd bumping

> against one another, looking for a scent that will comfort them.
>
> (Updike, *Terrorist 10)*

It is a strict version of Islam that Ahmad adopts. As such, much in American life disgusts him and is grossly at odds with his cherished Islamic values and view of worldly life. To Ahmad, what matters is not life in this world. Life in the hereafter alone is of value and is what every individual Muslim should strive for and aspire to. Earthly life is but a preparation for a permanent, pleasurable life in paradise. Accordingly, the life that Ahmad scrupulously lives is one of psychic and even sexual distancing from the life he sees around him. His counsellor, the sixty-three-year-old Jew, Jack Levy, urges him to go to University to prosecute higher studies. But Ahmad refuses to do so. It is of importance that Jack does not vanish from Ahmad's life; he continues to be a benign and forceful presence before Ahmad, especially after he strikes up a passionate affair with Ahmad's amoral mother. When Ahmad discontinues his studies, it becomes easier for the imam to exert more of his influence on him and direct his future. The Imam arranges for Ahmad to qualify as a truck driver and to work for a business concern owned by the Chehabs, a Lebanese- American family. Gradually, Ahmad is drawn into a terrorist plot. On the anniversary of 9/11, he shall drive a truck loaded with 4,000 kilos of ammonium nitrate deep into the Lincoln Tunnel and detonate it there. The operation aims to send a message to the US, "the global Satan" (Updike, *Terrorist* 248).

Before he goes on his mission, Ahmad has a heated, though muddled and reluctant, sexual encounter with Joryleen who, by the force of circumstances engineered by Tylenol, her greedy and deviant boyfriend, has now turned a call-girl.

The encounter, in fact, has been arranged by Charlie to afford Ahmad some solace before he makes his ultimate leap into martyrdom for the love of God. It is, obviously, a key moment in Ahmad's life. Joryleen's erotic ministrations make Ahmad feel "a convulsive transformation, a vaulting inversion of his knotted self like that, perhaps, which occurs when the soul passes at death into Paradise". (Updike, *Terrorist* 226). The terms, in which Updike describes Ahmad's experience of sex, presage Ahmad's 'transformation' and the 'inversion' of his mission at the end of the novel. The experience touches Ahmad's soul and, in a sense, initiates him into the pleasures of earthly life which he has been shunning with the utmost diligence in his attempts to live in accord with the dictates of Islam. Updike has always been fascinated by the tension between religion and sexuality, the search for transcendence, and carnal desires. The Ahmad - Jorlyene rendezvous takes place in the dimly- lit furniture warehouse of the Chahab's. With its touch of humour and erotic grotesquery, it becomes, at one level, a carnivalesque dramatization of this tension. At another level, it involves an ironic view of the narrowness and the rigidities of Islam's approach to sexual morality.

The novel perks up once Ahmad starts working in the furniture company. As a truck driver, his duty is to carry and deliver furniture to the customers. Ahmad is, indeed, against consumerism. Nevertheless, he enjoys his work, the part that he plays in providing comfort to people. At times, he even thinks that there is some point in people's passion for comfort and that it will not bring down God's displeasure on them. "God knows what it is to desire comfort, else He would not have made the next life so comfortable; there are carpets and couches in Paradise."

(Updike, *Terrorist* 152). On their delivery routes, Ahmad's boss, Charlie, who dreams of directing commercials, instructs Ahmad in the art of advertising and in the proprieties to be observed in running the business smoothly.

Ahmad's religious intolerance is abundantly brought out in the novel. It sets him apart from his infidel coevals at school, like the sluttish, nose-studded Afro-American Joryleen and her thickset boyfriend, Tylenol. When Joryleen invites him to her church to hear her sing in the choir, Ahmad is greatly offended and declines the invitation. Later, he changes his mind and attends the church. Afterward, he tells her: "You have been gracious to me, and I was curious. It is helpful, up to a point, to know the enemy" (Updike, *Terrorist* 68). Also, Ahmad happily walks Jorlyeen from the church to her house. Indeed, he likes the girl. Still, he sees in her an 'enemy', surely because she belongs to a religion different from his. This hostile attitude toward the religious culture of others is discernible even in his relationship with his mother. The sentiments he expresses in a conversation with Charlie are worth noting here:

> I think recently my mother has suffered one of her romantic sorrows, for the other night she produced a flurry of interest in me as if remembering that I was still there. But this mood of hers will pass. We have never communicated much. My father's absence stood between us, and then my faith, which I adopted before entering my teen years. She is a warm-natured woman … I am not yet quite grown enough to be my mother's enemy, but I am mature enough to be an object of indifference" (Updike, *Terrorist* 212).

Ahmad, as Updike puts it, has “a pained stateliness” (Updike, *Terrorist* 34) about him. Part of the ‘pain’ can be attributed to the absence, in his life, of proper parental care. Even his forty-year-old mother, long separated from his father, and warmly flirtatious, is in Ahmad’s eyes an infidel. His attitude to Jack Levy, the Jew, is no different, even though Jack is not a practicing Jew. Ahmad resents the affair that burgeons between his mother and his sixty-three-year-old counsellor. In his assessment, it is an improbable, indecorous, and audacious liaison, and they are ‘two aged infidel animals’. In a lyrical passage, Updike describes the enormous disgust and hard feelings that well up in Ahmad’s mind, when he sees them flirt:

> Ahmad has felt the man approach, and then the presumptuous, poisonous touch on the shoulder. Now he is aware of, too close to his head, the man's belly, its warmth carrying out with it a smell, several smells--a compounded extract of sweat and alcohol, Jewishness and Godlessness, an unclean scent stirred up by the consultation with Ahmad's mother, the embarrassing mother he tries to hide, to keep to himself. The two adult voices had intertwined flirtatiously, disgustingly, two aged infidel animals, warming to each other in the other room (Updike, *Terrorist* 94).

The passage underscores Ahmad’s anti-Semitism as well as his general antipathy toward people of other faiths. It also reflects his religiously motivated negation of human sexuality and his inability to understand that, if the ‘two aged infidel animals’ are ‘warming to each other’, it is nothing but a normal expression of the

native bodily urges and their inordinate love of life. It may be noted that Ahmad's circumscribed vision of human sexuality and his pre-eminently austere life are rooted in his uncompromising religiosity. As he sees it, the sexual instinct is an 'animal' instinct that the pious would always rein in. Infidels alone will love to live like sexual 'animals.

Ahmad's Islam, as Updike sees it, is of an orthodox order that prompts him to live an extremely austere life. Ahmad does not listen to music, use a cell phone, lust after girls, go to movies, or even read books. When occasionally, he watches television, all that he is interested in is to look for "traces of God in this infidel society" (Updike, *Terrorist* 196). American society, as Ahmad perceives it, is all Topsy turvy. Family life, according to Ahmad, should be founded upon the values of love, empathy, and intimacy which the prophet had emphasized. Such a life is absent in American society. Even American parents, who as a rule encourage independence and look on filial acts of disobedience with levity and insouciance, are guilty contributors to the monstrous messiness that has overtaken the American family:

> Even the parents conspire in this, welcoming signs of independence from the child and laughing at disobedience. There is not that bonding love which the Prophet expressed for his daughter Fatimah: Fatimah is a part of my body; whoever hurts her, has hurt me, and whoever hurts me has hurt God (Updike, *Terrorist* 168).

While exploring the roots of Islamic terrorism, *Terrorist* also unfolds, on a large canvas, the ethos of post-9/11 America. An understanding of the novel's Muslim

characters is of special importance in this respect. Peter C Herman notes:

> Updike has his Muslim characters describe what the world looks like from their perspective, and their views partly overlap with Updike's long-standing criticisms of American culture as materialistic and self-destructive. The book does not endorse, it should be said, their view that America consciously seeks Islam's destruction ("Terrorism and the Critique" 691).

The theme of the clash between Islam and the West, therefore, becomes pivotal to the novel's argument. Indeed, this theme is nothing new in Western or American literature and other forms of writing. It is, like terrorism itself, something that can be traced back to medieval and early modern Europe. Loomba observes:

> In medieval and early modern Europe, Christian identities were constructed in opposition to Islam, Judaism, or heathenism. Above all, it was Islam that functioned as the predominant binary opposite of and a threat to Christianity (*Colonialism/Postcolonialism* 122).

However, it may be interesting to see what perspective Updike brings to bear upon this century opposition between the world's two major religious ideologies. Ahamad, as has already been pointed out, decides not to continue his education. His vindication of the decision is based on his perception that American culture is inordinately unhealthy. "Western culture", he says, "is Godless. ... And because it has no God, it is obsessed with sex and luxury goods" (Updike, *Terrorist,* 38). American secularity, sexual permissiveness, consumerist narcosis are out of tune with Ahmad's Islamic way of life which he thinks is the only right way. In his view,

it is Islam that provides Muslim devotees, including Afro- Americans, with what American culture does not. He tells Joryleen:

> The mosque and its teachers give them what the Christian U.S. disdains to—respect, and a challenge that asks something of them. It asks austerity. It asks restraint. All America wants of its citizens, your President has said, is for us to buy—to spend money we cannot afford and thus propel the economy forward for himself and other rich men" (Updike, *Terrorist* 72).

Christian America looks down upon Islam and Muslims. All that it asks of its citizens is to fall in line with its materialist and consumerist mode of life which is pre-eminently geared to promoting capitalism and the economic advancement of the rich. Even President George Bush, Ahmad rues, champions consumerism. America has the least concern for its poor people. When Joryleen protests that George W. Bush "ain't my President," Ahmad responds that it does not matter, because all American presidents are birds of a feather. "They all want Americans to be selfish and materialistic, to play their part in consumerism" (Updike, *Terrorist* 72). His criticism of his mother, Terry is also rooted in his negative attitudes toward America. Terry lives a dissolute life, a life of abandonment to America's freewheeling culture. As such, he considers her a typical American:

> A typical American, lacking strong convictions and the courage and the comfort they bring. She is a victim of the American religion of freedom, freedom above all, though the freedom to do what and to what purpose is left up in the air. Bombs bursting in the air—empty

> air is the perfect symbol of American freedom (Updike, *Terrorist* 167)

To Ahmad, the freedom, in which America believes and for which it is well-known, is an empty, delusive freedom. It is utterly without any substance because it is not based on any real purpose behind it. So, Ahmad places Islam above Christianity and his way of life above the American way. Ahmad is a purist where his religious convictions are concerned. He is perfectly at one with God:

> Ahmad in his fatherless years with his blithely faithless mother has grown accustomed to being God's sole custodian, the one to whom God is an invisible but palpable companion. God is ever with him…. God is another person close beside him, a Siamese twin attached in every part, inside and out, and to whom he can turn at every moment in prayer. God is his happiness (Updike, *Terrorist* 39- 40).

With so much of the piety entrenched in him, Ahmad is perpetually alert and careful not to let anything corrode it or tempt him to lose it altogether. This is what makes him look at Jack Levy skeptically. He is apprehensive that the old Jewish devil with "his cunning, worldly-wise, and mock- fatherly manner, wishes to disrupt" his "primal union" with God" (Updike, *Terrorist* 40). It is the same fear that makes him keep himself aloof, even from the Middle Eastern Muslims in New Jersey. He looks upon the areas where he sees concentrations of them as "pockets of a diluted Middle East" (Updike, *terrorist* 177). In other words, they are Muslims who have diluted and desecrated Islam with elements of American culture. He cannot approve of their adaptation or assimilation into American culture. So, when he drives through New

Jersey to convey furniture, he does not take any interest in befriending or interacting with them. Melting into the crucible of American culture is, to Ahmad, unIslamic. What he is more concerned with while on the business move is to carefully observe the "sprawling ferment" of American life. As Updike puts it, "He takes less interest in the pockets of a diluted Middle East than in the American reality all around, a sprawling ferment for which he feels the mild pity owed a failed experiment" (Updike, *Terrorist* 177). Scrutiny leads to understanding and understanding leads to identifying flaws and pitfalls and avoiding them. But, as Updike clearly shows, Ahmad gazes on American life through the prism of his religion and its conception of right and wrong. Ahmad's approach is not that of a relativist who, even while he holds fast to his religion or culture, will show respect and tolerance for the culture or religion of the other. Ahmad, it may be remembered, is in constant fear of the culture around him. He is deeply conscious of its scintillating, materialist allurements, and of the threat, they pause to his Islamic faith and practices. Islam, he knows, has "rendered him immune" (Updike, *Terrorist* 151) to America's unIslamic materialism. But how long he will be able to sustain this immunity is a concern that often troubles him. For, as he sees it, the evil culture is always deliberately seeking to undo his love of God.

While Ahmad sees in America a seductive force that might jeopardize his personal faith and his eventual salvation, the other Muslim characters in the novel see in America a more dangerous and loathsome enemy. The voices of these characters are also decisive for an adequate understanding of Updike's charting of Islamic terrorism, the language it speaks, its purported motives and grievances, and

the message it transmits. For example, Sheikh Rashid, Ahmad's spiritual preceptor believes that America has embarked on a "crusade against Islam" (Updike, *Terrorist* 183). He is enraged over the post-9/11 "anti-Islamic fury that has perversely possessed the present-day West" (Updike, *Terrorist* 197). He is aware that "bespectacled professors and Mullas" (197) are frenziedly deliberating it on Islamic television. This fury, as he understands it, is but a perversion and a post-9/11 extension of the medieval Christian crusaders' anti- Islamic zeal. Intolerance, dogmatism, and prejudice are manifestly the distinguishing features of his psychology. He lives in what Jack Levy calls "a diverse and tolerant society" that accommodates" a variety of viewpoints" (Updike, *Terrorist* 39). Yet, he rejects relativism. As Ahmad tells Jack Levy, "He feels that such a relativist approach trivializes religion… you believe this, I believe that we all get along – that's the American way" (Updike, *Terrorist* 39). The Koran is his only master narrative and 'the American' way is his bete noire, his aversion.

Charlie, who, as part of his undercover CIA scheme for busting terrorist activities, entices Ahmad to join a terrorist cell, only grudgingly agrees with Ahmad's belief that the West is against Islam and wants "to take our God" (Updike, *Terrorist* 188). He is of the view that America's actions are not motivated by religious antagonism, but by imperialistic and commercial interests. At times, what inheres in America's policies and actions is simply a fundamental denial of human dignity. He tells Ahmad, "They take from Muslims their traditions and a sense of themselves, the pride in themselves that all men are entitled to" (Updike, *Terrorist* 188). Similarly, he contends before Ahmad and his father:

> In America, nothing is free, everything is a fight. There is no sharia. Let the young man here tell you, he's just out of high school. Everything is war, right? Look at America abroad—war. They forced a country of Jews into Palestine, right into the throat of the Middle East, and now they've forced their way into Iraq, to make it a little U.S. and have the oil (Updike, *Terrorist* 147).

Jack's criticism of America, it may be said, is Janus- faced. It has a sincere as well as a false side to it. Because, on the one hand, it embodies his honest view of America and, as such, buttresses and reinforces Ahmad's derogatory attitudes. On the other, Charlie uses it as a ruse, a tactical move intended to please Ahmad and retain him as a tool, a Trojan horse, to be manipulated into the secret services of the CIA.

The parleys between Ahmad and Charlie gain in significance when viewed in the light of Charlie's Arab origin. Charlie, indeed, is not religious at all; he is a well-assimilated American Muslim with dreams of making documentaries and commercials to grow richer. In spite of his being a clandestine associate of the CIA, it seems that there is something still left in him that makes him empathize with the Arab world. This is, perhaps, what makes him lash out at America's expansionist proclivities especially across the Arab world. In this sense, Updike's Charlie embodies the fact that ethnic roots run deep, a fact well demonstrated by Alex Hailey's tireless quest after his ancestral origins, which eventually came to fruition in his celebrated novel, *Roots*. It may be said that if Sheikh Rashid teaches Ahmad to look at America from the standpoint of the religion of Islam, Charlie teaches him

to look at it from a political one, from the standpoint of America's imperialistic projects across the world. The two approaches, obviously, supplement each other and complete Ahmad's overarching negative outlook on America. It is, therefore, small wonder that, when Charlie asks him, toward the close of one of their conversations, whether or not he will fight America and lay down his life, if necessary, Ahmad answers, "Of course…. If God wills it" (Updike, *Terrorist* 189). Ahmad is now well on his way to become a suicide terrorist:

Updike's Muslim characters, it may be suggested, think of themselves as a beleaguered minority, confronting a power that desires, their psychic as well as spiritual destruction while stealing their land and wealth. Updike uses these characters to channel the radical Islamist's view of America. Ahmad's hyperawareness of the steamy sensuality of the students in his High School echoes the American impressions of Sayyid Qutub, the ideologue of the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood and of radical Islam. Toward the end of the novel, Ahmad tells Jack Levy that Qutub "came to the United States fifty years ago and was struck by... The open wantonness between the sexes" (Updike, *Terrorist* 302). Qutub saw the American woman as a hypersexual temptress. His description of her is of note here:

> The American girl is well acquainted with her body's seductive capacity. She knows it lies in the face, and expressive eyes and thirsty lips. She knows seductiveness lies in the round breasts, the full buttocks, and in the shapely thighs, sleek legs, and she shows all this and does not hide it. She knows it lies in clothes: in bright colours that awaken primal sensations, and in designs that reveal the

> temptations of the body—and in American girls these are sometimes live, screaming temptations" ("Sayyid Qutub's America" 1*)*

The image that Ahmad has of the American girl is akin to Qutub's. Ahmad's reflections, as Updike puts them, on the girls around him are of relevance in this context. "All-day long, at Central High School, girls sway and sneer and expose their soft bodies and alluring hair. Their bare bellies, adorned with shining navel studs and lowdown purple tattoos, ask, what else is there to see? " (Updike, *Terrorist* 3).

