Challenging the Stereotype of the Violent Muslim/Arab in a sample of three American modern novels: Lorrie Moore's *A Gate at the Stairs,* Claire Messud's *The Woman Upstairs,* and Lorraine Adams *Harbor*

Contester le stéréotype du musulman/arab violent dans un échantillon de trois romans modernes américains: Lorrie Moore's *A Gate at the Stairs,* Claire Messud's *The Woman Upstairs,* and Lorraine Adams *Harbor*.

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Summary:

The September 11 attacks (also referred to as 9/11) marked a change observed inthe world's focus on Islam and Arabs/Middle Easterners specifically. Post 9/11 fiction is highly characterized by Orientalist stereotyping. Islam is claimed to nurture terrorism, and promote bloodshed, and Arabs/Middle Easternersare called the "terrorists" who have beenbehind the attacks.Asa result, a powerful massive and aggressive literary attack has been directed towards contemporary Arab and Muslim societies for their "violence."In the light of Edward Said's *Orientalism* (1978), this article seeks to discuss three post 9/11 American literary works and highlight their writers' positive portrayal of the main Arab/Muslim characters, a portrayal which dismantles the stronglyestablished stereotype of violence that post 9/11 fiction emphatically mirrors. These works are Lorrie Moore's *A Gate at the Stairs* (2009), Claire Messud's *The Woman Upstairs* (2013) and Lorraine Adams *Harbor* (2004). By exploiting these writers' portrayal of the protagonists of the novels and by referring to keynovels inpost 9/11fictionwhichoffer key features ofthe stereotype of violence, we aim at demonstrating that Lorrie Moore's *A Gate at the stairs,* Claire Messud's*The Woman Upstairs and* Lorraine Adams' *Harbor* challenge the stereotype of violent Arabs/Muslims spread in the aftermath of 9/11.

Keywords : Post9/11Americanfiction;StereotypeofviolentArab/Muslim;EdwardSaid's *Orientalism* ; Positive portrayal ; Challenge.

Résumé

Les attentats du 11 Septembre ont marqué un changement observédans la concentration du monde surl'Islam et les Arabes / Moyen-Orient en particulier. La fiction post-11 Septembre est fortement caractérisée par les stéréotypes orientalistes dont L'Islam est censé nourrir le terrorisme et promouvoir l'effusion de sang et les Arabes / Moyen-Orient sont appelés les "terrorists" qui ontété à l'origine des attaques. En conséquence, une puissante attaque littéraire massive etagressive a été dirigéecontre les sociétésarabes et musulmanescontemporaines pour leur "violence". À la lumière de l'Orientalisme d' Edward Said (1978), cet article cherche à discuter trois oeuvres littéraires américaines post-11 Septembre et à mettre en évidence la représentation positive des personnages principaux arabo-musulmans, une représentation qui démantèle le stéréotype de la violence fortement établidans la fiction post-11 Septembre qui le reflète avec emphase. Ces oeuvres sont :A Gate at the Stairs de Lorrie Moore (2009), The Woman Upstairs de Claire Messud (2013) et Harbor de Lorraine Adams (2004). En exploitant la représentation de cesécrivains des protagonistes des romans et en se référant aux romans clés de la fiction post-11 Septembre qui offrent des caractéristiques clés du stéréotype de la violence, nous visons à démontrerque A Gate at the Stairs de Lorrie Moore, The Woman Upstairs de Claire Messud et Harbor de Lorraine Adams, remettent en question le stéréotype des Arabes / Musulmans "violents" répandus au lendemain du 11 Septembre.

Les mots clés: Fictionaméricainepost – 11 Septembre ; Stéréotypede laviolenceArabe/ Musulmane; l'Orientalisme d' Edward Said; Représentation positive ; Défi.

