



ORIGINAL ARTICLE

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The Psychological Impact Of Terrorism In Contemporary Fiction: Trauma, Identity, And Precarious Belonging In Falling Man, The Reluctant Fundamentalist, And Home Fire

Abstract

This article examines the psychological impact of terrorism in three contemporary novels: Don DeLillo's *Falling Man* (2007), Mohsin Hamid's *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* (2007), and Kamila Shamsie's *Home Fire* (2017). Using trauma theory, supported by postcolonial approaches to trauma, the study investigates how terrorism affects memory, identity, interpersonal relationships, belonging, and perceptions of security. It argues that contemporary fiction represents terrorism not as an isolated episode of spectacular violence but as a continuing psychological and political condition. In *Falling Man*, the survivor's compulsive return to the attack, emotional withdrawal, and disturbed domestic life demonstrate the delayed and repetitive structure of trauma. In *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*, the attacks of September 11 intensify Changez's divided identity and expose the racial suspicion underlying his conditional acceptance in the United States. *Home Fire* extends the inquiry to a British Muslim family affected by inherited stigma, radicalization, state surveillance, citizenship deprivation, grief, and public hostility. A comparative qualitative reading shows that psychological suffering arises both from terrorist violence and from the social responses that follow it. Fear, securitization, racialization, and exclusion turn trauma into a shared yet unequal experience. The selected novels also reveal the ethical value of fiction: by shifting attention from official narratives and public spectacle to private consciousness, family life, and morally complicated subjects, fiction resists simple divisions between victim and perpetrator. The article concludes that trauma theory remains useful for reading terrorism fiction, but it must be widened through postcolonial criticism so that historical power, migration, race, citizenship, and state policy remain central to the analysis.

Keywords: Terrorism, Trauma, Contemporary Fiction, Psychological Impact, Identity, Post 9/11 Literature, Migration, Surveillance, Belonging

Introduction

Terrorism seeks political effect through violence, but its influence cannot be measured only through fatalities, damaged buildings, or immediate security responses. Its psychological force lies in the uncertainty it produces and in its capacity to make danger feel present after the physical event has ended. Survivors may experience intrusive memory, emotional numbness, guilt, hypervigilance, or an altered sense of time. Communities may internalize fear,

suspicion, and hostility. People associated, fairly or unfairly, with the identity of an attacker may face surveillance, discrimination, and pressure to prove their loyalty. Contemporary fiction is especially suited to examining these less visible consequences because it can enter private consciousness, represent fractured memory, and place public events beside intimate relationships.

The attacks of September 11, 2001, and the global War on Terror changed the political

and imaginative vocabulary of the twenty first century. Terrorism became not only an event but also an organizing framework through which governments, media institutions, and citizens interpreted identity, migration, religion, security, and belonging. Fiction written after 2001 frequently returns to scenes of violence, but it also studies the lives that continue beyond them. Such writing asks how a person reconstructs ordinary life after catastrophe, how political fear enters the home, and how suspicion reshapes the self. These questions complicate the familiar binary of innocent victim and identifiable enemy. They reveal psychological injury across different positions, while refusing to claim that all suffering is identical or politically equivalent.

This article studies Don DeLillo's *Falling Man*, Mohsin Hamid's *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*, and Kamila Shamsie's *Home Fire*. The novels form a useful comparative corpus because they approach terrorism from distinct geographical, temporal, and psychological positions. *Falling Man* focuses on a survivor of the World Trade Center attacks and the disordered family life to which he returns. *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* follows Changez, a Pakistani professional whose apparent success in the United States collapses as the post 9/11 climate forces him to reconsider his place within American economic and political power. *Home Fire* examines British Muslim siblings whose lives are shaped by a dead jihadist father, the radicalization of a young man, public surveillance, and a state that makes citizenship conditional.

The article asks three related questions. First, how do the selected novels represent the psychological consequences of terrorism through memory, fear, grief, alienation, and identity crisis? Second, how do their narrative forms reproduce or interpret

traumatic experience? Third, how do race, migration, citizenship, and state security practices influence who is recognized as traumatized and who is treated primarily as a threat? The study argues that the novels represent terrorism as a prolonged structure of feeling rather than a closed event. Psychological damage develops through the interaction of violent shock with pre-existing vulnerabilities and with later political responses. Trauma therefore appears as personal, relational, cultural, and institutional.