The most striking aspect of Updike's *Terrorist* is his treatment of Ahmad. Critics have not been especially happy with it. Michiko Kakutani considers Ahmad "a completely unbelievable individual," ('Terrorist' Imagines" 2). To David Martin-Jones, Ahmad is "a solemn robot,". He sees Ahmad as an artistic failure, which he attributes to Updike's inability to "imaginatively comprehend the roots and character of Islamist jihad against the West." **(**"The Novel Response" 2). **S**ome studies see domestic turmoil as a major reason for putting young people on the terrorist path. For example, a study of West German terrorists "found a high incidence of fragmented families". A quarter of these terrorists "had lost one or both parents by the age of fourteen; loss of the father was found to be especially disruptive" (Post, "Terrorist Psycho-logic" 225). This view, however, has not met with wide acceptance among terrorism experts mainly because large numbers of terrorists do not fit with this profile. In *Terrorist*, Updike seems to be sharing in this general dissent. He does not see the absence of the father, Omar Ashmawy, who "decamped" when Ahmad was three years old, as the prime reason for his son's

radicalization. At one point in the novel, Ahmad's mother thinks, "I guess a boy needs a father, and if he doesn't have one, he'll invent one" (Updike, *Terrorist* 117). But, immediately after, she outrightly rejects the theory as being "cut-rate Freud" (117), reductive and, in the ultimate analysis, unconvincing. Ahmad may have found in Islam a symbolic substitute for his father and lived on with his simple faith with no harm for others. It may not be correct to argue that Ahmad's radicalization, which paves the way for his terrorist inclinations, stems from the absence of his father.

A better explanation, which Updike seems to offer, lies in Ahmad's sense of alienation which results from his mixed ethnic identity and from the overall unhappiness that derives from his broken family with a nonchalant mother at its controls. His parents are different not only in terms of their national origin, but in terms of their religion as well. Americans think that he is not one of them. It is Ahmad's consciousness of this fact that leads him to remind Jack Levy, "I am not a foreigner" (Updike, *Terrorist* 35). To Joryleen's boyfriend, Tylenol, Ahmad is "Arab" (Updike, *Terrorist* 115). Tylenol also taunts and insults him for his racial hybridity, for not belonging to any one single category of racial identity. He tells Ahmad right in his face, "Black Muslims I don't diss, but you not black, you not anything but a poor shithead. You no raghead, you a shithead" (Updike, *Terrorist* 16). There are, indeed, other Muslim students, too, in the Central High School. But Ahmad stands apart from them in two respects. As Updike puts it, "there were no others quite like him—of mixed parentage and still fervent in the faith" (Updike, *Terrorist* 177). To Sheikh Rashid, Ahmad is American" (Updike, *Terrorist* 145), and Ahmad, certainly, understands this identification and likes it. Though Ahmad

has chosen to be a Muslim, his affiliation with Arabs and Arab Muslims extends only to embracing Islam. As a rule, he distances himself from them.

> For four or so blocks to the west, the so-called Arab section, begun with the Turks and Syrians who worked as tanners and dyers in the old mills, stretches along this part of Main Street, but Ahmad never ventures there; his exploration of his Islamic identity ends at the mosque. The mosque took him in as a child of eleven; it let him be born again (Updike, *Terrorist* 99).

Even the grocery store, which is situated near the Mosque that he frequents and that specializes in Middle Eastern foods such as dried lentils and fava beans, hummus and halvah, falafel and couscous, and tabouli, holds no special attraction for "Ahmad's American eyes" (Updike, *Terrorist* 99). Ahmad's sentiments, when, in the company of Charlie, he passes through those areas of New Prospect where "emigrants from the Middle East" (Updike, *Terrorist* 243) have settled, are of particular interest here. The store signs in these localities combine "Arabic script and Roman alphabet", advertising shops with such names as "*Al Madena Grocery, Turkiyem Beauty, Al- Basha, Baitul Wahid Ahamadiyya*" (Updike, *Terrorist* 243) signifying the Arab and immigrant cultural diversity and eclecticism that mark out these localities. But Ahmad does not feel any ethnic connection to the people or culture of these localities. He knows that these are places where he, certainly, "would not fit in…." To him, these Arab- American enclaves, with their uncouth behavioural patterns and modes of living, seem "an underworld he is timidly visiting", an 'underworld' where he is "an outsider among outsiders" (*Terrorist*

244). Ahmad no more fits in with the immigrant Arab communities in New Jersey than he does with white Americans or Afro- Americans.

The enormous disgust with America's mainstream culture articulated by Ahmad throughout the novel is earnest and predominantly based on his Islamic convictions. This, however, does not mean that Ahmad is insensitive to the political dimensions of America's political history. Indeed, he has his share of rancorous feelings about the genocides and aggressiveness that accompanied the founding of European colonies in the continent of North America. Earlier in the novel, at a counselling session at the Central High School, Ahmad reminds Jack of the early white, Christian, settlers' brutish treatment of native Americans:

> Look how Christianity committed genocide on the Native Americans and undermined Asia and Africa and now is coming after Islam, with everything in Washington run by the Jews to keep themselves in Palestine (Updike, *Terrorist* 38).

America, particularly post-9/11 America, in collaboration with Israel represented by the American Jews, is hunting down Islam. This is but a continuation of the white Christian violence that had accompanied the founding of America and Europe's imperial projects of past centuries. Nonetheless, the overriding reason why he resolves to become a suicide terrorist is not any of these. It is his desire to belong, a desire which underlies his sense of alienation but is blocked by the seemingly insurmountable wall erected on his life's path by a misreading of what he considers to be the life-giving, life-preserving, creative, and constructive teachings central to the Koran and to the sayings of the prophet. Ahmad, as drawn by Updike, represents

traditional or orthodox Islam, which, as a rule, believes in taking the Koran and the Hadith literally and sternly rejects all attempts at revisionist and reformative readings and exegeses. It is important to note that Sheikh Rashid does not interpret everything Islamic literally. For instance, he does not consider the 'Miraj', the prophet's journey to heaven, to be a physical journey. The winged horse 'Buraq' encounters with other prophets, and the eventual meeting with God are all, according to him, symbolized. The entire episode is an allegory of a mystical experience. When he advises Ahmad to look on the Miraj from this perspective, Ahmad is offended and sees his teacher as wanting in sincere devotion to God. Similarly, to Sheikh Rashid, the visionary descriptions of the sura 'Hutama', the Crushing Fire are figurative. "They are truly about the burning misery of separation from God and the scorching of our remorse for our sins against His commands" (Updike, *Terrorist* 6). Ahmad does not like Sheikh Rashid's voice when he says this with down-cast eyes, which are "as milky and elusive as a kafir woman's". Ahmad hears "Satan's undertone in it, a denying voice within an affirming voice" (Updike, *Terrorist* 6). He is convinced that the prophet meant by the Crushing Fire physical fire alone. Shaikh Rashid's approach to the Koran is modern. "He seeks to soften the Prophet's words, to make them blend with human reason" (Updike, *Terrorist* 7). Ahmad's reaction to his teacher's penchant for a revisionist reading of the Koran is an enormously hostile one. He sees in it the operations of extraneous, diabolic forces. "When the murmuring of the devils gnawing within him tinges the imam's voice, Ahmad feels in his own self a desire to rise and crush him,… The student's faith exceeds the master's" (Updike, *Terrorist* 7). Evidently, 'the devils' Ahmad has on his mind here denote not only the people of America, but also science and reason

which have overwhelmed their outlook and conditioned their lives. But Ahmad would not apply reason to an understanding of God or His revelations. God "does not blend with our reason, but makes our reason bow low, its forehead scraping the dust and bearing like Cain the mark of that dust". Ahmad strongly believes that the Prophet physically "visited Paradise and consorted with the realities there" (Updike, *Terrorist* 7). To Ahmad, the imagery of fire and flames, of hell and heaven is to be taken literally, not figuratively. Ahmad's unfaltering orthodoxy is what is capitalized on by Shaikh Rashid even though, he is inclined toward reading the Koran and other Islamic lore from a rational angle. Similarly, Charlie, who is not religious at all but is politically oriented, also exploits Ahmad's deep-rooted faith to his advantage. Updike seems to imply that even those like Shaikh Rashid, who tend to believe in a modernized version of Islam, are likely to turn militantly hostile to America and the West. For, their Islam is political Islam. As for Charlie, his hostility to America is largely political, moored in his displeasure over America's imperialist and extortionist designs on the Arab world.

When Shaikh Rashid asks him, as Charlie does toward the end of the novel, whether or not he is willing to be "a shahid," a martyr, Ahmad is overjoyed. Because, finally, the outsider, the marginalized, the person who is bereft of a real identity has now come up with an opportunity to become an unambiguous part of a larger group. "After a life of barely belonging, he is on the shaky verge of a radiant centrality" (Updike, *Terrorist* 234). It may be relevant to note here that the 9/11 hijackers are different from Updike's Ahmad in terms of their ethnic backgrounds and domestic situations. The hijackers decided to become suicide bombers. So does

Ahmad in the novel. The fundamental reason, in both cases, is alienation. According to Lawrence Wright, the 9/11 hijackers never felt they belonged anywhere:

> Despite their accomplishments, they had little standing in the host societies where they lived. ... The Pakistani in London found that he was neither authentically British nor authentically Pakistani; this feeling of marginality was just as true for Lebanese in Kuwait as it was for Egyptians in Brooklyn ("The looming Tower" 346).

Alone and alienated, the 9/11 terrorists, therefore, turned to Islam. In *Terrorist,* Ahmad also turns to the mosque and Islam where he finds the answers and the sense of belonging that have been eluding him everywhere. "The mosque took him as a child of eleven; it let him be born again" (Updike, *Terrorist* 99). Ahmad's alienation, it is important to note is total in that he feels alienated not only from family but from society as well. Sometimes, social conditions, precipitate feelings of isolation and disconnectedness. Commenting on the plight of the Muslim youth in Western Europe, Jerrold M Post says:

> European social conditions promoted feelings of alienation among young Muslims who felt excluded from the rigid European social structure. Not particularly religious, they drifted back to the mosque to find companionship, acceptance, and a sense of meaning and significance. This in turn made them vulnerable to extremist religious leaders and their radicalization within Muslim institutions (*The Mind of the Terrorist,* 226).

It may be said that this pattern of social setup in the host country, estrangement from it, seeking refuge in religion, exposure to extremist religious leaders, radicalization, and passage to terrorism is clearly adumbrated in Ahmad's growth into a potential terrorist. In her book *Heretic* (2015), Ayaan Hirsi Ali who considers herself a heretic and an apologist for a reformative rereading of Islamic texts, including the Koran writes:

> In the West, however, where Islam is a minority religion, devout Muslims live in what is best described as a state of cognitive dissonance. Trapped between two worlds of belief and experience, these Muslims are engaged in a daily struggle to adhere to Islam in the context of a secular and pluralistic society that challenges their values and beliefs at every turn. Many are able to resolve this tension only by withdrawing into self-enclosed (and increasingly self-governing) enclaves. This is called cocooning, a practise whereby Muslim immigrants attempt to wall off outside influences… disengaging from the wider non-Muslim community *(Heretic* 17).

Updike's Ahmad, it may be said, has all the trappings of the Muslim sketched by Hirsi Ali in the passage. He is, to a very large extent, characterized by what Hirsi calls "cocooning". Slavoj Zizek refers to "the passion for the Real" (*Welcome to the* 9). As the motive force behind a variety of human actions. It may not be presumptuous to suggest here that it is this 'passion for the Real' that goads Ahmad on to undertake a terrorist act. In his religious computation, the people around him are so immersed in an impious, objectionable life that it is hard to awaken them

through standard moral or spiritual education and consciousness-raising. As such, a more violent intervention is needed to shake them out of their ideological numbness, their hypnotic consumerist state. Only direct interventions like bombing certain strategic places like supermarkets, bridges, or tunnels would do the job. It is this philosophy that, according to Zizek, works behind terrorism. He puts this view in the form of a rhetorical question: "And does the same not hold … for today's fundamentalist terror? Is not its goal also to awaken us, Western citizens from our numbness, from immersion in our everyday ideological universe?" (*Welcome to the* 9). In Ahmad's view, 'the Real', in terms of life here as well as life in the hereafter, is what is embodied in the teachings of Islam. Ahmad's anathema, anchored in his Islamic world view, to the postmodern hyper-real US culture is what is, at the bottom, his hamartia that taxes him toward his projected terrorist mission. However, it should be said in fairness to Updike that he does not view Ahmad as being innately evil. Through the figure of Ahmad Updike shows how dangerous this kind of a passionately held worldview could be to peaceful human coexistence. In a valuable passage, in which Zizek draws on Novalis' conception of the evil man, Zizek writes:

> Long ago Novalis made the perspicuous observation that what an evil man hates is not good – he hates evil excessively (the world he considers evil), and therefore, tries to hurt and destroy it as much as possible- this is what is wrong with the terrorists (*Welcome to the* 142).

This is quite true of Ahmad who wants to 'hurt' the American society which 'he considers evil'.

Terrorist is a remarkable contribution to the growing canon of fictional texts that deal with terrorism. The novel certainly does not fully conform to the conventions of 'the terrorism novel'. Robert Appelbaum and Alexis Paknadel observe:

> The cultural work of the terrorism novel from 1970 to 2001 has been by and large to legitimate the position of innocence occupied by terrorism's victims and the political society to which they belong. ... These novels tell us that terrorism is the violence of another; it is illegitimate violence perpetrated from an illegitimate position (*Taxonomy of Terrorism Novels* 8).

In an interview, Updike has said that Ahmad

> is American, and that's the key. I would not attempt to animate from inside a Palestinian terrorist or an Iraqi freedom-fighter or whatever, but I did think I could handle an American who was self-converted at the age of 11 (Updike, *Terrorist* 45).

Updike can "animate," as he says, American characters, and unveil the minds of Ahmad, Charlie, Jack Levy, Terry, Beth, Hermione, and the Secretary of Homeland Security. Yet, he cannot bring himself to invent what might go on inside the head of a genuine Islamic terrorist, such as Shaikh Rashid, who remains, free at the end of the novel. "For now," Jack Levy tells Ahmad, "he's vanished" (Updike, *Terrorist* 300). Having shaved off his beard and wearing "a grey Western-style suit" in place of his "usual shimmering embroidered caftan" (Updike, *Terrorist* 266), he is at large in the American streets. Perhaps, he will be caught. Levy adds, "he won't make it

back to Yemen, I can promise you" (Updike, *Terrorist,* 300). But Updike leaves the matter unresolved. The particular terrorist plot may be defused in *Terrorist,* but the larger issues remain. The implication, perhaps, is that terrorism cannot be completely wiped out and that, in some form or other, it will persist as an evil in our world.

What Ulla Kriebernegg sees in Updike's *Terrorist* is "a renegotiation of Americanness":

> What Updike, I believe, is concerned with in Terrorist is a renegotiation of Americanness for all his characters and a search for or re-affirmation of some common ground beyond ethnic and religious borders. The characters in the book actually "humanize" each other (*Hey, Come on* 6).