I. Introduction:

Post 9/11 fiction ishighly characterized by Orientalist stereotyping which is most apparent in key American novels of that period such as *Falling Man* by Don Delillo (2007) and*Terrorist* by John Updike (2006) in addition to many other literary works. In his *Orientalism*, Edward Said argues that "the Orient was almost a European invention" (Said, 1978, p.1) and Orientalism is not justa study of the Eastby the West,but itis alsoa way of perceiving Arab peoples and cultures and then distorting the reality by means of representations that accommodate preconceived notions (1978, p.203).Indeed ,Western literature has often stereotyped Arabs /Muslims butit seems thatthe 9/11 events have strengthened the old Orient alist discourse. 9/11 marked a change observed in

the world's focus on Islam and Arabs/Middle Easterners specifically. These events of worldwide significance have had a heavy influence on Westerners' attitudes towards Islam and Arabs/Middle Easterners. Islam is claimed to nurture terrorism and promote bloodshedand Arabs/Middle Easterners are considered the "terrorists" who have been behind the attacks.

As a result, a powerful massive and aggressive literary attack has been directed towards contemporary Arab and Muslim societies fortheir "violence". Noticeably, post 9/11novelsprovide Orientalistimages of violent Muslims/Arabs. However, the novels under study, Lorrie Moore's *A Gate at the Stairs*(2009), Claire Messud's *The Woman Upstairs* (2013) *and Lorraine Adams' Harbor*(2004) offer positive images of peaceful Arabs/Muslims. In the light of Edward Said's *Orientalism* (1978), this article intends to highlight and discuss these writers' positive portrayal of the main Arab/Muslim characters, a portrayal which dismantles the strongly established stereotype of violence that post 9/11 fiction emphatically mirrors.By exploiting the writers' portrayal of the Muslim/Arab protagonists of the novels, and by referring to key novels in post 9/11 fiction which offer key features of the stereotype of violence, we aim at demonstrating thatLorrie Moore's *A Gate at the Stairs* , Claire Messud's*The Woman Upstairs and Lorraine Adams' Harbor* challenge the stereotype of violent Arabs/Muslims spread in the aftermath of 9/11.

I.1 **Arabs/Muslimsand "Violence"inPost9/11American Fiction:**

In his Orientalism, Said argues that Western fiction advocates a "backward, barbaric Orient" (1978, p.153). Post 9/11 American fiction portrays Islam as a religion that promotes violence and the Orient as a harsh space in which violence prevails .Namely, Muslims have often been said to believe in the power of "swords", and Zoe Ferraris' novel *FindingNouf* (2008) may be the best illustration:"Should we Muslim sit back until we are devoured by the unbelievers?" demanded IbnAzziz. "I say, put them to the sword and scatter their bones! I say, whatever good exists is thanks to the sword! Compromise with unbelievers is a defeat for righteousness! The sword is the Key to paradise" (Ferraris, 2006, p.392).Another example is Sherry Jones' *The Jewel of Medina* (2008)which starts with an Orientalist description that bestillustrates violence: " Join me in a harsh, exoticworld ofsaffronandswordfights"(Jones, 2008, p.2). Meccaand Medina, thes ettings in this noveld well Muslimswho are"swordholders."This indeed isnotanewphenomenonbut has deep roots in the past. That is to say, Islam has been regarded in this way since early timeaccording toKaren Armstrong whopoints out that the history of Islamophobia in Western culture is very old: "we have a long history of Islamophobia in Western culturethat dates back to the time ofthe Crusades. Inthe twelfth century, Christian monks in Europe insisted that Islamwas a violent religion of the sword" (qtd in.Ahmed et al, 2012, p.140) ,and this one-dimentional view of Islam has persisted ever since. Updike, among other post 9/11 American writers, participates in this long tradition in his novel *Terrorist* (2006).

Updike's effort through *Terrorist* is essentially aimed at proving that Islam promotes violence. The same aim is fulfilled in Robert Ferrigno's *Prayers for theAssassin* (2006),which stronglyconveys the idea that Islam advocates Terrorismand thus violence. Likewise, Don Dellilo introduces Islamic regulations as the source of violence. He proves that Muslims' violence isrooted in the Quran by coining the expression "sword verses" of the Quran in his *Falling Man*and by highlyassociating love of God with violence. The novel shows that Muslims' love of God is strongly linked to killing Americans. Interestingly, the stereotype of Arabs'/Muslims' violence stressed in all the above post 9/11 novels seems to be challenged in Claire Messud's *The Woman Upstairs*, Lorrie Moore's *AGate at the Stairs* and Lorraine Adams' *Harbor*.