The comparison also addresses a central problem in post 9/11 literary criticism. Early American responses often concentrated on national grief and domestic recovery, sometimes leaving the historical and geopolitical contexts of violence outside the frame. Gray (2011) identifies this retreat into familiar domestic forms, while Rothberg (2009) calls for a more outward looking imagination capable of connecting American suffering with other histories and locations. Read together, the three novels move from the immediate body of the survivor to the racialized migrant and then to a family caught between extremist recruitment and state punishment. This progression does not erase differences among victims, witnesses, and perpetrators. Instead, it shows how fiction can connect different forms of psychological vulnerability without reducing them to one universal story.

Theoretical Framework

The primary framework of this study is literary trauma theory. Freud's account of traumatic repetition in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* provides an early vocabulary for understanding experiences that return through compulsive action rather than ordinary recollection. A traumatic event may not be fully understood when it occurs. Its force appears later through repetition,

dreams, bodily responses, and behavior that the subject cannot easily control. This delayed structure is central to the selected novels, whose characters repeatedly revisit scenes, sounds, gestures, or identities that they cannot integrate into a stable life narrative.

Caruth (1996) develops this insight by describing trauma as an overwhelming encounter that is not completely assimilated at the moment of occurrence and consequently returns in belated form. For literary analysis, this approach connects psychological disturbance with narrative form. Disrupted chronology, repetition, silence, fragmented perspective, and compulsive return can formally enact the difficulty of knowing and communicating trauma. *Falling Man* most clearly follows this pattern: the narrative repeatedly circles the attack while Keith's body and behavior register what his language cannot fully explain. Yet similar structures appear in Changez's retrospective monologue and in the divided perspectives of *Home Fire*.

Herman (1992) places trauma within relationships and social environments. Recovery involves safety, remembrance, mourning, and reconnection. This model is valuable because terrorist violence damages more than an isolated mind. It affects trust, intimacy, family communication, and a person's ability to participate in ordinary social life. In each novel, psychological disturbance becomes visible through damaged relationships. Keith and Lianne fail to establish genuine emotional connection; Changez's relationship with Erica becomes entangled with loss and fantasy; and the Pasha siblings' loyalty to one another is strained by secrecy, radicalization, political judgment, and grief.

LaCapra (2001) distinguishes between acting out and working through. Acting out involves compulsive repetition in which the past remains experientially present. Working

through does not erase loss, but it permits critical distance and renewed agency. The distinction helps explain why repetition has different meanings in the three novels. Keith's poker playing and bodily routines can appear as attempts to narrow an unmanageable world into controlled patterns, yet they also prevent fuller reconnection. Changez's narration is both repetition and interpretation: he reconstructs his past before a silent American listener, but the dramatic monologue never resolves the threat surrounding the encounter. In *Home Fire*, public mourning is obstructed by state power, leaving grief without an accepted social form.

Classical trauma theory, however, can become too universal if it treats the traumatized subject as detached from history, race, empire, and material power. Visser (2011) argues that trauma studies must engage more carefully with postcolonial literary contexts. Craps (2013) likewise criticizes the field's tendency to privilege Western experiences and models. These interventions are essential for the present comparison. Changez and the Pasha family do not suffer only because of an overwhelming event. Their distress is intensified by racialization, migration histories, unequal citizenship, and security policies. A postcolonial approach therefore asks not only what happened to a character but also which institutions define the event, whose pain becomes nationally visible, and whose speech is viewed with suspicion.

The framework used here combines psychological trauma with the concepts of precarious belonging and cultural othering. Belonging becomes precarious when acceptance depends on conformity, silence, or continuous demonstrations of loyalty. The terrorist attack then works as a political test that exposes the conditional nature of inclusion. Changez learns that professional success does not protect him from being

read as a dangerous Muslim body. In *Home Fire*, British citizenship does not provide equal security to the Pasha family, and Parvaiz's actions allow the state to transform family grief into a matter of national discipline. This expanded framework keeps individual psychology connected to social power.