Although Updike's intentions are subverted by the ambivalences the text reveals, Updike writes in the tradition of a utopian discourse of American identity in spite of ethnic and religious differences; Ahmad needs to negotiate his American identity amidst his different role models. By presenting various models of Americanness in the novel, Updike indirectly offers a concept of identification for Ahmad that is not essentialist, but recognizes the discursive constructed-ness of identity in a post-modern world. In the search for his identity, the adolescent Ahmad, as mentioned earlier, is looking for a father figure in the religion of Islam. "He thought he might find in this religion a trace of the handsome father who had receded at the moment his memories were beginning" (Updike, *Terrorist* 99). He eventually finds two fathers, Shaikh Rashid, and Charlie Chehab. The irony, however, is that the imam,

"slight and slim as a dagger with a dangerous shyness about him" (Updike, *Terrorist* 99) does not accept Ahmad as one of his kin. Ahmad does not even speak Arabic, and his otherness is too apparent. "To him, Ahmad is American. No amount of zeal and Qur'an studies can change his mother's race" (Updike, *Terrorist* 145). Shaikh Rashid is aware that although Ahmad tries awfully hard to learn Arabic, he will never make up for the fact that it is not his mother tongue. English is his first language since his mother is Irish American. Shaikh Rashid's comment on Ahmad's recitation of the Koran is worth noting here. "We must work harder, of course, on your accent" (Updike, *Terrorist* 108). What Shaikh Rashid means is that Ahmad has to improve his Arabic. Shaikh Rashid does not offer himself as a father. However, there is in his regard for Ahmad something fraternal. There is also in it a sardonic element and a splinter of hostility.

The ending of *Terrorist* is of vital importance in understanding Updike's perspectives on Islam and terrorism. The climax comes with a scene that shows Ahmad and Jack Levy sitting in the bomb truck, heading for the Lincoln Tunnel, the detonation target. The rationalist Jew and the determined "Islamist" begin discussing their religious convictions, the red detonation button metaphorically sitting between them. When Ahmad is told that his friend Charlie had been secretly working for the CIA and is now dead, he starts accepting another role model:

> There had been a father who vanished before his memory could take a picture of him, and then Charlie had been friendly and shown him the roads, and now this tired Jew in clothes as if he dressed in the

> dark has taken their place, the empty space beside him" (Updike, *Terrorist* 290).

To Ahmad, the "empty space" beside him means more than just a passenger seat in the truck. To him, it represents the amiable and friendly Charlie, who has "shown him the roads", initiated him into some of his life experiences. When a moment later, Jack and Ahmad find out that the note, that had been found attached to Charlie's dead body, quotes a passage that could be a quotation both from the Torah and the Koran, their "harmonization" becomes even more evident. They casually start discussing their lives, like father and son who are together in a car. The remark that Ahmad makes at this juncture reflects his deep-down acceptance of the Jew:

> Before Israel, Muslims and Jews were brothers—they belonged to the margins of the Christian world, the comic others in their funny clothes, entertainment for the Christians secure in their wealth, in their paper-white skins. Even with the oil, they despised us, cheating the Saudi princes of their people's birth rights. Mr. Levy heaves another sigh: "That's some 'us' you've worked up, Ahmad" (Updike, *Terrorist* 295).

This encounter creates an empathetic bond between Jack and Ahmad. Ahmad now sees Jews and Muslims as brothers, as Christianity's other. When Ahmad wants Jack to get out of the truck, Jack refuses to do so, saying, "We're in this together, son" (Updike, *Terrorist* 296). Jack's words are, indeed, an assertion of the fact that there is, a bond existing between them. Ahmad feels it, too. But, at this point, he is a little reluctant to fully appreciate it. His quick reaction, when he hears Jack calling him

'son', is, "I'm not your son" (Updike, *Terrorist* 296). However, the bond between the two soon deepens and grows stronger. This is shown through Jack's subsequent readiness to read the works of Sayyid Qutub Ahmad tells him about and his promise that he would incorporate some of them as optional texts to be read by his high-school students. As such, Ahmad's ominous observation, "Sir, I regret to say that you will not live. In a few minutes, I am going to see the face of God" (Updike, *Terrorist*,303) sounds affected and unconvincing. It is hard to believe that Ahmad will press the detonation button. His will to be a martyr is evidently in for a shift.

Ahmad's uncertainty is reinforced by a parallel situation, as he drives the explosive-laden truck toward his vantage point in the Lincoln Tunnel. Two black kids, a girl, and a boy, sitting in a car in front of the truck, with their childlike antics and waving of hands, catch Ahmad's attention. But, overwhelmed as he is by the sense of his mission, he ignores them. Bored with his unconcern, they fall asleep. As the truck approaches the spot, where the explosives are to be detonated, Jack Levy, who has his share of sorrows and frustrations even in matters of love and who, therefore, is ready to die with Ahmad, reaches for the detonating button, but Ahmad "seizes his hand in his own" (Updike, *Terrorist* 304). When Ahmad lets his hand go, Jack compliments Ahmad's stamina, in a fatherly tone. This makes Ahmad proudly announce that he is now no longer afraid of Tylenol who has wrenched from him his beloved Joryleen. Seeing, in his unfulfilled love, a commonality with his teacher, he says, "So not only you have romantic difficulties" (Updike, *Terrorist* 305). At this point, their conversation resumes the tone of a conversation between a father and a son. When Ahmad realizes that Jack is prepared to die with him, he recalls the Koran:

> In the fifty-sixth Sura, the Prophet speaks of the moment when the soul of a dying man shall come up in his throat. That moment is here. The journey, the Miraj. Buraq is ready, his shining white wings rustling, unfolding. Yet in the same Sura, "The Event," God asks, we created you: will you not credit us? Behold the semen you discharge; did you create it, or We? (Updike, *Terrorist* 306)

The Sura, it is important to note, enlightens Ahmad. The truth now dawns upon him. "God does not want to destroy; it was He who made the world" (Updike, *Terrorist* 306). With this epiphany, which comes about a little before the truck reaches the detonation point, everything suddenly takes on an altogether different hue in Ahmad's consciousness.

> The pattern of the wall tiles and of the exhaust-darkened tiles of the ceiling—countless receding repetitions of squares like giant graph paper rolled into a third dimension—explodes outward in Ahmad's mind's eye in the gigantic fiat of Creation, one concentric wave after another, each pushing the other farther and farther out from the initial point of nothingness, God having willed the great transition from non-being to being. This was the will of the Beneficent, the Merciful, ar-Rahman and ar-Rahim, the Living, the Patient, the Generous, the Perfect, the Light, the Guide (Updike, *Terrorist* 306).

Ahmad now sees with clarity the true implications of the "gigantic fiat of creation", and of the "great transition from non-being to being" brought about by Divine Will. He is now convinced that God loves life, not death. "He does not want us to

desecrate His creation by willing death. He wills, life" (Updike, *Terrorist* 306). The epiphany occurs in a place underneath the river where Ahmad "feels himself already to be underwater" (Updike, *Terrorist* 298). In the context of the great change that comes over Ahmad, the image of water, traditionally a symbol of purification, gains in significance. Ahmad's feeling of immersion in water is, accordingly, suggestive of his cleansing, and rebirth, his emergence into a new life, and his future reshaping of his life in accord with a new set of norms. By the end of the novel, Jack becomes a surrogate father to Ahmad. It is significant to note that Jack tells Ahmad of his affair with Terry, Ahmad's mother. This revelation also serves as an influence on Ahmad's decision to live on.

When he finally withdraws his hand from the detonation button and puts it on the steering wheel, Ahmad has ceased to be a terrorist and become a lover of life. The children in the rear seat of the car ahead, who are now awake, begin to smile at him again. Ahmad smiles back, generously, unhesitatingly. Jack Levy senses Ahmad's regeneration and happily welcomes the inversion, the reversal in Ahmad's life. He hails Ahmad: "Well done, my friend, welcome to the Big Apple" (Updike, *Terrorist* 308). Ahmad accepts the reception and "lets himself be guided" (Updike, *Terrorist* 309). Ahmad, together with Jack, is, now headed toward a fresh and cozy life. It may be interesting to recall that here at the outset of the novel when Joryleen tells Ahmad "You're looking way serious,"... "You should learn to smile more" so that people will like him more, Ahmad replies, "I don't care about that. I don't want to be liked.". This image of the grim, serious, anxious, though pious, Ahmad is replaced, at the novel's close, by an Ahmad capable of smiling and even joking

about his loss of God. *Terrorist* has a circular structure, though in a hugely different sense. The novel's concluding sentence, "These devils, Ahmad thinks, have taken away my God" (Updike, *Terrorist* 310) recalls its opening one, "DEVILS, Ahmad thinks. These devils seek to take away my God." (Updike, *Terrorist* 3). The novel, obviously, ends, in an open-ended way. Nevertheless, it may safely be said that Ahmad, who has repudiated violence, is on his way toward acculturation and American life. Anna Hartnell observes:

> As Ahmad emerges from the Lincoln Tunnel having failed to detonate his bombs the loss of faith, he fears throughout the text seems to have been realized: 'these devils… have taken away my God" (310). So, we are left with the potentially problematic situation in which the intervention of Ahmad's individual consciousness – his repudiation of violence - has deprived him of Islam ("Writing Islam" 139).

What is just as important as Ahmad's epiphany is the fact that it is Jack Levy, a Jew by birth, though not in practice, who, through his sensitive and sagacious way of dealing with Ahmad leads him to abjure the idea of blowing up the Lincoln Tunnel and to retrace his steps to the 'straight path' in its wider and humanistic sense. Ahmad feels that Jack understands him and that he takes his Muslim identity seriously. It is Ahmad's conscience, awakened by Jack's ideas and persuasions, that allows for his fresh insights into the Koran's meaning. The light, that Ahmad sights at the end of the tunnel and into which he emerges, is not only the light of reason, but also the light of life in contradistinction to the darkness of death

which he has now shunned in order to save lives, including his own. When viewed in the context of the Arab – Israel conflict and the US- Israel rapport, Updike's portrait of Jack Levy assumes added significance. The portrait is also greatly interesting in that it clearly counters the traditional negative images of the Jew in western culture and imagination. Similarly, the tie the novel establishes between Jack and Ahmad is full of suggestiveness not only in the context of the post-9/11 American social scenario, but also in the context of the triangular political relations between the US, Israel, and the Muslim world. In light of the healthy changes slowly taking over the relations between Israel and the Arab countries, as evidenced by the establishment of diplomatic relations between Israel and the UAE, Updike's *Terrorist* may be said to have been a shade prophetic.

Ahmad and Jack Levy, however, are not the only important characters in *Terrorist*. Updike's treatment of Charlie Chehab is, to a certain extent, intriguing. Nevertheless, the role that he plays in the novel helps a better understanding of the theme of Islamic terrorism and America in the novel. As a CIA mole, he entices Ahmad to his terrorist mission of blasting the Lincoln Tunnel. Updike portrays him as being more American than a jihadist. Accordingly, his values are American, not Islamic. Sex is an obsession with him since he does not entertain any scruples whatsoever about American permissiveness. His hiring of Joryleen to "devirginate" Ahmad (Updike, *Terrorist* 217) exemplifies the amoral nature of his values. Despite his Americanness, Charlie is discomfited by the black and white binary in terms of which his fellow plotters see the world. On hearing Arab leaders categorized as "tools" or "heroes," Charlie confides to Ahmad: "Tools, hero: no shades in between.

As if Mubarak and Arafat and the Saudis don't all have their special situations and their own intricate games to play" (Updike, *Terrorist* 250). Charlie, unlike Haffenreffer, the Homeland Secretary, understands full well America's limitations. This is shown through the views he expresses in a dialogue with his father. The elder Chehab glorifies the United States as a peaceful, delectable country and contrasts it with Lebanon, his strife-ridden land of origin. As such, he does not understand why others should hate and harm America:

> America, I don't understand this hatred. I came here as a young man, married but my wife had to be left behind, just me and my brother, and nowhere was there the hatred and shooting of my own country, everybody in tribes. Christian, Jew, Arab, indifferent, black, white, in between—everybody gets along. ... 'This is an honest and friendly country. We will have no problems" (Updike, *Terrorist* 147).

In Communist countries and countries like Saudi Arabia or Saddam's Iraq, people have no freedom and live-in perpetual fear. In his view, the United States is beyond comparison with the Middle East or Eastern Europe, or, for that matter, the whole of what he calls the "Old World". Referring to the US, he says: "In this country, people have no fear of prison". A little later, he adds: "In this country, the average man knows nothing about prisons. The average man has no fear. He does his job. He obeys the laws. They are easy laws. Don't steal. Don't kill" (Updike, *Terrorist* 148). In his book, *Contemporary Arab American Literature*, Carol Fadda Conrey identifies a category of Arab - American characters marked by "the pain and anger they experience through witnessing their Arab homelands constantly being plunged

into military conflicts and wars" (179). The elder Chehab obviously belongs to this category. Charlie, however, contests his father's rosy view of America, as he finds in it an erasure of the horrors of American history, such as slavery and white oppression of the blacks:

> Papa, ... there are problems. The Zanj weren't given any rights, they had to fight for them. They were being lynched and not allowed in restaurants, they even had separate drinking fountains, they had to go to the Supreme Court to be considered human beings. (Updike, *Terrorist* 147).

Charlie reminds his father that in post-9/11 America, too, a man can be jailed indefinitely without trial and subjected to torture. He exemplifies this with "our little concentration camp down at Guantanamo Bay". He adds that the prisoners there "can't even have lawyers" (Updike, *Terrorist,* 149). Charlie, indeed, is referring to the violations of human rights and freedoms that accompanied the tight security measures America had resorted to after the 9/11 attacks, both inside and outside the country. To Charlie, America is duplicitous, not always living up to the ideals it proclaims. Updike uses Charlie's arguments to contradict the post 9/11 American discourse on Al Qaida. For President Bush and others, America and Al Qaida have virtually nothing in common. America stands for freedom, humanity, and all that is good and constructive. Contrary to this, Al Qaida's sole goal, according to Bush, is to "plot evil and destruction"; they are "enemies of freedom". They have attacked America, because "they hate our freedoms—our freedom of religion, our freedom of speech, our freedom to vote and assemble and disagree with each other" ("The

speech at US Congress" 1). Charlie seems to subvert all this American rhetoric. His casuistry makes the legendary George Washington into a role model for Al Qaida. Charlie contends that it was Washington who first provided the tactics for contemporary resistance movements. Alluding to Washington's mode of fighting, he says: "He learned to take what came, to fight guerrilla-style: hit and hide, hit and hide. He retreated, but he never gave up" (Updike, *Terrorist* 181). What is more surprising, and even shocking, however, is Charlie's assertion that Washington is the direct ancestor of America's contemporary foes. "He was the Ho Chi Minh of his day. We were like Hamas. We were Al-Qaida" (Updike, *Terrorist*, 181). What Charlie means is that Washington and his band of "soldiers in rags" (Updike, *Terrorist* 179) have demonstrated the value of asymmetric warfare. Like 9/11, the American Revolution:

> showed the world what can be done against the odds, against a superpower. He showed—and this is where Vietnam and Iraq come in—that in a war between an imperialist occupier and the people who actually live there, the people will eventually prevail" (Updike, *Terrorist* 181).

Taking the comparison even further Charlie argues that America is currently the equivalent of George III and England, whose bullying on the Continent and in the colonies had made them universally hated: "All of Europe was out to cut England down to size. Like the U.S. now" (Updike, *Terrorist* 182). In other words, contemporary America, as Charlie sees it, is identical with the former imperialist England it had battled. America's colonial response to George III thus anticipates

and justifies the Islamic jihad against the United States. There is a commonality running through the American revolution and jihad. “These old revolutions,” Charlie tells Ahmad, “have much to teach our jihad” (Updike, *Terrorist* 183). Through the figure of Charlie, Updike breaks the taboo surrounding terrorism’s “unspeakability”, channelling and partly endorsing Islamic complaints about the West and. At the same time, limning the ties between jihad and the American Revolution. According to Anna Hartnell, Charlie is “one of the principal agents of Ahmad’s radicalization” (“Writing Islam” 145). To her, Charlie’s role is indicative of “an attempt on Updike’s part to rescue a ‘true’ Islam from the sinister tentacles of politics” (145). She adds that:

> it does register the possibility that Muslim hostility to the US has some political as well as cultural legitimacy for this CIA agent, metonymically representing US political intervention on the world stage, acts as a midwife to Ahmad’s reluctant turn to violent jihad. (“Writing Islam”145).