I.2 The peaceful " terrorist " child:

Reza Shahid, the character who is called a "terrorist" in *The Woman Upstairs*and thus is supposedto be violent andto embodypost 9/11stereotypes isthe youngest peacefulcharacter with Arab background. He is as Nora (the American protagonist of the novel) observes, not an ordinary child, but "an exception."Reza is "Exceptional. Adaptable. Compassionate. Generous.So intelligent.So quick.So sweet. With such a sense of humor" (Messud, 2013, p.13) and neverviolent. More importantly, the moment of this so called "terrorist"encounter with Nora seems to

Bloom the wholestoryasshe states when shestartsrecounting it: "It all started withthe boy. With Reza" (2013, p.2), the first member of the Shahids family and the one who leads her to find ful fillment.

The possibility that Reza is violent or will be violent when he grows up is totally eliminated in Nora's depiction of this Arab child. As an elementary school teacher,Nora compares Reza to the other schoolboys she teaches and displays the magical attraction he draws at school and which helps him earn the good graces of his classmates and teachers, starting with herself, "What did any of our praise mean, but that we'd all fallen in love with him" (2013,p.13).Reza is still the same in Nora's eyes, he seems to keep the same traits even when he grows up as the writer points out: She "still saw in him the perfection that was," (2013, p.9)a statement which eliminates the possibility that he maybe violent in hisadulthood. Additionally, Messud hintsat the kind ofmanReza willbe in the future.This Arab child wants to make the world better when he grows up. He tells Nora: "when I grow up…I'm going to be an architect. I want to create worlds for people." Significantly, Messud presents this Arab child as an "architect" and not as a "terrorist". This stands in opposition to "the stereotypes of Arabs as evil aggressors determined to destroy the West" (Jackson, 2003, p. 76).

I.3.The non-violent Arab father:

Likewise, Reza's father, Skandar Shahid, a Lebanese university lecturer, does not seemto be an example of the classic Orientalist representation of Arabs. First, Skandar despises any kind of violence which is according to him " very upsetting, wherever it takes place, whomever it hurts" (Messud, 2013,p.179). Nowhere inthe novel,is asignofviolenceattributed to Skandar. Incontrast, he proves to have a peaceful spirit through his reaction to his son's problem: Reza is violently attacked in the school by three bullies but Skandar's reaction is peaceful and optimistic too. Hedoes not show any verbal or physical violence towards what happens to his son. Nora asks him about hisopinionofwhat happenstoRezabeforethe vacation, about punchinghimandcalling him "a terrorist". He wishes it had not happened but he knowsin his inner feelingsand thoughtsthat he is "wishing the impossible"; he describes himself as"a realist"," a pragmatist" and" also an optimist". He re -inforces these adjectives saying that he could not do what he did if he was not so:"To what end does one speak about the ethics of history, about the moral questions inherent in the very historyof history, if not then to look to the future and hope—no, not to hope, to work, for better?" (2013, p. 181) Skandar says "to work, for better" and not "to fight" or "to kill" for better thus belittling post 9/11 stereotype and going totally againstEmmett Tyrrell's claimin *Harper's* magazine " that Arabs are basically murderers and that violence and deceit are carried in the Arab genes"(Said, 1978, p.288).

It seems that Messudmakes use of a peaceful Arab character to dismantle the old cliché of the Arab being "violent" by making him aware of the way stereotypes are established and thus explaining how Arabs/Muslims are stereotyped as inherently violent . When he recounts his country's history to Nora, he first tells her about the assassination of the Lebanese Prime minister Hariri, about the Civil War in Lebanon, then about his childhood dreams then he regrets starting withviolence insteadoftelling her howBeirut is beautifullyrebuilt, believingthat Lebanonand his people would be stereotyped because he deduces that this is the way history is told to people and this is how the world works:

> *What does it mean, you see, that the first thing every American child knows about Germany is Hitler? What if the first thing you knew was something else? And maybe some people would say that now it's important , after the Second World War, it's ethical and vital that Hitler is the first thing a child knows. But someone else can argue the opposite .And what would it do, how would it change things, if no body were allowed to know anything about Hitler, about the war ,about anyofit, until first they learned about Brahms, Beethoven and Bach, about Hegel and Lessing and Fichte, about Schopenhauer, about Rilke—but all this, you had to know first. Or*

> *one thing only, the Brahms Piano Quintet in F Minor, or the Goldberg Variations, or Laoco?n—one of those things you had to know and appreciate before you learned about the Nazis (Messud, 2013, p.185).*

Moreover , Skandar emphasizes the idea that incorrect facts may beattributed falsely topeople in reply to Nora who asks him about Sirena's artistic work:

> *I haven't really thought about it, but if you ask mefor ananswer straight off, I'll sayyes. Witha set of facts, as in historical facts, there are obviously incorrect interpretations. So, with art—a different sort of assemblage of signs, and of course signs are not facts, although they may refer to facts— theremight bemoreleeway, but therewouldcertainly bea point at whicha reading or interpretation would be not merely inept, or extreme, but simply wrong (2013,p. 254).*

This passage implicitly questions the Orientalist stereotyping spread in post 9/11 American fiction and attracts the reader's attention to the possibility of falsely attributing incorrect facts and traits to Arabs/Muslims.

I.4.The " Terrorist"lover:

In the same way Skandar and his son Reza are positively portrayed in *The Woman Upstairs*. Reynaldo, the Muslim protagonist of *A Gate at The Stairs,* does not reflect "the classic Orientalist representation of Muslim masculinity as inherently violent"(Grewal,2017, p.82). On the contrary, he takes a peaceful role in a scene of love in the novel: Violence in *A Gate* is turned into a scene of love. The violent 9/11 attacks which equated the Arab/Middle Easterner with a "terrorist" and thus with "violence" are replaced with a love scene whose actors are a Muslim man (Reynaldo) and an American woman (Tassie). Tassie depicts herself saying "As if adorned for a costume party's idea of a terrorist, I wore my Egyptian scarab necklace and my Arabian Goddess perfume and a clumsy blue ring made in the backstreets of Karachi." She adds, "I was politically incorrect. The idea was a surprise attack which seemed to work" (Moore, 2009, p.184). After this introduction, Tassie describes the scene of love which melts them together:"Often we didn't talk at all. His arms were soft and strong. His penis was as small and satiny as a trumper mushroom in Easter basket grass. His mouth slurped carefully as if every part of me were an oyster, his, which made me feel I loved him" (2009, p.184). Reynaldo thus is not like Delillo 's Hammad, a fictional version of one of the 9/11 Hijakers in *Falling Man* , but a peaceful lover in the "surprise attack" which is an allusion to the 9/11 attacks. Noticeably, whereas the 9/11 attacks are extremely violent and have resulted in Islamophobia , the "surprise attack" depicted by Tassie is full of love and tenderness, as Tassie observes " there was a tender but energetic adhockery to our sex (2009,p.184).

I.5. Innocent Arab escapingviolence :thirstforpeace:

Like Messud's peaceful Skandar and Reza in*The Woman Upstairs* and Moore's peaceful Reynaldo in *A Gate*, Adams' protagonist , Aziz Arkoun, the Algerian illegal immigrant in *Harbor* proves to be peaceful as well. First, he is innocent from any act of violence. He escapes the violence that prevailed Algeria in the 1990s and refuses to be a terrorist once in New York and has never indulged himself in dubious affairs. Aziz is not like Dellilo's Hammad in *Falling Man* who gets influenced by Amir, the most prominent of the novel's terrorists, who fills Hammad's mind with beliefs and concepts he claims to bring from Quran ,leading him to involve in terrorist acts. In other words, no one in *Harbor* has been able to get Aziz involved in illegal affairs and most importantly in terrorism. In other words, Aziz never lets himself enroll in a terrorist cell or advocate terrorism: Aziz is a peaceful man.