Literature Review

Scholarship on post 9/11 fiction has repeatedly examined the difficulty of representing an event whose images were already globally circulated through television and digital media. Gray (2011) argues that many American novels responded by returning to domestic life, using private grief to make the attacks narratable. Morley (2011) similarly studies the relation between domestic and global perspectives in the post 9/11 novel. The domestic focus can reveal the deep penetration of public violence into intimate life, but it can also narrow political understanding if the terrorist appears only as an external and incomprehensible threat.

Rothberg (2009) challenges the limited geography of early post 9/11 fiction and calls for an imagination able to connect different spaces, histories, and forms of violence. This criticism is important for a comparative reading. *Falling Man* offers an intense account of embodied survival and family disturbance, yet its primary emotional field remains New York. The *Reluctant Fundamentalist* and *Home Fire* broaden the frame by placing Muslim and diasporic subjects at the center. They show that the aftermath of terrorism includes the production of suspect identities, the return of imperial histories, and the expansion of state surveillance.

Criticism of *Falling Man* frequently emphasizes trauma, loss, embodiment, and repetition. The novel begins in the physical debris of the attack and follows Keith

Neudecker's uncertain movement back into family life. Scholars have noted how sound, bodily vulnerability, and repeated performance become carriers of traumatic memory. Ventéjoux (2021), for example, reads the novel's precarious self through vulnerability and the role of art, while discussions of the novel's soundscape show how sensory repetition anchors Keith to the disaster. Marshall (2013) connects the novel to unresolved attachment and the difficulty of mourning. Together, these studies support a reading of the novel in which psychological injury is registered through disrupted time and altered habits rather than through direct explanation.

The *Reluctant Fundamentalist* has generated extensive discussion of narrative ambiguity, identity, race, and post 9/11 political discourse. Morey (2011) argues that Hamid challenges the conventions and orthodoxies of post 9/11 fiction. The novel's dramatic monologue requires readers to judge an American listener whose words remain absent, making interpretation itself part of the political problem. Ilott (2014) develops this active role of the reader, while Munos (2012) shows how the attacks trigger a crisis in Changez's identification as a successful model minority. These studies demonstrate that the novel's psychological power comes not from depicting the attack directly but from showing how its aftermath reorganizes the protagonist's understanding of himself.

Work on *Home Fire* often concentrates on British Muslim identity, citizenship, radicalization, gender, and the novel's adaptation of Sophocles' *Antigone*. Banerjee (2020) situates the novel within debates over multiculturalism and British Muslim identity. Other readings examine the politics of fear and anti-terrorism legislation, noting that the novel places the instrumental use of fear within its own intellectual world. The *Antigone* structure turns the denial of burial and public mourning into a conflict between

family obligation and state authority. Psychological suffering is therefore inseparable from legal status and public representation.

Although existing scholarship offers rich readings of each novel, a comparative psychological analysis across these three positions remains valuable. The corpus places together an immediate survivor, a racialized migrant undergoing ideological estrangement, and a diasporic family affected by recruitment, surveillance, and citizenship deprivation. This arrangement reveals that terrorism produces several overlapping afterlives. It may return as sensory memory, as damaged intimacy, as public suspicion, as identity fracture, or as grief that the state refuses to recognize. The present study contributes by treating these not as separate themes but as connected expressions of traumatic and political insecurity.

Research Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative, interpretive research design based on comparative close reading. The primary texts are *Falling Man* by Don DeLillo, *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* by Mohsin Hamid, and *Home Fire* by Kamila Shamsie. They were selected purposively because each places terrorism and its aftermath at the center of psychological and social experience while presenting a distinct narrative position. The corpus includes American, Pakistani diasporic, and British Pakistani perspectives, enabling comparison across survivor trauma, racialized alienation, radicalization, family grief, and state securitization.