The novel also includes a critique of a specific post-9/11 US nationalism. Anna Hartnell argues that “A dominant US Protestantism has always coexisted with —and to a certain extent enabled--an American civil religion that lends Christian themes and imagery to the nation in order to in effect deify the state”. This civil religion has always been and “most vividly on display” and used to invoke God’s blessings on America. “And it experienced something of a resurgence in the aftermath of 9/11” (“Writing Islam” 146). In *Terrorist,* Updike does not hesitate to take ironic stabs at America’s exaggerated sense of nationalism and security through the characters of Hermione and her boss the Secretary for Homeland Security. Anna Hartnell says:

"In *Terrorist*, the religious zeal with which 'America' was defended following the attacks is most clearly illustrated, and satirized, through the character of Hermione…." Hermione, who is sister to Betty, is perennially paranoid and often hysterical. It is she who embodies Updike's critique of the unthinking vilifiers of Islam and of Muslims as fanatics. When her boss articulates the representative American question – "why do they hate us?", she loyally responds, "They hate the light. Like cockroaches. Like bats. *The light shone in darkness and the darkness comprehended it not."* (Updike, *Terrorist* 48). It may be noted that her response is characterized by a combination of Christian scripture and the Enlightenment economy of darkness and light. Likewise, the portrait of the Secretary for Homeland Security has an element of caricature about it. The paranoid way in which he goes about his security responsibilities is used by Updike to critique America's exaggerated concern with national security.

The struggles, which the novel's characters go through, also involve issues of identity, immigration, and multiculturalism, which have acquired unprecedented importance, particularly in post-9/11 America. A variety of factors like religion, nationality, ethnicity, race, and intermarriage have got intertwined in the status of immigrants and expatriates, of those who move out and settle in other countries, making the processes of identity formation, citizenship, and belonging arduous and complicated. Perhaps, the task of self-identification will never be brought to a completion. Stuart Hall describes some of the challenges faced by the modern world:

> Since cultural diversity is, increasingly, the fate of the modern world, and ethnic absolutism a regressive feature of late-modernity, the

> greatest danger now arises from forms of national and cultural identity—new and old—which attempt to secure their identity by adopting closed versions of culture or community and by a refusal to engage . . . with the difficult problems that arise from trying to live with difference ("Culture, Community, Nation" 349).

Updike recognizes these challenges. His *Terrorist*, nevertheless, shows that adopting the enlightened position of "trying to live with difference", is not easy. He is fully aware of the socio-political problems faced by multicultural America. After Ahmad has been retrieved from the terrorist track, Jack Levy tells Ahmad, "Hey come on, we're all Americans here. That's the idea, didn't they tell you that at Central High?" (Updike, *Terrorist* 301). There is, indeed, a streak of cynicism in Jack's words. He insinuates that multiculturalism is a passionately propagated, but less practiced, 'idea' in America.

Terrorist is, indubitably a notable contribution to the post-9/11Western discourse on Islam and violence, suicide terrorism, Muslim-American identity, the relations between the US and Arab- Americans. At a metaphorical level, it is a call for tolerance and mutual respect in matters relating to religion and culture. A careful reading of the Koran, Updike seems to imply, will lead to the realization that its core message is one of affirmation, of the value of living and protecting life. At the end of the novel, Ahmad sees the truth that protection, not destruction, of life, is a vision central to the Koran. This is brought home to him by the sura entitled: "The Event" in which God says: "We created you: will you not credit us? Behold the semen you discharge: did you create it, or We?" (Updike, *Terrorist* 306). He now is convinced

that “God does not want to destroy it was He who made the world” (Updike, *Terrorist* 306). He now understands the implications of “the gigantic fiat of Creation” (Updike, *Terrorist* 306), “the great transition from non -being to being and in the meaning of “the Beneficent and the Merciful”. Ahmad is convinced of what God really wants. “He does not want us to desecrate His creation by willing death. He wills, life” (Updike, *Terrorist* 306).

Chapter V

Chronic Others

Laila Halaby, who is an Arab American, has to her credit two novels, *West of the Jordan* (2003) and *Once in a Promised Land* (2007), and also a book of poetry, *My Name on His Tongue* (2012). She established herself as a notable Arab-American writer with her 2003 debut novel itself. "Both novels," as Steven Salaita observes, "focus on a range of socio-political issues involving Arab American identity, civil liberties, racism, and xenophobia and the effects of September 11, 2001, on American Society" (*Modern Arab* 79). However, it is in Once *in a Promised Land* that she takes up, on a larger and more profound canvas than in *West of the Jordan,* her concerns about the life and predicament of Arab-Americans after the 9/11 terrorist attacks on the World Trade Centre and the Pentagon. "*Once in a Promised Land* re-examines some of the themes of *West of the Jordan* but is more focused on racism, state power, and the post-September 11 crackdowns on civil liberties in the United States. In particular, the novel explores how anti-Arab racism and Islamophobia intersect with domestic policy…." (*Modern Arab* 87)

Arab-American Literature, which is the literature produced in English by Americans of Arab origin, has a history of roughly a century and a half, a history that stretches back to the times of Khaleel Gibran, the internationally reputed author of *The Prophet* (1923). Before 9/11, most of this literature placed its accent on featuring the nostalgia, memories, and transcultural issues of adaptation and assimilation, of the various Arab communities in America. In the post-9/11

environment, however, Arab- American writers saw that there was an urgent and inevitable need for remapping the Arab American experience. Accordingly, a number of works were produced to suit this necessity. Steven Salaita observes that when his book, *Arab-American Literary Fictions, Cultures, and Politics* (2007) was in production, he "started noticing an upsurge of Arab-American novels…. This upsurge was fantastic…" (*Modern Arab* 2). He adds:

> The sort of dynamism now appearing in the Arab American Literary tradition is indicative of the healthfulness necessary to assert a categorical distinctiveness. Arab-American drama seems to be everywhere these days, produced, and performed with wit and ingenuity. Poetry is probably the most established genre in the Arab American literary traditions; it too appears to be flourishing, constantly promising to break new ground, and rarely defaulting. Bur fiction, especially the novel, has emerged in the past decade as a formidable art form in the Arab-American community" (2).

This resulted in drastically altering the nature of Arab - American literature, which is increasingly being recognized as a significant tributary to the larger body of American Literature. There have been remarkable works by Arab Americans, that have drawn profusely on the 9/11 disaster and its aftermath. These works have successfully captured the frustrations and deep sense of insecurity felt by Arab-Americans in the post- 9/11 American socio-political scenario. Evidently, to this category of literary texts belongs Laila Halaby's *Once in a Promised Land.* Some of the other Arab -American writers, who have sensitively explored these themes, are

the Lebanese Ameen Rihani and Rawi Hage, the Egyptian Ahdaf Soueif and Waguih Ghali, the Jordanian Diana Abu-Jaber, the Libyan Hisham Matar, and the Palestinian Jabra Ibrahim Jabra.

This chapter intends to explore and contextualize the post-9/11 realities of Arab - American life, and the issues relating to their American citizenship as articulated in the novel, *Once in a Promised Land*. Central to Halaby's concern is the representation of the anguish and hardships experienced by Arab Americans consequent on the unprecedented. The post-9/11 rise in America's prejudice and hostility toward Arab -Americans in general and Arab- American Muslims in particular. The vision that informs Halaby's novel, it may be suggested, is that as far as the Arab Americans are concerned, America is slowly ceasing to be a haven of success and security. Through the misfortunes that overtake her Arab-American protagonists' life and calling after 9/11, tragically upsetting their cherished American hopes and dreams, she also puts her finger on how major political events in a country can, sometimes, have highly harmful repercussions on the lives of its diasporic communities. The novel is an incisive and thought-provoking treatment of the fears, anxieties, obstacles, sense of insecurity, and disenchantment that had overwhelmed the Arab American community in the US in the wake of 9/11.

The very title of the novel, with its clear overtones of the biblical narrative about the repressed Israelites' exodus from Pharaoh's Egypt to the Promised Land, is a cue to the novel's central preoccupation with the predicament of Arab-Americans in post-9/11 America, the country they had chosen, journeyed to, and made their own in search of freedom, prosperity, equality, and happiness. Perhaps, there also

lurks in the title the ominous hint that there might in future be a re-enactment of the Biblical exodus from the discontented Arab- Americans. The word 'once', used in the title, may be said to inhere a subtle subversion of the vaunted and globally trumpeted American values of equal rights and freedoms, suggesting that, as far as the Arab immigrants are concerned, these values are getting defunct.

Once in a Promised Land is the story of Salwa and Jassim, an immigrant Jordanian Muslim couple, who have been living and working in the city of Tucson, a few kilometres from New York, for about nine years before the occurrence of 9/11. Jassim works as a hydrologist and Salwa as a banker. Salwa also works as a real estate agent during her spare time. She was actually born in the US to Jordanian parents. She had gone back to Jordan with her parents when they, after an unsuccessful life in America, chose to return to and settled in their native land. It was at a University in Amman, where Salwa was a student and where Jassim, holder of an American Ph.D., was on a visit to give a guest lecture on the role of water in the regional politics of the Arab world, that the two of them had met and fallen in love. After their marriage, they migrated to America. Industrious, competent, and dedicated to work, they are both of them, American citizens, living in a secular and cosmopolitan outlook. They have diligently constructed and kept up an American identity for the sake of successful adaptation to and easy survival of their alien milieu and culture. Accordingly, they do not shrink from American ways and have no qualms about assimilation and melting into the American socio-cultural pot. They live the happy, comfortable life of the American upper-middle class. They have an air-conditioned house on a hillock and a glinty Mercedes car; they drink the purest

mountain spring water that money can buy. They are fond of fashion. They buy expensive fashion magazines and catalogues of consumer goods. Salwa, particularly, has a penchant for modish clothes including high-priced undergarments. Jassim's daily routine includes an early morning visit to the gymnasium and swimming pool. It is evidently a rather luxurious life, immersed in American culture. In fact, it is to make more money that Salwa has opted for working as a real estate agent in addition to her part-time job as a merchant teller at the bank. The material comforts that Salwa and Jassim enjoy are markers of their attainment of the American Dream. In short, so happy their life has been for the nine years before 9/11 that they never pause to think of a permanent return to Jordan. This happiness, however, does not last long.

With 9/11, winds of change begin to sweep across their life and routine activities, and they begin to see with clarity how the dominant white American society actually views them, sheerly on account of their Arab-Muslim descent. Exposure to a series of humiliating experiences makes them aware of the precariousness of their status and situation in the post-9/11 social structure of America. They have now to bear the brunt of constant surveillance, aggravated prejudice, and ubiquitous suspicion. By degrees, these militate against their American certitudes. The feeling that they can no longer hold on to secure space in America eventually overpowers them.

Immediately after the 9/11 attacks, the United States of America embarked on a plethora of rigid measures to safeguard homeland security and combat terrorism globally. In his book, *The 9/11 Effect: Comparative Counterterrorism*, Kent Roach

identifies the three dimensions of the American response to 9/11 as war, executive action, and extra legalism. Of these, extra legalism, which comprised such actions as extraordinary rendition, torture, warrantless spying, electronic surveillance, detention without trial, and demoralizing interrogation of suspects, has been the most objectionable. In a highly disapproving tone, he calls it America's "post-9/11 descent into illegal conduct" (Roach164). Defining extra legalism, he says: "The term extra legalism is meant to describe illegal conduct that was nevertheless supported by dubious claims of legality…." (Roach164). This extra-legal approach, which obviously stems from what is known as American exceptionalism, involved a gross neglect of human rights and freedoms. As Roach adds, "The extra-legal approach harmed rights, but has left the United States unprepared to deal firmly but legally with terrorism." (Roach 164). Following 9/11, there were various forms of violence, directed against Arab- Americans. Commenting on this aspect of the aftermath of 9/11, Kent Roach observes:

> … Congress… deplored violence against Arab and Muslim Americans in the wake of 9/11 and affirmed the need to protect 'the civil liberties and rights of all Americans including Arab-Americans…. as 'sacrosanct in American Society. These were noble and important values, but ones that for the most part were only extended to American citizens (Roach 187).

The 'American citizens' Roach refers to are, in fact, white American citizens. In the novel, *once in a Promised Land,* Salwa and Jaseem become victims of American extra-legal practices coupled with the socially rampant anti-Arab sentiments which

had been forbidden reinforced with 9/11. Increasingly, they find their rights and freedoms both as American citizens and as human beings unjustly infringed on. Consequently, they become greatly dismayed and disoriented. Even familiar and favorite places and landscapes seem to them to be bizarre, absurd, and uncanny. The America, which they had loved as a land of promises, a symbol of a new life and a more prosperous future, has now been metamorphosed into a suffocating place where even their basic freedoms are in peril.

Eventually, Salwa and Jassim ruefully realize that they are not alone in their vulnerability and that it is a fact of the experience of the entire community of Arabs and Arab- Muslims in America, especially after the events of 9/11. One consequence of the hassles they go through, hassles, which come in different shapes and on quite unexpected occasions and in which both the administrations and the white American society at large are enthusiastic collaborators, is that they lead them to develop a paranoid vision of life. It is with a sharp eye that Halaby surveys the impact of 9/11 on the white American and Arab- American communities, two of the constituents of the larger multi-ethnic and multicultural American society. Besides showing the relational strains that have coagulated between the two as a result of 9/11 and its link with terrorists of Arab origin, she also reveals how powerfully the 9/11 trauma operates on the mind and memory of its victims, particularly its direct victims who suffer various losses including the loss of loved ones.

More than three million Arab-Americans are estimated to be now living in the United States. Steven Salaita observes:

> Accurate demographics of the Arab American community are difficult to find. However, various estimates indicate that there are approximately three to four million Arab Americans…. Not all Arab-Americans are Muslim and Christian, though the community includes Druze, Bahai, and Jews, all though in small numbers. (*Modern Arab* 9)

The majority arrived during the last quarter of the twentieth century. The community is noted for its diversity, which is evident in its ethnic, racial, linguistic, religious, and national identities. Today, the Arab Americans are dispersed throughout the United States, with their highest concentrations in major metropolitan cities like Los Angeles, Detroit, New York, Chicago, and Washington, D.C. It is important to note here that it is because of the equation and identification, in the popular western mind, of the term 'Arab' with the Muslim, that there is a tendency to conceive the Arab- American community as comprising only Muslims. The fact is that more than fifty percent of the community is made up of Arab -Christians. It has also a smattering of Jews and Druze's. The community is still in an amorphous state, struggling to form and reform itself and to achieve a definitive identity. Nevertheless, the process is often rendered dishearteningly, even demoralizingly, strenuous on account of the fluctuations in America's policies concerning the flow of immigrants, particularly from the Arab world. Legislation, foreign policy, and die-hard American prejudice against Arabs and Muslims have accelerated in post 9/11 America, militating against, and impeding the integration of the Arab-Americans into American society.

Immediately after 9/11, the Bush administration passed, on 24 October 2001, what is commonly known as the USA PATRIOT ACT (Providing Appropriate Tools Required to Intercept and Obstruct Terrorism). The Act removed all legal protection of liberty for Muslims and Arabs in the United States. It allowed the monitoring, without any prior notification, of the bank transactions, telephone conversations, e-mail messages, purchase of books and credit cards and so on, of all suspected individuals, organizations, and institutions. Some of the provisions of the Act came in for severe criticism, as they seemed to be serious violations of the civil rights and freedoms guaranteed by the American Constitution. There have also been several suits filed against the government by civil rights groups and Arab and Muslim organizations. The Supreme Court, however, upheld the PATRIOT Act on grounds of homeland security.

With the 9/11 attacks, 'Homeland Security' became the priority of the US Government. As a consequence, the policing system acquired fresh dimensions and huge funds were allocated for stepping up activities connected with homeland security. Kappeler and Gains point out:

> The Homeland Security office identified four goals for its existence: (a) Prevention of terrorist attacks; (b) Protecting Americans, key resources, and critical infrastructure; (c) responding to and recovering from incidents; and finally, (d) to continue to strengthen the foundation of Homeland Security to ensure long-term success *Homeland Security* 75).

Besides, a series of measures like cancellation and diversion of domestic as well as international flights, intensive checking of vehicles, and prevention of all types of traffic across the borders by Customs and immigration officials were also initiated.

It is important to note here that since 9/11 there has been, in the US, an effervescence of interest in debating and exploring the compatibility between Islamic thought on the one hand and Western political and cultural values on the other. In his book, *Good Muslim, Bad Muslim,* Mahmood Mamdani refers to this phenomenon as "cultural talk" **(**25**).** According to Mamdani, 'cultural talk'

> is based upon an essentialized approach to Islam as a unified ideology spreading from Europe to Iraq and Afghanistan. In this structure, Muslims are petrified in history and occupy a mould from which they cannot escape, defined by their so-called conformity to the past and their incapacity to address the current challenges of political development and liberal religious thinking (*Good Muslim, Bad Muslim* 25).