The members of his family call him "a pigeon" because he "was always flying away"; his mother finds difficulty in finding him as if he has wings. Thus, his sister Anissa calls him "Hamaam", and it sticks to him. Though this does not show that he is called so on account of his peacefulness, "Piegon" seems to be the appropriate nickname for a man like Aziz who, throughout his story, searches stability moving from Algeria to America then traveling from one place to another within America peacefully without harming anyone neither Americans nor Arabs, the opposite image of Hammad whose mission is to kill Americans. Besides, though it is not explained as a hint to peace in the novel, it is very positive and

unexpected to attribute such a nickname (pigeon) to a Muslim in the post 9/11 context because whatever the explanation is, pigeon has always been a symbol of peace. In short, "Pigeon" does not reflect the stereotypical images of bloody Arab/Muslim characters offered in post 9/11 fiction. Delillo's Muslim characters for instance, are strongly ready to kill the others believing that violent acts and death make them closer to God. Therefore, other kinds of birds, aggressive birds and not "pigeon", would be more appropriate in the case of Aziz in *Harbor* but Adams seems to avoid negative portrayalsand makes her work different from *Falling Man*: While Aziz lives with the Americans and has never thought to harm any of them, Hammad's duty in the novel is "to kill Americans" (Delillo, 2007, p.171).

In addition to this, all the details in *Harbor* allude to Aziz's peacefulness. Aziz's experience in the army in Algeria continues to haunt him in his new life in America, and he hates being told of the massacre taking place in Algiers. When his friends once discuss the atrocities of terrorism and tackle ambivalent questions, " Aziz, eyes down, encouraged peace to his chest, his belly, his eyes, his ears, repeating a word of one kind or another to still himself" (Adams,2009,p. 71), a portrayal that sheds light on his despise of violence. Throughout the novel, Aziz neither uses physical violence against anyone nor does he practice psychological violence .Violence has never been part of his notion of life. For him, life is "a series of dramas in which the goal was a place where you could talk, truly talk, and say whatever it was that haunted you at night alone. He would get to that place" (2009, p.104), the place he wishes to reach is " to talk" and not "to kill", a statement which reflects his thirst for peace. Even his way of thinking tends towards peace. At his arrival in Boston, Aziz feels wretched. He possesses nothing to eat or to put on, yet he does not have the slightest idea to commit a violent act to save himself. Instead, he moves into the blocks of the city, the first thing he looks for is a peaceful place where to sleep. He thinks of a church and he imagines a kind priest with "a face of love" (2004,p. 6) that he really needs in his loneliness and tough conditions in USA. Such a face may well reassure him and feed his peaceful nature.

Moreover, one of Aziz's jobs to gain his living in USA is selling coffee in cups with a piece of writing on them. While Arabs/Muslims are portrayed in post 9/11 novels as "bearded men with swords", Adams' Muslim protagonist Aziz comes as a bearded man who believes in "the power of words" instead of " swords". Adams once says in an interview:

> *I wanted to use it (this idea of selling coffee) because I think it speaks to several things. The first thing is that it speaks to a kind of sweetness in Aziz…that he has this idea about how to make money. And it is very modest in its way, but it also has something to do with writing. Because I think Aziz in a lot of ways is a character who even though he isn't a writer does believe in the power of the written words (2008, p.2).*

Therefore, Adams distances her Aziz from "swords" and talks about a "kind of sweetness in Aziz" which makes it evident that Aziz is not violent for "sweetness" and violence can never meet.

Islam has been portrayed as a source of terrorism, and Muslims have often been said to believe in the power of "swords". Zoe Ferraris' novel *Finding Nouf* (2008) may be the best illustration as mentioned previously. Interestingly, the swords, the means of violence in post 9/11 fiction, are beautifully replaced with "words" in Adams' novel. Adams provides more details about the words Aziz uses to cancel any possibility of violence since words are vital instruments which may either promote violence or establish peace and happiness. Yet, Aziz's written words serve peace and happiness. All the proverbs he uses can in no way be linked to violence: "Min ratl hakya tafham wiqya : From a pound of talk, an ounce of understanding" means being talkative is bad (2004, p.218), "Kun namla watakul sukr: work like an ant and you'll eat sugar" stresses hard work, and " Al ketheb bem'hallu ebada: Lying in its proper place is equal to worship" reflects good intentions.