The analysis proceeds through thematic coding rather than statistical measurement. The principal categories are intrusive memory and repetition, fear and hypervigilance, grief and mourning, identity fracture, alienation, damaged relationships, surveillance, radicalization, and precarious

belonging. Narrative features are examined alongside these themes, including chronology, focalization, silence, repetition, dramatic monologue, shifts in perspective, and the use of public media within fictional narration. Attention is given to how form shapes the reader's access to psychological experience.

The interpretation is informed primarily by Caruth's model of belated trauma, Herman's relational account of recovery, and LaCapra's distinction between acting out and working through. Postcolonial critiques by Visser and Craps are used to prevent the analysis from separating psychological injury from race, migration, citizenship, and unequal political power. Secondary scholarship on post 9/11 fiction and on the selected novels provides critical context but does not replace direct textual analysis.

The study is limited to three English language novels and does not claim that their fictional representations constitute clinical evidence about all survivors or communities affected by terrorism. Terms such as trauma, anxiety, and psychological disturbance are used as literary and interpretive categories, not as retrospective medical diagnoses of fictional characters. The purpose is to examine representation: how fiction imagines the mental, emotional, and relational consequences of terrorism and the security regimes that follow it.

Discussion

Terrorism as a Continuing Psychological Event

Across the three novels, terrorism does not remain confined to the moment of violence. It alters the characters' experience of time. In *Falling Man*, Keith emerges from the World Trade Center carrying physical traces of the disaster and returns to the apartment of his estranged wife, Lianne. His return appears to restore family order, but the household becomes a space in which the

attack continues indirectly. Ordinary gestures carry an intensity that the characters cannot fully explain. Keith's attention narrows, his emotional communication weakens, and his later immersion in poker creates a repetitive world of limited variables. The game offers rules, probabilities, and controlled risk, in contrast to the incomprehensible randomness of the attack. Yet this apparent control also signals withdrawal from relational life.

DeLillo's fragmented chronology reinforces this psychological condition. The narrative does not simply move away from September 11. It circles back through memory, bodily sensation, and recurring images. The performance artist known as Falling Man suspends himself from structures in a posture associated with those who fell from the towers. His public reenactment interrupts daily routines and forces witnesses to encounter an image that official remembrance might prefer to stabilize. For Lianne, the performance is not a neutral work of art. It creates an involuntary confrontation with fear and mortality. The fictional performance illustrates Caruth's idea of belated return, but it also shows that traumatic memory is culturally mediated. Images can preserve witness, reopen injury, or become public spectacle.

The Reluctant Fundamentalist locates the continuing event in identity rather than bodily survival. Changez is not present at the attack, yet September 11 reorganizes his life. Before it, he imagines himself as a mobile member of a global professional elite. Princeton, Underwood Samson, and his relationship with Erica seem to confirm his entry into American privilege. After the attack, signs that previously appeared secondary become politically charged: his name, nationality, beard, accent, and travel history. The psychological effect develops through a widening distance between his external performance and internal judgment.

His polished professional identity no longer secures recognition.

Home Fire presents terrorism as an inherited and anticipatory condition. The Pasha siblings grow up under the shadow of a father associated with jihadism. Before Parvaiz joins the Islamic State, the family's life is already shaped by stigma, secrecy, and the expectation of scrutiny. Terrorism therefore precedes the new act as a family history and a social label. After Parvaiz leaves Britain, the consequences intensify through fear, regret, political exposure, and the threat of statelessness. The novel shows how a terrorist organization exploits emotional vulnerability, but it also shows how punitive state responses can convert a young man's wrongdoing into collective suffering for his family.

Memory, Repetition, and the Failure of Ordinary Time

Traumatic memory differs from voluntary recollection because it disrupts rather than confirms a coherent sense of the past. Keith cannot make September 11 into a completed story. The attack remains present through physical habits and repeated encounters. His relationship with Florence, whose briefcase he carried from the tower, is founded on shared proximity to disaster. Their bond provides recognition because each understands what ordinary listeners cannot. At the same time, the relationship risks becoming a closed circuit of repetition. They meet through the object that survived, exchange memories, and return psychologically to the tower. Shared testimony offers temporary connection, but it does not automatically produce recovery. Lianne's response demonstrates another form of repetition. Her anxiety about cognitive decline, influenced by her father's illness, becomes entangled with the attack's threat to memory and identity. Her work with people experiencing Alzheimer's

disease places narrative loss beside traumatic memory: one condition involves memories that disappear, while the other involves an event that will not recede. This contrast deepens the novel's psychological inquiry. Human identity depends on memory, yet memory can be both necessary and unbearable.