Such an approach justifies the creation of an insurmountable boundary between modern and pre-modern, between secularism and Islam. What is Arab? Who is an Arab? How does one become an Arab? These questions had surfaced during the formative period of the modern Arab nation-states. An Arab nationalist identity was proposed as the foundation for a modern Arab state. This identity, significantly enough, was based on an inclusive, multireligious approach. As such, it included all those who spoke the Arabic language and identified themselves with Arab history and culture, regardless of whether they were Muslims, Christians, or Jews. The

question of Arab identity came to be far more hotly discussed in the wake of the 9/11 attacks. Even today, it continues to be an intriguing concern with Arab-Americans.

The struggle to modernize and westernize, it may be noted, has been a prominent feature of the colonial and postcolonial eras. In a manner of speaking, the immigrants, who came to America from the Arab and other parts of the world, have also been part of this struggle. They perceive the United States as a nation that has certain strong and salutary institutions, that sees itself as a model democracy, that welcomes with open arms all those who come, choosing to share in the American dream, and that holds up openness and pluralism as the foundational principles of its polity. Nevertheless, somewhere behind this idealized image, there lurks the menacing possibility of an anti-Saracen heritage that is as anti-Arab and anti-Muslim as it is anti-Semitic. This is clearly reflected in the mainstream media images and narratives aimed at demonizing Arabs and Muslims and presenting them as monolithic 'outsiders,' as the essential 'other,' whose beliefs and customs are inferior, barbaric, irrational, and sexist and have therefore to be denounced and eradicated.

Arab-American identity has been honed and reshaped by the immigrants themselves in response to American attitudes and policies toward them as well as toward their original homeland. It has also been conditioned by their local American experience, the places in which they have settled, their relations with older generations of immigrants, the reception and treatment meted out to them in their new environment, the diversity of the community with which they associate, their

involvement in organized religion, and their attendance at mosques. It has also been greatly influenced by America's wilfully distorted constructions of Arabs and Muslims.

Halaby prefaces *Once in a Promised Land* with a short note called 'Before'. Introducing the main characters of the novel, she states in this note:

> Our main characters are Salwa and Jassim. We really come to know them only after the World Trade Centre buildings have been flattened by planes flown by Arabs, by Muslims. Salwa and Jassim are both Arabs. Both Muslims. But of course, they have nothing to do with what happened to the World Trade Center. Nothing and everything (Halaby, *Once* viii).

The novel shows that Salwa and Jassim are in no way linked to the 9/11 violence. In this sense, they have 'nothing' to do with it. Nevertheless, it has an enormously disastrous impact on their lives, simply because of the geographical and cultural identity between them and the terrorists. Salwa and Jassim are 'Arab' and 'Muslim. The terrorists were also Arab and Muslim. In this sense, 9/11 has 'everything' to do with Salwa and Jassim. Louise A Cainkar observes:

> …. Following the attacks of September 11, 2001, a majority of Arab Muslim Americans reported feeling unsafe and insecure in the United States. This sense of insecurity… was an outcome of their treatment by the American Government and some members of the American public and by portrayals of them in the mainstream American media…. (*Homeland Insecurity* 1)

The constructions, that the American media repeatedly proffered, were geared to strengthening notions of the collective culpability of Arab and Muslim Americans for the attacks. As a result, Arab Muslim Americans ceased to be confident about their personal safety; they felt vulnerable and were uncertain about their ability to live happily and peacefully in the United States. They even feared that "they might face expulsion from the country or incarceration en masse in camps" (*Homeland Insecurity* 1)

Through a series of well-crafted episodes, Halaby explores these aspects of the 9/11 violence carried out predominantly by a group of young American citizens of Arab descent. For example, in a scene, which may be called the Bike Scene, she brings to vivid focus not only the post-9/11 white American mindset, full of fear, prejudice, suspicion, and hostility but also the miseries it had brought down on the Arab- American community. In the Scene, Salwa is shown busy selecting garments in a mall. While waiting outside for her, Jassim's eyes happen to fall on a motorcycle parked in front of the garment store. Then, a woman with a handy-talky begins to follow him. Salwa, who senses this, is irritated. When she asks the woman why she is following her husband, the woman answers that she is a security official and that she has been informed by one of the salesgirls that there is a furtive Arab staring at a motorcycle, as if he would rob everything in the store and make away on the bike. Salwa's inflamed reaction to Amber, the informer salesgirl, is worth noting here:

> I am sorry to hear that. Are you planning to have every Arab arrested now? Do you not use your brains? This country has more than fifty

> million people in it, and you are worried about your tacky little store. But now you will have a lot to talk about in school. You can say you saw a real live Arab and had to call security on him (Halaby, *Once* 30).

In fact, Amber has acted under instructions from her supervisor who wants her staff to report anything suspicious. However, Amber's behavior may also be explained in terms of another factor that relates to traumatic experiences. In the course of the altercation between the Amber and Salwa couple, it transpires that one member of the salesgirl's family had been killed in the 9/11 attacks. Obviously enough, the girl has not yet been able to obliterate this loss from her memory. It is the negative image of the Arab- American, that she has on her mind and that has been reinforced by post-9/11 social constructions of the Arab Muslim as vicious and dangerous that makes her fantasize Jassim as a potential criminal intent on robbing the garment store and scuttling away on another's bike. To put it differently, it is Jassim's Arab appearance that serves as a trigger behind her behavior. It may be noted here that experts on anxiety disorders have widely recognized "that anxiety is a predominant chronic reaction to trauma" (Yuval Neria, 9*/11 Mental health* 459). Fear, avoidance, and exaggeration of probable threats are some of its symptoms. Describing the behavioral patterns of individuals suffering from anxiety disorders, Foe and Kahil observe:

> Fear and avoidance are common to PTSD, specific phobia, social phobia, and agoraphobia Furthermore, escape/ avoidance behaviors… are driven by the strong desire of anxious individuals to avoid or

> escape states of high anxiety as well as by their bias toward exaggerating the probability of threat" (459).

Viewed from this perspective, the very sight of Jassim, 'the Arab looking man' has aroused in Amber, a 9/11 victim, a state of high anxiety which she wants to avoid by getting him somehow removed from the scene. It may be her post-traumatic memories, now severely triggered and stimulated by Jassim's proximity, that drives her to see him as a probable threat and to exaggerate it, rather phantasmagorically, into a sudden assault, robbery, and escape. The loss of her family relative in the 9/11 disaster has rendered her psychologically disturbed. As Foe and Kahil put it, "… chronic psychological disturbances following traumatic experiences are a common occurrence" (458). Halaby's Amber clearly exemplifies this. Perhaps, she is also meant to represent "the families of nearly 3000 individuals who lost a loved one to the ruthless attack of terrorists on New York on 9/11…" (458). It may, therefore, be only simplistic and not wholly correct to explain away Amber's erratic behavior in terms of the traditional American prejudice toward Arab- Muslim Americans alone. It has deep roots in her trauma-induced mindset, too. According to trauma theory, victims of trauma develop an aversion to objects, places, and people associated in some form or other with the trauma, since they tend to serve as stimulants of the traumatic experience. This psychology, it may be said, is what informs Amber's behavior.

The encounter between Amber and the Salwa -Jassim couple illustrates, as do some other social interactions of the couple in the novel, what Steven Salatia calls "imperative patriotism" which, as he defines it, is "a type of patriotic outlook in

the post- 9/11 United States that demands acquiescence to a particular notion of safety and the national interest" (*Modern 88*). This imperative patriotism is what is at work behind Salwa's boss Joan's suggestion that Salwa hoist an American Flag decal on her car, so that she can ward of troubles that might be caused by white racist Americans. "You never know," she exhorts Salwa, "what people are thinking, and having this will let them know where you stand" (Halaby, *Once* 5). In other words, Salwa has to publicly demonstrate that she stands with America and not with its alien enemies. In the wake of the 9/11 attacks, it was a general practice for Americans to hoist the American flag on their cars as an open assertion and declaration of their allegiance to the nation. This gesture, according to Salatia, was intended to signify outright condemnation of the 9/11 terrorists, solidarity with the victims of the attacks. It also meant participation in national mourning for the dead victims and giving the US government categorical support in all its anti-terrorist programs. It's meant as Salatia puts it, offering the US government "a blank cheque for the use of military action" (*Modern* 89) against all the culprits behind 9/11. Joan herself doubts the sincerity behind Salwa's American belonging and citizenship. As such, what appears to be a well-intentioned piece of advice from a colleague can as well be seen as 'an injunction'" (*Modern* 89). It is this susceptibility of Arab-Americans to belligerence, verbal or physical, or both, at the hands of fanatically nationalist White Americans that is laid out explicitly by Mohja Kahf in her post-9/11 novel, *The Girl in the Tangerine Scarf* (2006). It is worth noting that Seemi, who is an assimilated Muslim and so does not wear the traditional Muslim woman's headscarf, exhorts Khadra, the novel's protagonist, to take off her headscarf as a precautionary measure against the backlash. "Take the damn thing off; it is not

worth risking your life for…." (*The Girl 424*). However, devout as she is, Khadra does not take it off. She continues to wear it, since she considers it to be "the outer sign of an inner quality that she wants to be reminded of…" (*The Girl* 425). Even Jassims's progressive boss, Marcus, and his wife Ella at times find it hard to dispel from their minds the thought that Jassim might do some harm, like poisoning the water supply, even though they have known him quite intimately for some time and have only good impressions about him.

Salwa and Jassim extract an apology from Amber and her boss. Nevertheless, the experience at the mall serves as an eye-opener for them. They now begin to see that America is changing and that they are treading on thin ice. Throughout the novel, Halaby depicts 9/11 as a force that has 'changed America forever' (Halaby, *Once* 8). Whether or not this is an exaggeration, there can be little doubt about the extensive, pernicious impacts on it has had on all spheres of American life, particularly on Arab- American life.

Another incident, which throws greater light on how 9/11 had deepened American racist prejudice toward Muslims and Arab- Americans and reified their representations as terrorists and criminals in the popular imagination, takes place in the bank where Salwa works. In the scene, Salwa encounters a white American woman who has come to open an account. On hearing that Salwa is a Jordanian of Palestinian origin, the woman's countenance falls. Furiously, she asks Salwa:

> "What does that mean? What do you mean that you are Palestinian from Jordan? Does it mean you will steal my money and blow up my world?" (Halaby, *Once* 113)

In the eyes of the woman, Salwa is an outsider, a criminally inclined Arab, a prospective manipulator of her accounts, an embezzler of her money, and a potential terrorist who will use the money to blow up America. The woman's reference to America as 'my world' evidently reflects her deeply possessive attitude toward America, her conviction that the country belongs to her, and to white Americans like her, not to Salwa or to non-white Arab Americans like her. The cultural and physiological otherness of Salwa is so obnoxious to her that she adamantly refuses to be served by Salwa and goes over to another counter operated by a white American official. The scene is a poignant dramatization of the exclusion, marginalization, and social ostracism that Arab-American Muslims had to endure especially after the events of 9/11. It also underscores "the deterioration… of interpersonal relations" (*Mental health* 535) which often tends to be more powerful when a man-made disaster, like 9/11, overtakes a people. "Deterioration may be particularly potent in the context of human-caused disasters" (535). In such contexts, the intersection between disasters and personal as well as communal relationships intensifies. "The miasma of disasters on personal and communal relationships grows in scope and virulence" (537). The White woman's effrontery is a pointer to the large-scale effusion in White America's unsympathetic attitudes toward Arab-Muslim Americans.

> Following September 11, the shared experience of the lethal assault on American liberties and values ensuing common threats undoubtedly amplified the sense of patriotism and national identity, but this increased sense of togetherness was also responsible for some

> occurrence of escalation of political, societal, and cultural divides. "The defensive posture accentuates in group-outgroup differences as a knee jerk reaction" (537)

The White woman's words also illustrate her consciousness of the cultural and socio-political divides between Salwa and herself, between the white Americans and the non- whites. It is important to note how arrogantly and vehemently she denies Salwa an American identity, even though Salwa is an American citizen. The issue, that is fundamentally at stake, as Halaby shows it through the White woman's effrontery, is the Americanness of Arab -Americans.

It may also be said that the white woman's angry outburst is a verbalized gesture of what Slavoj Zizek playfully calls "the explosive display of 'American Patriotism' after September 11 (flags everywhere, etc.)…." (*The Real* 107). It is to this flag politics that David Bernans also refers to when, in his novel, North *of 9/11, he* says, "Everybody rallied to the flag, singing *God bless America*" (Bernans, *North of 9/11* 15). In fact, Bernans contemptuously labels this post 9/11 effervescence in American patriotism as "the patriotic drivel." (Bernans, *North of 9/11* 18). The white woman's vitriolic raving at Salwa, like Amber's suspicious view of Jassim, is also an index of what Fadda Conrey refers to as the "exclusionary conceptualizations" of American citizenship and of "the us- versus- them binary" (*Contemporary Arab* 141) that were the stock-in-trade of America's national debates and discussions on 9/11 and its different aspects.

Accordingly, the bitter experiences, that Salwa and Jassim go through, would make more sense when looked at from the perspective of the popular White

American perception of American citizenship and of the suitability of Arab-Americans to be brought under its rubric. To the White Americans, Anglo- Saxon whiteness is intrinsic to legitimate American citizenship. Others, like Arab – Americans, whose origin lies in other ethnicities and nationalities, even if they are, in legal terms, American citizens, are not proper American citizens and, as such, not on a par with White American citizens. This denial of real belonging and real citizenship of Arab- Americans, which had assumed menacing proportions after 9/11, is also shown by Halaby in her earlier novel, *West of the Jordan*. Here, Soraya and her cousin Walid are harassed by a group of white Americans. Hoping that their American citizenship would serve as a protective shield against further harassment, Soraya proclaims, "We are American citizens" (*West of the Jordan* 59). This claim, however, only incites the racist bullies more and they turn on the Arab- Americans, beating up Walid and directing more of their vitriolic tongue at Soraya. The miscreants seem urged by the feeling that they are protecting their sanctified American turf and upholding the mythology of an Anglo- Saxon whiteness as a valuable and indispensable prerequisite for a genuine American identity or for a rightful claim to American citizenship.

The post-9/11 degradation in the status of Arab- Americans in the dominant white-American society can also be seen in Jassim's ordeals at the workplace. The terrorist attacks had spread tremendous fear and suspicion among the public. They were afraid that more of them might come in various shapes and forms. Right from the day of the disaster itself, Jassim's job becomes extremely arduous, because "his usually predictable job had been the focus of panicked people anticipating bombs

and poison in their water supply. Demanding fluidity in service. Pleading for security" (Halaby, *Once* 24). Jassim's job is to oversee the water supply to the residents of the city of Tucson. He puts the customers in mind of the fact that the city has an elaborate network of water-quality sensors, detectors, and analyzers that are operated and monitored 24 hours a day, and seven days a week. He tells them that even though precautionary measures, like posting armed guards to protect the water or locking down all the tanks, or rather impossible, there is no reason for the customers anxious and panicky. He assures them:

> However—and this is very important to note—any change in water quality, no matter how subtle, will be detected almost immediately, contained, and prevented from reaching consumers. So, while it may be impossible to protect the water completely, the systems we have in place are so sophisticated that an attack, unless it is very large, should not be able to affect the public. (Halaby, *Once* 25)

Public fear, however, takes an entirely unexpected turn and the giant shadow of suspicion falls fully on Jassim himself. Customers report to Marcus, chief administrator of the company, where Jassim is employed, that they are greatly concerned about their safety. For, Jassim is an Arab and a Muslim and cannot, therefore, be trusted at all. He might himself expertly use the city's water resources to do violence to the city. Who knows if he will not pour poison into the city's drinking water? The customers want Jassim to be immediately fired. Even during the days of such fears and doubts about his trustworthiness, Jassim continues to work hard and discharge his duties and responsibilities most honestly and sincerely. He is

not just a technical water expert; he loves water, and it is his passion and obsession. It is, indeed, a love of water that can be traced back to his Jordanian boyhood days and to his uncle who had implanted it in him. He is profoundly aware that water is not only an indispensable biological necessity, but also a crucial factor in international politics and relations. This is evident in the lecture that he gives at the University of Amman, where he was on a short visit before settling down in America. In the lecture, he emphasizes the often-underestimated geopolitical role of water, and it is potential for precipitating international conflicts. For example, he touches on the role of water in the 1967 Arab – Israeli war:

> The 1967 war started because Israel was caught trying to divert the Jordan [River] away from the West Bank and Jordan. The result of that war was that Israel controlled—controls still—most of the headwaters of the Jordan, much of the Jordan itself, and is in partial or total control of all the aquifers (Halaby, *Once* 244).

Jassim is a socially committed professional, interested in promoting the values of social justice and human equity. Concluding his lecture with comments on the global interest in the water, he observes: “Do not believe it is just the Israelis who divert water though. It is the Chinese, the Americans, the Egyptians. It is everyone. Water is life, technology is power, and humans are thieves” (Halaby, *Once* 245).

Nothing, that Jassim does, alleviates the untoward experiences he has to put up with in the workplace. His professional life is rendered more excruciating by his WASP colleagues, Corey, Bella, and Lisa, who join hands in conspiring against him. They keep him under constant observation, secretly checking his computer, noting

down his statements, and analyzing his looks, moods, and clothes. In the long run, all this leads to putting Jassim in the clutches of the FBI. In tune with the West's conception of the Middle East as a region of riches, Jassim is called 'the rich man from the Middle East' (Halaby, Once, 47). Halaby's description of the harsh FBI interrogation of Jassim is well designed to underscore the hostility and prejudice of white Americans and the negative social constructions with which the American government machinery deals with people of Arab-Muslim stock, even if they are full American citizens. Jassim and his wife's sentiments on 9/11, phone calls to and from Jordan, amounts of money sent to Jordan, the number of times they attend the mosque - all these and a host of other items of their day-to-day life come under the FBI's demoralizingly hair-splitting probe into Jassim's mindset and circumstances. Jassim's agonized words to Agent Fletcher are worth noting in this context:

> I am a scientist; I work to make water safe and available. I am a normal citizen who happens to be an Arab. Yes, I have access to the city's water supply, but I have no desire to abuse it. The mere fact that I am an Arab should not add suspicion to the matter. I have spent my entire life trying to find ways to make water safe and accessible for everyone. Just because I am an Arab, because I was raised a Muslim, you want to believe that I am capable of doing evil (Halaby, *Once* 232).

Jassim is increasingly marginalized. As a result, he starts viewing his surroundings with a renewed candor and interest. The mistreatment, to which he is frequently subjected at the workplace and in the society around, slowly traumatizes his mind.

He is gripped with the feeling that he has become an isolated person, who is no longer what he was prior to the events of 9/11. Noam Chomsky's view of victimhood is in place here. In 2005, he said in an interview: "It is very common for the victims to understand a system better than the people who are holding the stick" (*Imperial Ambitions* 79). Jassim has begun to see the white dominant society's sticks meant for Arabs and Arab- Muslims like him. Accordingly, life itself now seems to him to be meaningless, to be without any real substance. He feels "like a ghost who might vanish at any time without being noticed. . ." (Halaby, *Once* 153). His perception of his relationship to America, to his wife Salwa, and to worldly life itself undergoes a change. He feels that he is nothing but "a visitor to this country, to this woman, to this life" (Halaby, *Once* 153). This sense of detachment gives him insights into aspects of American life to which he had previously been largely insensitive. In a sense, Jassim is a contrast to his wife, Salwa. For, she is a person who can expertly hide her identity as "Palestinian, Muslim, recent mother of buckets of blood" (Halaby, *Once* 160) partly under her clever and intelligent deployment of sexual exoticism coupled with a strong dose of American-trained professional charm. So, Jassim feels exposed, as if an eager surveillant eye had opened right in front of him, with no possibility of circumvention. Before 9/11, he could live his cozy, affluent American life in a "bulldozer style, an Arab in a Mercedes, oblivious of the sizzling around him, the words tossed his way, the puddles of fear and loathing he skirted and stepped through," (Halaby, *Once 165*). But, ironically enough, things soon changed. After 9/11, "his diorama sufficiently shaken, he began to see, slowed down, and looked at those looking back. And for the first time, he felt unsettled in his beloved America" (Halaby, *Once* 165). To swell the cataracts of his

misery and make matters harder for Jassim, his car runs over a white boy named Evan Parker. The boy is killed. The accident occurs at an already critical juncture of Jassim's life. The FBI investigation is not yet over; there still are problems at the workplace; neighborhood hostilities are still alive. Besides, his wife has had a miscarriage. It is, indeed, a phase of debilitating strains and acute mental conflicts for Jassim. Evan's death, even though it has been only accidental, gnaws incessantly at his heart. Filled with remorse, he approaches Mrs. Parker, the bereaved mother, to apologize. It is then that he learns that Evan was an uncompromising racist and a hater of the Arabs. On hearing that her visitor is an Arab, she laughs, almost guffawing, perhaps sensing the irony involved in her son's death. Recollecting the 9/11 disaster, she tells Jassim:

> See, when 9/11 happened, Evan was freaked out, totally freaked out. It was weird because once he was a teenager, he did not lose it very often. But he did then, ranted and raved about how Arabic people should all be kicked out of this country, rounded up, herded up, and thrown out. I ignored it for a while, though he was simply scared. We were all scared those people were going to blow us all up. Then he started talking about how he wished he could kill an Arab – my own son talking about killing someone! I sat him down and told him two wrongs don't make a right, that most Arabic people don't have anything to do with this. He wouldn't listen – refused to. Talked like a bigot, and I was so mad at him. I think he got it from his dad, who is a racist prick. That's why I say that God is one fucked -up bastard,

> to have Evan die under the wheels of an Arabic person's car.
>
> (Halaby, *Once* 200-201)

The mother, of course, is convinced of Jassim's innocence. Nevertheless, because Jassim is an Arab and the dead boy a known racist, anti who used to skate about with the slogan "Terrorist Hunting Licence" (Halaby, Once 76) insolently inscribed on his skateboard, some people suspect that Jassim must have intentionally bumped the car into the skating Evan, and then made it out to be a sheer accident. All this makes Jassim's predicament in the white society around him all the more precarious. In a philosophical vein, Halaby writes: "Death has a way of peeling the safety film from people's eyeballs, allowing on what is really there rather than the filtered view through the comfort of routine" (Halaby, *Once* 217). The death of the boy, Evan and Salwa's miscarriage, which meant the death of a prospective child begin to weigh down on Jassim's mind. "A dead boy and an incomplete fetus weigh the blood down with their unfulfilled promises" (Halaby, *Once* 218). His soul is now awakened and "he saw that the past nine years (and even more than) had been a sabbatical from real life, a rich man's escape from the real world" (Halaby, *Once* 218). It makes "what is really there" (Halaby, Once 217) pretty apparent to him. In other words, he realizes with clarity the distressing and unnerving realities of his post-9/11 life in America. This realization, interestingly enough, emboldens him and enables him to return the fearful, loathing gaze of anti-Arab racism and respond not necessarily in kind but in the same style. "A man stood in the front yard of the house across the street and stared at him. Jassim stared back, numb, neither stare was friendly" (201). Looking at himself through a hate-tinted lens, he internalizes the

racist profiling to which he is outwardly subjected. Embittered as he increasingly becomes, his work standards slacken, his sense of morality declines, and his rosy, empathetic approach to America degenerates into a lugubrious view that brings home to him the "social apartheid" (*Modern* 25) of which he has now become a victim. With "heavy dark globs of sadness" (Halaby, Once, 201) in his mind, he becomes keenly aware of the "unwelcoming neighborhood" and the "more liberal streets where fear and hatred were disguised" (Halaby, Once, 201). Halaby brings out the abjectness of Jassim's condition in a passage, resorting to powerful disease imagery.

> Jassim stepped up to the concrete stoop, like the neighborhood, and really like the whole city, had too much sun on it; an exposed wound with skin seared back, clean, white bone and fresh tissue open to all the world's germs. Jassim, child of Jordan, whose feet learned to walk on holy soil, was a beautiful cancerous growth in his pressed dress pants, Armani tie, olive skin, holding a bouquet of lilies to mourn the dead, penance for his enormous sin (Halaby, *Once* 194).

By imposing a "plot" on Jassim's "story" - teeming with random incidents and unlikely coincidences -- the FBI agents effectively reverse the normality, seeing causality in inexplicable events and failing to find an explanation for the occurrences that Jassim considers logical and related. The FBI mode of operation in matters relating to Arabs and Arab- Muslims, especially in the post-9/11 context, is aptly summed up in Marcus's reply to Al who wants Jassim to be pulled off his contract. "Al, the FBI is trying to get information on every Arab in the country right now. Our

government is at a loss, so they are grasping at straws. Jassim is a straw" (Halaby, *Once* 269).

Arguments and appeals fall on deaf ears. And, to break the camel's back, Jassim is fired from his job. With this the Salwa-Jassim couple's cup of misery is full, and their American dream comes to an end. In the meantime, in addition to bearing the brunt of American ostracism along with Jassim, Salwa suffers a miscarriage, which she keeps hidden from her husband for some time but is a little later revealed to him. It may perhaps not be presumptuous to suggest that Halaby uses the miscarriage to symbolically suggest the depletion of security and happiness, on the American soil, for Arab-Americas like Salwa and Jassim. Salwa's married life, too, suffers certain setbacks. During their ordeals, Salwa slips into a secret affair with Jake, one of her white American colleagues in the bank, who is always high on drugs. Eventually, fed up with everything American and prompted by her sudden longing for her Arab roots and milieu, she resolves to return to Jordan. When she approaches Jake to tell him of her projected departure for Jordan, he attacks her in a fit of drug-induced rage and pushes her down the stairs, injuring her seriously. A victim of white American male violence, Salwa ends up on a hospital bed, bruised, disfigured, and completely nonplussed.

In the context of the novel, the Salwa- Jake affair is of special significance. It is, indeed, an affair marked by sexual exuberance. However, Salwa manages to pull herself out of it, when she comes to know that her lover has been in the shameless habit of bragging about their sexual life before others. It is, therefore, only her sense of etiquette that goads her to go to his apartment and bid him farewell. Jake's

immediate reaction on hearing about her imminent return to Jordan was particularly noteworthy. He says, “So you are running back to the pigsty” (Halaby, *Once* 320). Subsequently, while attacking her physically, he calls her a “Goddamn fucking Arab bitch” (Halaby, *Once* 322). Jordan, in Jake’s view, is a ‘pigsty’, filthy, foul place where women are treated like pigs without any freedom whatsoever. As for Salwa, she is none other than a sex-crazy Arab woman. The images of Jordan and Salwa, that underlie Jake’s abuses, are identical with the Western, European, Orientalist constructions of the Arab Muslim world as a culturally hateful place inhabited by rude, uncivilized people who enslave and oppress their women and also with the constructions of the Arab woman including the Arab- Muslim woman, as a lascivious and promiscuous one who often takes a fancy toward white men. It may be noted that in post-9/11 America, these negative, Orientalist representations were feverishly revoked and resuscitated through a variety of discourses, particularly the media. Jake exemplifies the extent to which these disparaging representations had gripped the popular American imagination. The Salwa- Jake parting scene also involves a veiled debunking of the myth that liberal America is a country where there is no masochism, no male battering of women, and where women are held in unfailing egalitarian respectfulness. The implicit statement, that Halaby seems to be making, is that America is not exempt from the guilt of oppressive violence directed at women, the guilt that the Orientalist West has consistently lied at the doors of the Arab- Muslim world. It may be suggested here the pattern of a short-lived liaison followed by a rupture that eventually leads to a total estrangement, a pattern which is discernible in the bonding between Salwa and Jake, parallels the pattern noticeable in the US international politics and relations. Jake with his vituperative and

defamatory jargon and his reckless proclivity toward violence is symbolic of a United States that, as is well known, resorts to objectionable language and unwarranted violence against those that either wriggle out of its controls or refuse to yield to its wishes and dictates. Jake sees blemishes only in others; he does not see them in himself. This is true of the US, too.

The prevalence of the negative stereotyping of Arab- Muslims is also shown through Penny's contrast between Jassim and the other Jordanian Arab- Muslims. When his family begins to fall apart and the indignities, he has to endure increase, Jassim secretly seeks solace in the company of Penny, a white waitress. In fact, Penny loves Jassim not for what he is but for what he has got. When a friend asks her about her association with Jassim, Penny defensively answers that "He is from Jordan, but he is so different from those people" and that "he's got a conscience. He's not a religious freak like them" (Halaby, *Once* 281). Jassim is an exception to those Jordanians and Arab- Muslims who are religious freaks without a conscience and who, like the 9/11 terrorists, will not hesitate to do atrocious things. Penny's estimate of the Jordanian Muslims is obviously rooted in the Islamophobia of post-9/11 America. The demarcation that she makes between good and bad Arabs is reminiscent of Jack Murphy's perception of Arabs in David Bernans' novel, *North of 9/11*. Jack Murphy, a corporate executive, who is on his way to his office in a taxicab driven by the Palestinian Arab Muslim, Hassan, is happy that the Arab cabby has no 'Kafiyya' and no beard and has a clean-shaven face and polite manners. When he sees, from the back seat of the car, the Arabs among the anti-war activists protesting before the American embassy in Montreal, he mentally contrasts his Arab

cabby with them: “He was not like those marauding Arabs on the street, calling for an anti- American Jihad” (Bernans, *North of 9/11* 12). Like Penny, he sees Hassan as an exception to the general category of “marauding Arabs” (12).

Immediately after her hospitalization, Salwa is suspected by the police of trafficking in drugs because of her erstwhile connection with Jake. She also receives a call from Hassan, her Jordanian lover, informing her of his marriage to Intizar. All this adds to the cauldron of her agonies. Only a shattered Jassim is now beside her, consoling and empathizing with her. It is with this supremely suggestive image of the mentally and physically shattered Salwa - Jassim couple that the novel closes. Post-9/11 America with its huge flood of vilification, hatred, and slander directed against the Arab American Muslims, its permissiveness and lax sexuality, its stupendous consumerist culture, its veneer of attractions, and its inordinately free lifestyle have made a tragedy of Jassim and Salwa’s life. The doleful image of the couple in the hospital is a telling metaphor for the overarching perils of the life and destiny of the Arab American Muslims in post-9/11 America.

The return of Salwa and Jassim of Jordan is only hinted at in the novel. This prospective return, nevertheless. Takes on an ominous shape, underlining their shame and failure in America, the ‘Promised Land’, which has progressively shown its seamy side, it's less than promising traits, to them. What we see by the end of the novel is a Salwa, “Palestinian by blood, Jordanian by residence, and American by citizenship” (Halaby, *Once* 70), who has dwindled into an insignificant entity and who retains but little sense of belonging to any country. The novel has a great deal of revisionary and counter-hegemonic potential about it. It reflects some of the

challenges inherent in the performance of a critical and transnational Arab American citizenship and belonging. Such performances must contend with the dominant narratives of racial, ethnic, religious, and national identities prevalent in the post-9/11 US cultural and political landscape. At the beginning of the novel, Salwa seems to be the epitome of the female migrant who moves from incarceration within a patriarchal culture of freedom within the American liberal civil society, However, this exodus from one culture to the other results in complete failure. Salwa is American-born; her own father refers to her as “really first world" and a “colonizer" (Halaby, *Once* 70). Yet, she is unable to reconcile her cultural differences. This is because her place of birth

> Does stitch itself under the skin and stay attached by invisible threads, so that if a person leaves that place for somewhere else ..., there is always an uncomfortable tugging as the silken (in her case) threads are pulled taut" (Halaby, *Once* 49).

In Salwa’s view, the culprit behind the lies and betrayals, that she and Jassim lives with, is America, the so-called Promised Land. As she sees it, her errors of judgment would have never gone unchecked “back home” in Jordan. She realizes:

> Here in America. . . no one tiptoed into the dark rooms of other people’s homes with their buckets of judgment and said what they thought. There were no intrusive neighbors or blunt aunties to announce what they knew and say, You’d better not, or else” (Halaby, *Once*181).

Comparisons between the Arab homeland and the US host land recur in the novel. Commenting on these comparisons, Fadda Conrey says:

> Through such constant comparisons, the novel characterizes the latter as the Arabian ‘ghula'. A female monster or sorceress in the Arab world, that tricks immigrants and their children into believing in the American dream, leading them in the process to abandon their values, culture, language, and religion, and to relinquish any attempt at a permanent return home (“Contemporary Arab” 167).