Changez's monologue is itself an extended act of recollection. He tells his American guest the story of his transformation, but because the listener never speaks directly, the narrative remains unstable. Changez controls the language while continuously interpreting the listener's gestures, fear, and possible intentions. The structure creates mutual surveillance. Is the American a tourist, an agent, or an assassin? Is Changez a hospitable narrator, a political critic, or a threat? The absence of confirmation makes the reader experience the uncertainty that security discourse often resolves too quickly through stereotype. Repetition here becomes interpretive: Changez revisits moments in which he misrecognized America and America misrecognized him.

In *Home Fire*, family memory operates across generations. Parvaiz's desire to know his absent father makes him vulnerable to Farooq's recruitment. The recruiter offers a heroic and simplified paternal narrative that fills an emotional absence. Parvaiz's radicalization is not explained by one psychological cause, nor is it excused. Instead, the novel represents how grief, masculinity, belonging, and manipulation can converge. Once in Syria, the promised community becomes coercive reality. His wish to return indicates the collapse of ideological fantasy, but political structures leave little space for reintegration. The past is weaponized first by the recruiter and later by the state.

Identity Crisis and the Racialized Politics of Fear

The selected novels reveal that the psychological consequences of terrorism are distributed unequally. *Falling Man* centers subjects publicly recognized as victims. Their pain fits the dominant national narrative, even when the novel complicates that narrative. Changez and the Pasha siblings occupy a more unstable position. They may experience fear, grief, and loss, but public discourse also reads them through the category of potential danger. Their trauma is therefore accompanied by the demand to demonstrate innocence.

Changez's identity crisis develops when his earlier admiration for American power becomes impossible to maintain. Underwood Samson teaches him to focus on economic fundamentals, stripping companies of history and human context in order to determine value. This professional method parallels a political worldview that measures societies through utility and dominance. His assignment in the Philippines sharpens his awareness that he represents American capital in another postcolonial society. After September 11, American military action and domestic suspicion connect his professional unease with his Pakistani identity. His beard becomes both a personal choice and a visible refusal to erase difference.

Erica's psychological withdrawal offers a parallel but not identical narrative of loss. Her fixation on Chris prevents her from forming a fully present relationship with Changez. Changez attempts to enter the emotional space occupied by the dead man, a disturbing moment that exposes the unequal terms of intimacy. Erica's name has often been read as suggestively linked to America, but she remains more than a simple national symbol. Her inability to release the past mirrors a society absorbed in its own loss, while Changez experiences the

cost of being admitted only through resemblance to someone already desired. The relationship dramatizes conditional belonging at both personal and national levels.

Home Fire intensifies this condition through citizenship. Isma's questioning at the airport establishes from the beginning that mobility is not experienced equally. Her British identity can be examined, delayed, and made dependent on correct answers. The scene creates anticipatory anxiety before any new terrorist act occurs. Aneeka, Parvaiz, and Isma must negotiate not only their own choices but also the inherited public meaning of their father. The novel thus depicts what Banerjee (2020) identifies as a central problem of British Muslim identity: formal membership does not necessarily produce secure cultural recognition.

Karamat Lone appears to overcome this insecurity by embracing a strict public language of national loyalty. As Home Secretary, he distances himself from forms of Muslim identity that might expose him to accusations of divided allegiance. His political position does not eliminate precarious belonging; it transforms it into discipline directed at others. His response to Parvaiz demonstrates how a person from a minority background may reproduce exclusion to secure authority. The psychological logic of fear passes into policy.