The transnational connectivity between the Arab world, represented by Jordan, and the United States had initially resulted, particularly in the case of Salwa, in a move away from tradition to modernity. It resolves into a tragic return to customary conventions. In a sense, Salwa is severely punished for transgressing the norms markedly defined for women within her original community. In her host country, America, Salwa becomes the epitome of the persistence of what Gayathri Spivak calls the "patterns of oppression found in the homeland”. This is because she happens to be a member of a "diasporic subclass" that is often "super-dominated" and "super-exploited" by the colonialist” (*Diasporas old and new* 249). Salwa's culturally hybrid enterprise leaves her on a hospital bed recovering from the wounds inflicted by her American lover because, as Halaby puts it at the end of the novel, '"Happily ever after” happens only in American fairy tales" (Halaby, *Once* 335). For Salwa, America turns a shattered dream, an embodiment of disillusions. This is precisely because "the America that pulled at her was not the America of her birth; it was the exported America of Disneyland and hamburgers, Hollywood and the

Marlboro man, and therefore impossible to find" (Halaby, *Once* 49). It is clear that although Jassim and Salwa have internalized the US value system, assimilated the norms of American life and culture, and are American citizens, they are racially stigmatized. As such, after 9/11 they have to endure intense scrutiny by their fellow citizens and are faced with disgraceful rejection at the hands of White Americans. It is interesting to note that, after the attacks, even Penny, who has been a friend of Jassim's, also absorbs anti-Arab and anti-Muslim sentiments propagated by American mass media: "Each time the president spoke about the War on Terror she was outraged, sickened that there were people so sinister that they would want to harm innocent Americans" (Halaby, *Once* 280). The President's praise of the patriotic Americans who fought for freedom's arouses great pride in Penny. To her, it becomes a reminder of how her fellow citizens are "continuing the great history of this country, getting out there and saving poor people from the oppression of living in their backward countries" (Halaby, *Once* 280). Indeed, what informs her sentiments is America's self-constructed role as savior of the oppressed all over the world. Her sentiments also reflect America's vigorous post- 9/11 attempts to project itself as an "innocent" country unjustly subjected to immense harm and suffering.

Both Salwa and Jassim are rendered unable "to make that ultimate jump into American life, the one that promises a happy ending for everyone if you just believe it hard enough" (Halaby, *Once* 119) because, as the final words in the story read, "Wasn't this an American fairy tale? It was and it wasn't" (Halaby, *Once* 335). But the truth is that the story of Jassim and Salwa is no fairy tale; it is real when viewed in the light of the aftermath and the backlash of the 9/11 attacks, and it shows that

the America of Salwa and Jassim is no longer a Promised Land for them. It is certainly not the America that Patricia Sarrafian Ward plays up in her novel, *The Bullet Collection* (2003) through the mouthpiece of any who tells her daughter Marianna: "America: this is the land where people want to be…. You are living where half the world dreams of being" (*The Bullet* 271). In Ani's view, her husband Stephen, her daughters Marianna, and Magdalena, she herself constitute "a quintessential American family" (*The Bullet 2*60) who have come to America from a strife-torn Lebanon and who are "ready to make a new future" (*The Bullet 2*60). Halaby, on the other hand, plays down this vision of America as a utopia and a refuge for immigrants. She undercuts, through her emphasis on Salwa and Jassim's post- 9/11 ordeals and on the racist hostilities beneath the sugary, glistening surface of American society and also beneath government measures and actions, what the literary critic Ali Behadad calls "the myth of America as an asylum" (*A Forgetful Nation* 10).

It may be pertinent to suggest here that the ideas of embodiment and estrangement are central to our understanding of the disgraceful incidents that overtake Salwa and Jassim. They suffer because their bodies happen to be those of the immigrant strangers. Nadine Sinno rightly observes:

> The Arab American immigrant represents the ultimate (threatening) strange figure in the American imaginary. The immigrant's body often becomes the site of anti-Arab racism and xenophobia because of its proximity to other Arab bodies, including the bodies of the

> alleged terrorist Arab men… the Arab American immigrant resides in the country yet occupies an outsider status ("Dammit, Jim" 138).

The Arabs, as has already been pointed out, have been in the States for about a century and a half. However, there has been a long, die-hard tradition of stereotyping them negatively. Popular cultural forms have been the major media in this maligning of the Arabs and their culture. Perhaps, the culture, for which Hollywood, aping earlier negative representations of the French and the British, has shown its greatest contempt, has been the Arab culture. The Arab-Israeli wars of 1948 and 1967 and the Arab oil embargo of 1973 have also contributed to reinforcing these vilifying constructions of Arab- Muslims particularly as religious fanatics, extremists, and terrorists. Lately, 9/11 and its aftermath have consolidated and entrenched them, as never before, in American society, making Arab Americans generally and Arab-American Muslims especially vulnerable. Louse A Cainkar refers to "the subordinate status of Arab- Americans" and to "their current subaltern position" (*Homeland Insecurity* 73). Underlining the low and inferior position in which Arab Americans have plummeted over the years, he observes that "the social status of Arab- Americans changed from one characterized largely by socio-economic and political inclusion to that of social pariah and political outcast". He further adds:

> A wide range of social institutions -- the media, the arts, the news industry, pedagogy, academia, civil society, political organization, public policies, and popular culture - engaged in a plethora of "racial projects" in which social constructions of the essential difference of

> Arabs (and later Muslims) were put forth so extensively as to be widely accepted as common sense… (*Homeland Insecurity* 72)

It may be said that the harrowing post-9/11 experience of the Arab Americans has been, but a continuation and intensification of the larger, age-old patterns of prejudice and discrimination directed against them. Referring to the derogatory images, particularly of the decades immediately prior to 9/11, Cainker says: "Negative representatives of the Arabs has been a constituent part of the American culture for the past three decades and led to the understanding of their collective culpability after the 9/11 attacks" (*Homeland Insecurity* 73).

Commenting on the twofold character of the 'War on Terror that America lost no time in declaring and launching, Hainsworth says:

> As the scope of the "War on Terror" widened in the United States, it became clear that the battlefield in view was as much a domestic one as an international one. The passage of the Patriot Act authorized what were, in effect, wartime powers of surveillance, data collection, and internal security measures with the stated goal of identifying terrorist activities as well as the potential for terrorism. As the scope of the Patriot Act became clear, so too did its impact on the Arab-American community…. (*Arabs in the Americas 194*)

He adds: "For many Arab-Americans, however, September 11, 2001, meant…. a loss of personal safety". (*Arabs in the Americas* 194). When read against this socio-political backdrop, Halaby's *Once in a Promised Land*, undoubtedly turns out to be a remarkable work that chronicles the fears, dilemmas, hardships, and

disillusionment of the Arab Americans of the post-9/11 United States. Its protagonists, an assimilated, the middle-class Arab American couple, are the innocent victims of the unprecedented post-9/11 domestic security hysteria. It directly addresses the issue of the insecurity and precariousness in which even the well-integrated Arab American citizens, like Salwa and Jassim, have been driven after the 9/11 attacks, simply because of their or their ancestors' origin in a different land and culture.

Once in a Promised Land, it may be said, does not offer an optimistic vision on the future of Arab-Americans in post 9/11 America. In the context of what Fedda Conrey calls the "homogenized conceptualizations of US citizens and belonging" (*Contemporary Arab* 56) and of the Islamophobia and anti-Arab racism sweeping across post 9/11 America, it is rather difficult for Arab-Americans, especially Arab-American Muslims, to find an ungrudging acceptance of their citizenship on an equal footing with white America. Their treatment at the hands of the dominant white society will continue to be marked by the fact of their being of Arab roots and backgrounds, and by the complex web of derogatory attitudes and assumptions about Arabs and their culture. Halaby problematizes and underscores the tenacity and the intricacies of what has been called the "good- Arab/ bad-Arab rhetoric defining the Arab presence in the US" (*Contemporary Arab* 147). In spite of their living the American way in an attempt to enact a type of assimilative politics that would distinguish themselves from other less assimilated Arab- Americans and enable them to belong to the category of the 'good Arab, Salwa and Jassim gradually find themselves positioned, through the relentless scrutiny imposed on them by the

state and the dominant society, in the category of the ‘bad- Arab’. Their Arab origin will be persistently held as being essentially incompatible with the US constructions of proper citizenship and belonging, even though they have been legally granted American citizenship.

The post 9/11 hegemonic American strategy has been to erase all internal differences within the Arab- American community. “It depicts’” as Fadha Corney puts it, “all Arabs in the US whether they are recent immigrants, second/third/fourth generations Arab- Americans, residents, students and regardless of their varying political and religious beliefs) as the enemy or at least as the potential enemies” (Halaby, *Once* 49). This strategy of dissolving differences also extends to erasing the distinctions between

> Arab- Americans and members of other Arab minority communities, including south Asian Muslims and Hindus, who by virtue of their skin color, religious or cultural dress, or accents come to embody, in presumably recognizable ways, the elusive threat of terror the nation is waging war against. (Halaby, *Once* 149).

This homogenized lumping together of all Arab- Americans, under the banner of the ‘enemy’, irrespective of their ethnic and national differences, has been damaging to their status as American citizens. As Faddha Corney puts it, “Such homogenizations strip Arab- Americans of their right to belong in the US resulting in what I am identifying as an American citizenship crisis” (*Contemporary Arab* 149). In his view, American citizenship has two dimensions to it. Legal citizenship comprehends their legally sanctioned rights and freedoms as well as their obligatory duties and

responsibilities. Cultural citizenship concerns their day-to-day life. It is "an integral part of the everyday interactions and experiences of the immigrant, diasporic, and transnational subjects, beyond legal rights and duties". (149,150), Nonetheless, what Coreney sees is a "steady erosion of Arab- Americans' legal rights after 9/11". (150). This erosion and the ceaseless depiction of their inherent religious and cultural values as being antithetical to American values have caused issues of social class and upward mobility to play a decisive role in locating their position within constructions of the US citizenship and belonging, specifically pertaining to the pursuit of the so-called American dream by Arab- Americans. It is significant to note that throughout the nine years of their American life and existence prior to 9/11, Salwa and Jassim have chased this dream and have been successful in achieving it through dedicated hard work. Affluent as they are, they become willing participants in America's stunning consumerist culture, thereby ensuring their "consumer citizenship" as well. Post-9/11 America, nevertheless, completely collapses them, politically, economically, professionally, and familiarly. Fadha Corney's words become quite pertinent to Salwa and Jassim's American downfall:

> … Even when Arab- Americans are equipped with the economic means to fully participate in what Inderpal Grewal refers to as consumer citizenship (a type of citizenship referenced, for instance, by George W Bush's post 9/11 call for Americans to go shopping), their racialized and gendered bodies inevitably flag them as chronic Others" (150).

Laila Halaby's *Once in a Promised land* is a vivid exploration into the grim actualities of post-9/11 America. It exposes the processes and practices by means of which the United States of America has, after the World Trade Centre attacks, side-lined its Arab- Americans as 'chronic Others'.

Conclusion

The five novels taken up for study in this dissertation were all published after 9/11, the first major catastrophe with which the twenty-first century unfortunately began. Their authors are of different nationalities: Canada, the United Kingdom, and the United States of America. The novels reveal a keen sensitivity to, and a profound concern about, the World Trade Centre disaster and the varied nature of its aftermath. The treatment of 9/11 in these novels clearly underscores the depth and extent of its impact not only on the governments of the US and other countries, but also in large populations of people belonging to different races, beliefs, and cultural practices. Laila Halaby, who is an American novelist of Arab descent, focuses on the post-9/11 experience of the Arab Americans. In *Once in a Promised Land*, she shows without any equivocation whatsoever that their life and existence in the US have become rather precarious, especially because of the extensive post-9/11 resuscitation of negative views about Arabs in general and Arab- Muslims in particular. This is made evident through the tragic closure of the American idyll of Jassim and Salwa, a Jordanian Muslim couple. In *Terrorist*, Updike's focus is on Arab- American Muslims and the potential threat their presence in the US poses to the country's security. This is shown through the novel's young protagonist, Ahmed Ashmawy, and his religious preceptor, Sheikh Rashid. Ahmad's pursuit of terror is intended to punish the dissolute, libertine, and morally depraved American infidels. Fortunately, his terrorist mission gets stalled, as he is exhorted and persuaded into a loving and empathetic acceptance of life by his former school counsellor Jack Levy,

who expostulates with him and makes him see the brutality and the hollowness of his suicide mission and his idea of Jihad and its promise of paradise beatitudes. Updike's vision of Islam is not wholly negative. On the one hand, he inveighs against the Quran and other Islamic teachings as containing elements that sanction and promote violence. On the other, he shows that the very same holy text and teachings also have elements that emphasize the values of love and benevolence. This aspect of Islam is revealed through Ahmad's spiritual regeneration. Under the influence of Jack Lewy, Ahmad has already begun to waver in his resolve to detonate the explosive-laden truck. At this juncture, he suddenly recalls a Qur'anic passage that convinces him that what God loves is not death and the taking of life, but life and the giving of life. This passage becomes the source of Ahmad's enlightenment, his epiphany, as it were, and prompts him to retreat over his mission and return to life as it stretches ahead of him in all its plentiful varieties. Updike's overall proposition, in *Terrorist,* seems to be that the Islamic scriptures need to be subjected to re-reading and reinterpretation, so as to reform it and save it from irrational beliefs such as those in Jihad, martyrdom and blissful afterlife, and also from attitudes such as those of hate and hostility toward western culture and its modes of thinking and living. Bernans' *North of 9/11* is of a markedly different order in that it largely bypasses the question of the national, ethnic, or religious identity of the perpetrators of 9/11. His preoccupation is with exploring the reasons that lie behind the 9/11 attack and he finds them not in Islamic fundamentalism or its alleged opposition to western culture, but in the voluminous acts of violence America has carried out in the name of foreign policy and of safeguarding democracy and human rights across the world. As such, he makes a rather elaborate

inventory of American atrocities in the shape of war, coups, and other actions in different parts of the world. *North of 9/11,* it may be argued, images the US as a brutal, bellicose, and self-centred nation responsible for large-scale international massacres, devastation, and chaos. He traces this tradition of American violence and injustice in its early history, to the days of its founding fathers. He exemplifies this through the early white settlers' belligerences on the native population and through the injustices and banalities that have always accompanied the white man's practice of slavery. Bernans also puts his finger on the bitter experiences, both in Canada and America, of Arab Muslims after 9/11. In *North of 9/11, w*hite racism, represented through the figure of Jack Murphy, is shown to be a die-hard and the main reason for the hardships faced by Arab Muslims not only in post- 9/11 Canada but in pre- 9/11 Canada as well. The West's view of Islam as a dangerous ideology urging hatred and violence is also made manifest in the novel. Bernans is severely critical of this view and the resulting scapegoating and stereotyping of Arab Muslims as an undesirable community. He rejects the idea of avenging 9/11by waging wars on countries like Afghanistan and Iraq, as it can only result in distresses and disasters, particularly for innocent civilians. He also brings into focus how, a few decades ago, Judeophobia and the red menace had raged in the West and how, after 9/11, such fears have been strategically substituted by Islamophobia. What Bernans insinuates is that America would, from time to time, construct its prime enemy to suit and serve its political and economic interests. Bernans' novel may also be considered a study of terrorism. To Bernans, an act of terror, whether committed by a single individual, a group of individuals, or a state, is terrorism, because its core aim is to frighten and achieve some political or other goals. Accordingly, he considers America's War on

Terror to be nothing other than terrorism itself. The idea that underlies *North of 9/11* seems to be that, while probing the pros and cons of the WTC attack, and advertising it, the world over, as the worst act of terrorism on American soil, as an unmerited and evil onslaught on an innocent and perpetually benevolent country, America would do well to take a close look at its global acts of violence.

The novels under study often internationalize man-made tragedies by referencing historical events such as the Persian Gulf war, the Bosnian war, the Vietnam war, the Korean War, and the Iraq and Afghan Wars. *North of 9/11* is particularly noteworthy in this respect. The novels sometimes employ narratives to invert and critique such practices as racial profiling. In Halaby's *Once in a Promised Land*, its unsuspecting Arab American protagonist, Jassim, is increasingly marginalized after 9/11. This produces in his mind what Slavoj Zizek calls "the unbearable anxiety of perceiving oneself as non-existent" (*Welcome* 10). Eventually, he internalizes the racial profiling to which he is subjected. As a result, his hitherto rosy and empathetic view of America suddenly degenerates into a lugubrious one that diagnoses, social apartheid with unwelcoming neighbourhoods on one side and more liberal streets where fear and hatred were disguised on the other. Halaby's novel distinctly exposes the unwholesome consequences of racial profiling in post 9/11 America.

An important concern in all the texts under study is with the post-9/11 homeland security rhetoric indulged in by almost all nations of the world, especially those in the West. In *North of 9/11,* Jack Murphy is hyper concerned with Canada's security and is eager to contribute his mite to preserving it. It is this eagerness that

gauds him to transmit to corporal Boisvert the details about his daughter Sarah's activist politics. Subsequently, when Sarah is shot dead on insistent orders from the cunning, manipulative, and selfish Boisvert, who treats her as an out-and-out terrorist, he curses and dismisses, with absolute contempt, Canada's overblown, hysterical preoccupation with national security.

Inherent in the novels is also the notion that literature can play an ethical role in enlightening both society and government on the needs and imperatives to be met for common human welfare and the peaceful functioning of society or nation. Halaby's *Once in a Promised Land* is a strong plea on behalf of a fairer and more just treatment of the so-called 'other', the alien diasporas like the Arab American community. The novel underscores the need for "an ethics of global responsibility toward the other as an individual or as a nation" (*Plotting Justice* 43). Bernans' *North of 9/11* revolves around the proposition that America needs to rectify its flawed foreign policy and redefine its harped-on 'American interests'. Updike's *Terrorist* embodies the view that religious texts are likely to contain inconsistent and contradictory ideas and have, therefore, to be studied with utmost care and discretion, if they are to be of use and benefit to humanity. More importantly, Updike emphasizes that earnest dialogue, not ferocious confrontation, alone can bring an end to terrorism. This is shown, in the closing scene of *Terrorist,* by the success Jack Levy, a born, though not practicing Jew, achieves in reclaiming Ahmad from his terrorist path. It may be suggested here that this encounter between an elderly Jew and a young Muslim assumes paramount significance when viewed from the perspective of the still unresolved Israel- Palestine conflict and America's widely

known support to Jewish Israel. Equally interesting is the liberally positive image of the Jew that Updike presents through the figure of Jack Levy in this scene, as well as throughout the novel. It contrasts sharply with the West's representation, over the ages, of the Jew as an incorrigibly greedy, vicious, and dangerous religious person. In fact, Updike casts Jack Levy in the role of the kind and loving saviour. It is he who painstakingly, even riskily and adventurously, averts an impending terrorist disaster and, thereby, saves from death not only the young, suicidal jihadist, Ahmed, but also several others who would have died, had he not prevailed over Ahmed to abort his mission. Shakespeare's Shylock, it may be said, has been laid to rest in the West. Updike's portrait of Jack Levy may also be seen as an index and reflection of the link that has always existed between politics and representation.

The novels under study demonstrate what Banita calls "the ethical task of literature" by providing an understanding of each other's traumas and articulating "the historical forces that endlessly replicate our shared anguish" (*Plotting* 132). The articulation of these historical forces can be seen in the novels' concern with such issues as imperialism, racism, religious extremism, state repression, state-sponsored terrorism, counterterrorism, cultural fascism and antagonism, Islamophobia, and Judeophobia. Indeed, these have been some of the major factors responsible for causing unimaginable anguish to the human race and also the biosphere. The novels obviously have something to say about what literary ethics after 9/11 can be. In their varied ways, they seem to have assigned themselves an ethical role. In times, when humanity has become a risk society, a global, panoptical society with its daunting surveillance system and its tremendous love of spectacle, it is small surprise if these

novels, like many others of the post-9/11 years, assume an ethical perspective. This ethical orientation, certainly, does not detract from their merits as novels. If post-9/11 literature, or fiction, serves an ethical function in today's conflicted, contemporary world, it is to be regarded as a valuable aspect of it. The political and cultural debates, which they zealously embody, may be attributed to the tenor of the troubled times in which they have all been written. If literature is life seen through temperament or criticism of life, then, post-9/11 fiction, particularly 9/11 fiction -- the fiction treating 9/11 terrorism and its aftermath -- is eminently such literature. The novels examined are all precisely about the post-9/11 western world, and its socio-cultural and political life. Besides, they also focus on the nature of the West's relations and interactions with the rest of the world.

It may be a truism to say that, when massive man-made tragedies overtake humanity, people tend to be reflective, even philosophical, asking and answering questions of right and wrong, justice and injustice and seeking ways to redress the maladies and restore peace and happiness. Creative writers are human beings endowed with the ability to respond more sensitively, feelingly, and meditatively to the goings-on of the world around them. And this is precisely what the post 9/11 writers like the novelists under consideration have taken upon themselves to do. Indeed, no one, who is interested in the 9/11 disaster, can afford to overlook 9/11 fiction, which is, indubitably, serious fiction. With their accent on several of today's socio-political questions, the novels under study, as Clemens Spahr says, are "ultimately appealing to the liberal individual consciousness" ("Post - 9/11

Literature" 213). In other words, the issues raised in the novels are intended to be noted, understood, and responded to.

These novels invariably invite an ethical approach. In fact, there is nothing unworthy or objectionable about adopting an ethical approach to literature. Such an approach, as Banita sees it, can function as a bridge "between the academic discipline of the literary studies and the realities of the political life" (*Plotting* 297). Spahr agrees that "Post-9/11 literature can function as precisely such a link" ("Post 9/11 literature" 500). It may be worthwhile to note here that Fredric Jameson considers "the ethical binary opposition of good and evil as one of the fundamental forms of ideological thought in Western culture" (*The Political Unconscious* 88). A continuation of this tradition is perceptible in post- 9/11 fiction. Post- 9/11 novels, like the ones under study, may legitimately be seen as a literary intervention in what Benita calls "the ethical flaws of a culture" (*Plotting* 298). As she puts it, "a critical vision of contemporary literature that does not pay tribute to that event {9/11} is, by now, virtually unthinkable. (*Plotting* 12). Spahr notes:

> Samuel Cohen's After *The End of History: American Fiction in the 1990s* and Philp Wegener's *Life Between Two Deaths, 1989-2001: US Culture in the Long Nineties* see in the literary and cultural production of the 1990s a political and historical awareness … with Cohen showing how literature after the end of the cold war examines 'how the times in which we live shape the way we understand the past' and Wegener arguing that the long nineties ' represented a moment of heated debate over the direction of future" (*Plotting* 298).

In other words, political and historical awareness, the past examined in the light of the present, and prospects of the future are some of the patterns identified by Cohen and Wagner in the literary and cultural production of the decade immediately preceding 9/11. It may be suggested here that these elements are generally present in the post-9/11 literature, too. They are prominent hallmarks, in fact, of the novels under discussion. Indeed, an intriguing question that post-9/11 literature has to resolve concerns its periodization. In Spahr's view, "an assessment of post-9/11 fiction, that does not address questions of periodization will most likely end up reifying post-9/11 literature into a category of its own" ("Post 9/11 literature" 34). Post - 9/11 fiction, it may be said, has by now become a category of its own.

The novels under study problematize issues of citizenship, American, Canadian, and English. The propensity to view only those who are of white stock and pedigree as genuine Americans and legitimate American citizens in contradistinction to those of alien or immigrant ethnic stock, who are treated as citizens of a lower status even if they have been born in the US, is not only shown but also interrogated in the novels. This issue of citizenship, as treated in these novels, assumes vital importance in the context of the current world of escalating transnational migration and expatriation. If, despite their citizenship, immigrants and their descendants are looked upon as secondary citizens in their host countries, it truly becomes a serious social and political issue that calls for an enduring resolution capable of ensuring social acceptance, on equitable terms, of the immigrant minority communities. Else, these diasporas in Western countries like Canada, the US, and the UK will continue to feel marginalized and to be objects of prejudice, suspicion,

and violence. Such a situation can invariably lead to unforeseen and unwholesome political consequences. This aspect of the immigrant experience in the US is central to Halaby's *Once in a Promised Land*.

The idea that the 9/11 attack is an event that cannot be fully understood in isolation from the processes and procedures of capitalist globalism can be seen underpinning these novels. DeLillo, for example, shows that capitalism will lead to the creation of not only external terrorism but also internal terrorism. Indeed, there is but little difference between the terrorist Lee Harvey Oswald in DeLillo's novel, *Cosmopolis* (2003) and the imported Al- Qaeda terrorists Hamad and Ameen in his *Falling Man.* John Carlos Rowe points out that in DeLillo's conception "terrorism is the inevitable by-product of a system built upon unstable master-slave relation that inevitably prompts the servant's rebellion" (*DeLillo* 124). It is significant to note that in *Falling Man*, Keith's young son, Justin, mistakes the name, Bin Laden, for Bin Lawton and starts looking for him. The homophobic resemblance between the two names, one Arab and the other Anglo-American, is a subtle way of suggesting the essential identity and affinity between native and foreign terrorists.

The cultural fascism of the white West is also exposed in the novels. In *North of 9/11*, Jack Murphy's father is an arrant anti- Semite. In his youthful days, Murphy, too, was no different, seeing the Jews as odd-looking aliens. Later, he takes kindly and benignly toward them because he finds them to be a people mostly assimilated into his culture. Throughout *Falling Man,* Jack is held up as a hater of Arab- Muslim culture. In his opinion, even Arab victuals have to be shunned, particularly in the context of 9/11. Similarly, in *Falling Man,* Keith is depicted as

being unable to appreciate the Brazilian music which Florence, his Afro- American girlfriend, plays and enjoys in his presence. As for Lianne, she finds it impossible to stand the Arab music and song she hears from Elena's apartment. She even slaps Elena. To her, Arab song and music are no more than sonic irritants in the post- 9/11 social ambience. This inability to appreciate the culture of the other is a major cause of friction. John Carlos Raw considers it to be a serious failure on the part of the West. He observes that "these personal failures… are symptomatic of our national problem and explain in part our susceptibility towards terror." (DeLillo, *Falling Man* 126).

Globalization emerges as a pivotal issue in these novels. In *Falling Man*, DeLillo treats it as a consequential factor contributing to the rise in terrorism. In *North of 9/11,* Bernans sees it as a powerful force in the production of dissonances between the West and the Arab Muslim world. The novels take cognizance of the history of European imperialism and America's neo-imperialism and its accoutrements like global capitalism and multinational corporatism. These are pointed up as probable reasons behind the anti-Western outlook of the Arab peoples. In *Terrorist*, Updike portrays the psychology of the Arab- Muslim immigrant through the figure of Ahmed, who detests America and wants to do as much harm as possible to it. Carlos Rowe observes that the "first world, hyper-capitalist nations, especially the United States, have created their own antagonists in Al- Quada and any other terror (domestic or foreign)" (*Don DeLillo* 123 and 124). Indeed, this sentiment is what undergirds DeLillo's, *Falling Man*. It can also be seen as informing his earlier novels, *Underworld* (1997) and *Cosmopolis* (2003). Corporate

capitalism is strongly satirized by Bernans in *North of 9/11*. Sarah's death at the hands of the state, which is an alley of the corporation, and the abrupt termination of the services of her Women's Studies Professor are evidently intended by Bernans to show the dismal consequences of corporate power and hegemony which is as a rule buttressed by the state. Bernans underscores that corporatism will brook no thinking activist like Sarah; nor will it approve of a paradigmatic, intellectual activist like the Professor. Bernans burlesques the hectic corporate moves and machinations to absorb into its web of interests, even the system of education at all its levels. This is done through the appearance, as a replacement for the sacked and prosecuted Professor, of the corporate executive, Jack Murphy in Sarah's Women Studies class and through his drab, impertinent, and ineffectual lecture. Young, idealistic, and well-meaning student activists like Sarah and earnest and socially committed activist intellectuals like the Professor are anathema to the corporate, because they are people capable of seeing through and exposing the hidden, profiteering, and extortionist agendas of corporate ventures and projects.

The issue of the other is also central to these novels. How the other is seen by those who are hostile to them is well summed up in the words of the terrorist Atta in DeLillo's *Falling Man*. When Hammad expresses his concern about the innocent others who might be killed when he carries out his terrorist mission, Amir indifferently and irritated answers that "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". (DeLillo, *Falling Man* 176). Even though the words come from the mouth of a terrorist, who is without any empathetic feelings for those who are his targets,

the principle embedded in his view is equally applicable to all those who regard certain segments of people, like ethnic and immigrant minorities, as inferior and subaltern creatures who could conveniently be relegated to the margins and legitimately slurred and ill-treated. Atta's attitude evidently represents the attitude not only of the terrorist, but also of the counterterrorist. Both, while executing their lethal mission, are impervious to the woes and sufferings of others.

In *Falling Man,* DeLillo puts his finger on the culturally diverse nature of American society. For example, Lianne, while out in the streets, shopping, recalls the shop of "ethnic shampoo" (DeLillo, *Falling Man* 23), which she had seen while on a visit to Mexico. In fact, Lianne does not know "what made her think of this, ethnic shampoo, in the middle of Third Avenue." (DeLillo, *Falling Man* 23), Nevertheless, it is a reflection of her sense of the ethnic and cultural plurality to be seen in the American social environment. Keith, while waiting on the street for a taxi to get to Lianne's apartment, senses the fact that most of the taxis are operated by Arab American Muslims and are off the roads because of their fear of a possible post-9/11 backlash directed at them. The American public's hostile and derisive attitude toward them is well- brought out in DeLillo's observation that following the 9/11 attack, the Arab American Muslims had all of them been derogatorily nicknamed 'Muhamed.' As Keith waits for the taxi, he muses that "it might be hard to find a taxi at a time when every car driver in New York was named Muhamed." (DeLillo, *Falling Man* 28). The nickname is doubly allusive. On the one hand, it alludes to Prophet Muhamed, on the other, it alludes to Muhamed Atta, the Arab Muslim terrorist. As such, it is a subtle, ingenious way of associating Islam with

terrorism and of propagating the idea that the Arab Muslim is a terrorist danger to the American society. DeLillo's reference to the Arab Muslim taxi drivers and the nickname given them after 9/11 is intended to suggest not only the pejorative American attitude toward the Arab Muslims, but also the fact that most of them were earning their livelihood doing lowly jobs in the US. DeLillo also shows that in such a society, a certain number of cultural politics is also inevitable. For instance, while an anti-war demonstration is going on, a black American distributes pamphlets about a black American singer and an Arab- Muslim woman distributes leaflets about Islam. They are totally unconcerned about America's counter-terror wars and their consequences. Instead, their only concern is their respective culture and its propagation. DeLillo's irony is directed against the impropriety of their cultural politics at a time when they should have been seriously concerned about so important the political issue as war.

The role of art in its various forms is a notable theme in these novels. DeLillo's *Falling Man* is of especial interest in this respect. In this novel, Martin, who is, by calling, a dealer in artifacts like paintings, is pessimistic about the future of art. He tells Professor Nina: "What I can tell you is that the art market will stagnate. Activity here and there in modern masters. Otherwise, dismal prospects." (DeLillo, *Falling Man* 45). This, however, is not the vision of art in Mc Ewan's *Saturday,* where art is represented by literature. In this novel, poetry is held up as a force powerful enough to salvage humanity. The moral regeneration of the thug, Baxter, is brought about by Matthew Arnold's poem, "Dover Beach" which is recited to him by Daisy, a budding poet herself, and which he hears with rapt

attention. Art has its social importance. It has its aesthetic value, too. The two Morandi paintings, which Martin has gifted to Neena, are "beautiful" (DeLillo, *Falling Man* 46). The passport photographs of Martin and Neena are "also beautiful" (DeLillo, *Falling Man* 47). Artifacts can also serve as documents, chronicling history. The stamped and faded, photographs of Martin and Neena are "aged" (DeLillo, *Falling Man* 47). Nonetheless, they are "documents" and "history measured in inches" (DeLillo, *Falling Man* 47).

Islamic fundamentalism, particularly as it relates to the West, is a recurring theme in these novels. Neena, for example, thinks that the Muslim fundamentalists are a panicked people and that 9/11 is a product of this panic. Martin, her German lover, concurs with her. In his view, the apparent cause of the panic is the West. He says that "they think the world is a disease. This world, this society, ours. A disease that's spreading". All that the fundamentalist terrorists do is to "kill the innocent, only that" (DeLillo, *Falling Man* 46). Alluding to 9/11 and contrasting Americans with Islamic terrorists, he adds: "They aren't liberating a person or casting out a dictator…. They strike a blow to this country's dominance. They achieved this, to show a great power can be vulnerable. A power that interferes that occupies" (DeLillo, *Falling Man* 46). The discussion between Neena and Martin gains in significance when viewed in the light of these contrasts, made from a western point of view, between America and fundamentalist Islam. America is rich and powerful; it has everything necessary to subdue the Islamic world which has nothing but a few jihadists, "a few men willing to die" (DeLillo, *Falling Man* 47). What pulls the Islamic countries down is not "Western interference" (DeLillo, *Falling Man* 47), but

their own stubborn resistance to change and progress. Martin contends that “it is their history, their mentality. They live in a closed world, by choice, of necessity. They haven’t advanced because they haven’t wanted to or tried to”. (DeLillo, *Falling Man* 47). The first world / third-world binary is what informs this view of Arab Muslim societies. It may be worthwhile to note here that this view harks back to the European colonialist’s view of the Orient as a region of uncivilized and underdeveloped peoples, a view that was used as a fit rationale for the so-called white man’s burden of civilizing them through imperial rule and dominance. Through the Nina – Martin conversation, DeLillo brings out, with exceptional clarity, the post-9/11 American as well as western ethos and its relation to the Arab - Muslim world.

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