Damaged Intimacy, Grief, and the Family

Terrorism enters each novel through intimate relationships. In *Falling Man*, Keith's return to Lianne is physically immediate but emotionally incomplete. The family temporarily gathers around survival, yet proximity does not equal communication. Keith's detachment and Lianne's anxiety reveal that trauma can isolate people even when they share a home. Their son Justin and his friends scan the sky

for an imagined figure they call Bill Lawton, a child's mishearing of Bin Laden. This detail shows how political fear enters childhood language. The children attempt to manage uncertainty through ritualized watching, turning global threat into a repeated private activity.

In *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*, Changez's personal relationships become inseparable from political estrangement. Erica cannot escape her earlier bereavement, and Changez cannot remain the version of himself that America welcomed. Their failed intimacy is structured by absences: Chris, the secure pre-attack America imagined by its citizens, and the untroubled cosmopolitan future imagined by Changez. Psychological loss is therefore relational and historical. The novel refuses a therapeutic closure in which either character simply moves on.

Home Fire places sibling love at the center of its tragedy. Isma has assumed parental responsibility, Aneeka's loyalty to Parvaiz is fierce, and Parvaiz longs for an identity not defined by absence. These bonds provide care but also generate secrecy and conflict. Aneeka's relationship with Eamonn begins within a political strategy but develops emotional force. Because Eamonn is Karamat's son, private love becomes inseparable from state power. The novel's adaptation of *Antigone* culminates in the struggle over Parvaiz's body. Denial of burial is not only a legal or diplomatic act; it obstructs mourning and attempts to regulate which losses may be publicly grieved.

Herman's emphasis on safety and reconnection clarifies why recovery remains limited in all three texts. Keith survives but does not establish sustained emotional safety. Changez gains political clarity and returns to Lahore, but his encounter with the American remains surrounded by possible violence. The Pasha family cannot mourn within a secure community because their grief is turned into media spectacle and

political judgment. In each case, the conditions required for recovery are unstable or absent.

Narrative Form and the Ethics of Uncertainty

The novels do not merely describe psychological disturbance; their forms require readers to experience uncertainty, fragmentation, and divided judgment. *Falling Man* uses dislocated chronology and recurring sensory images. The structure weakens the expectation that time will naturally produce healing. It also refuses a smooth national story moving from attack to unity and recovery. The reader instead encounters interrupted consciousness and relationships that remain unresolved.

Hamid's dramatic monologue creates a different psychological pressure. Because the American's speech is filtered through Changez, the reader must infer tone, gesture, and danger. This structure exposes how quickly perception becomes securitized. A movement toward a pocket, a glance, or a metallic object may be ordinary or lethal. The ambiguity is not a puzzle with a final answer; it is the novel's ethical method. As Morey (2011) and Ilott (2014) suggest, the reader becomes responsible for acts of judgment. The form reveals how fear can convert incomplete evidence into certainty.

Home Fire uses multiple focal characters and incorporates contemporary forms of public communication, including news reports and social media. Private grief is repeatedly exposed to public interpretation. The movement among Isma, Eamonn, Parvaiz, Aneeka, and Karamat prevents any single voice from owning the tragedy. Readers see incompatible loyalties from within, although access does not erase moral responsibility. This polyphonic structure is especially important in a terrorism narrative because public discourse often compresses

complex lives into labels such as victim, extremist, traitor, or patriot.

Taken together, the narrative strategies create an ethics of uncertainty. They do not make terrorism morally ambiguous as an act of violence. Rather, they make the human field around it more complex. The novels distinguish explanation from justification and empathy from approval. They ask readers to understand vulnerability without romanticizing extremism and to recognize the damage caused by security policies without denying the danger to which those policies respond.

From Individual Trauma to Political Insecurity

A major finding of the comparison is that psychological suffering cannot be separated from institutional response. In *Falling Man*, the immediate attack dominates consciousness, but the novel also suggests the pressure of media images and national narration. In *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*, the most sustained psychological transformation occurs through the post-attack environment: suspicion at airports, workplace estrangement, military action, and racial hostility. In *Home Fire*, surveillance and citizenship policy directly determine the family's capacity to act, return, bury, and mourn.

This movement supports postcolonial critiques of trauma theory. A purely event-based model may explain Keith's intrusive return more readily than Changez's cumulative alienation or the Pasha family's inherited insecurity. Their distress emerges through repeated encounters with power rather than one overwhelming instant. Visser's expanded model and Craps's postcolonial intervention allow the analysis to include structural and historical pressures. Terrorism remains central, but it operates within longer histories of empire, migration, racial classification, and uneven mobility.

The three novels finally show that fear can reproduce the divisions terrorism seeks to intensify. When communities treat identity as evidence, they isolate individuals whose belonging is already fragile. Isolation does not mechanically cause radicalization, and the novels avoid so simple a claim. Yet *Home Fire* demonstrates how emotional need can be exploited by recruiters, while both *Hamid* and *Shamsie* reveal how exclusion narrows the space for complex citizenship. A psychologically informed reading therefore has political significance: security responses that ignore dignity, grief, and belonging may deepen the conditions of fear they claim to control.

Future Recommendations

Future research should widen the geographical range of terrorism fiction. Comparative studies could include novels from Afghanistan, Iraq, Nigeria, Sri Lanka, and other societies where terrorism and counterterrorism have shaped everyday life. This would reduce the continuing dominance of September 11 as the central reference point and reveal how local histories, languages, religions, and political institutions alter the representation of trauma.

Further studies should examine gender more closely. The selected novels show that women often carry emotional labor, preserve family memory, and confront public judgment, but their experiences differ across race, class, and citizenship. Research could compare the psychological representation of mothers, sisters, widows, female survivors, and women recruited into violent organizations. Such work should avoid treating women only as passive victims or moral symbols.

Researchers could also study children and intergenerational trauma. Justin's response in *Falling Man* and the inherited stigma affecting the Pasha siblings suggest that

terrorism enters childhood through family silence, media language, and public fear. Fiction can illuminate how children misunderstand, repeat, or transform the narratives given to them. This area would benefit from careful dialogue between literary studies, memory studies, and developmental psychology without reducing fiction to clinical data.

Digital media deserve sustained attention. *Home Fire* demonstrates how news cycles and online communication turn grief into spectacle and expose private individuals to mass judgment. Newer fiction increasingly addresses algorithmic surveillance, online radicalization, deepfakes, and digitally networked extremist communities. Future research should explore how these technologies change the experience of threat, memory, recruitment, and public mourning.

Finally, trauma theory should continue to engage postcolonial, feminist, critical race, and migration studies. Scholars should ask who receives the social status of victim, whose pain is doubted, and how laws governing borders and citizenship influence psychological security. Comparative research should retain moral distinctions between victims and perpetrators while examining the broader networks of vulnerability in which violence occurs.

Conclusion

Falling Man, *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*, and *Home Fire* represent terrorism as an enduring psychological and social condition. DeLillo shows the survivor caught in bodily memory, repetition, emotional detachment, and damaged domestic life. *Hamid* shows a migrant subject whose professional confidence and cultural identification collapse under racial suspicion and geopolitical disillusionment. *Shamsie* shows a family confronting inherited stigma, extremist manipulation, surveillance,

citizenship deprivation, and obstructed grief. Together, the novels move the study of terrorism beyond the moment of attack toward its prolonged effects on memory, identity, intimacy, and belonging.

Trauma theory explains the delayed return of overwhelming experience and the formal importance of repetition, silence, and fractured chronology. Yet the comparison also confirms the limits of a model centered only on a singular shocking event. Changez and the Pasha family experience forms of cumulative insecurity produced by racialization, migration, and state power. Postcolonial trauma criticism therefore provides a necessary expansion: it places psychological suffering within unequal histories and institutions.

The selected fiction does not excuse terrorist violence or erase differences between those who inflict harm and those who endure it. Its achievement lies elsewhere. It resists the reduction of human beings to secure categories and reveals how fear travels through bodies, families, workplaces, borders, and public language. By granting access to incomplete memories and competing perspectives, contemporary fiction creates a space for critical empathy. It allows readers to confront the psychological damage of terrorism while also questioning social responses that deepen alienation. The novels finally suggest that recovery requires more than physical survival or political victory. It requires conditions in which memory can be spoken, grief can be recognized, and belonging does not depend on the erasure of identity.

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