Therefore, Aziz does not write anything on the paper cups, and significantly he does not write words that suggest violence. Contrarily, he writes words that promote a wise peaceful life to a great extent.

I.6.The violent Westerner:

Post 9/11 American fiction strongly advocates a violent East and a peaceful West. However, the three novels under study reveal the opposite; they all advocate a peaceful East as explained above. Namely, two of them suggest a violent West: Unlike Adams who does not attribute violence to her American characters in *Harbor*, Moore and Messud do not stop at portraying the Arab/Muslim characters positively, but go further and attribute violence to the Westerners. In *A Gate*, the American characters who symbolize the West are depicted as violent, a feature which has been tightly linked to the Arab/Muslim characters who symbolize the East. Images of violence are attributed to American characters such as Sarah, Edward and Robert. Significantly, these American characters prove to carry violence in their genes.

Even unconsciously, Sarah and her husband Edward are presented as having a potential to kill, a fact which is made obvious in several scenes throughout the novel. One of the most revealing examples is the way this couple celebrate their marriage anniversary. Edward tells Sarah: “Don’t you remember? Every year on that day you put on a black armbond and then I go looking for you and find you on top of some bell tower with a bag of chips and some Diet Coke and a rifle” (2009, p.98). A strange violent way of celebrating a happy event in which Sarah looks like a terrorist preparing himself for a violent act and this is explicitly apparent in the above description and also in Tassie’s reaction at Sarah’s question that follows this violent “performance”. Sarah avoids taking part in the conversation fearing that “perhaps they would suddenly, brutally, fire [her]” (Moore, 2009, p.99).

Violence is present wherever the American characters go and in whatever they say even if they joke . Joking, Edward once tells Sarah: “Darling, remember when we murdered someone and American Express took care of everything?” (2004, p.115**)** His wife Sarah, in turn, seems to be more violent than him. Tassie mentions that Sarah once leaves home then comes back suddenly because she forgets something. She goes to the kitchen “opened a drawer, and grabbed a kitchen knife, which she stuck gleefully in her leather bag” (2009, p.131).Commenting at this strange deed, “a concealed weapon, or a chef’s tool? Who can say? Already, driving around in winter with a shovel in my car makes me feel like a serial killer” (2009, p.133).

Besides, in one of their journeys together with Tassie, Sarah suggests to Edward to go and “seek a fish fry”. They aim at a supper club whose provided napkins and placemats and even the teacups have “drawings of Vince Lombardi,” a coach of Pro football about which Edward once declares: “To play it other than violently would be imbecile." More important than this is the menu in which “Bloody Marry” appears. While explaining what “a supper club” is to Tassie, she states: “there’s always steak, and fish on Fridays, and fried potatoes of some sort. There’s whiskey sours and Bloody Marrys and Chubby Marrys, and supper, but there’s no real club. I mean there aren’t members or anything” (2009, p.97).It seems that there is a deliberate emphasis on “Bloody Mary” because it appears twice in the menu. We come to know this when Tassie asks what Chubby Marry and Sarah replies “ It’s Bloody Mary with a chub sticking out of it” (2009, p.97). Explaining that “a chub” is a small dead fish through the ice cubes

Above all violence appears in Tassie’s brother’s nickname “Gunny”, an allusion to guns and, thus, violence. Robert himself uses this nickname in his letters to his sister; he writes “Robert “Gunny” Keltjin” (2009, p.307). Intriguingly, Robert’s everyday behavior reflects the sense of this nickname. In one of the novel’s passages, his sister Tassie comments: “he was, essentially, always

nice to me, though he did gun the engine a little wildly as we pulled out of the parking lot” (2009, p.42). She adds:

> *On the ride back to the house he told me how he was doing though I had to ask two times. Sometimes a stammer came over him, which made him hesitant to speak at all- I’m sure he felt that the slightly chocked and garbled voice did not accurately reflect hismind, though who knows, maybe it did. Sometimes you could see him trying to pick up speed when he spoke, velocity smoothing things over and getting him to the end sooner. Gunny, indeed (2009, p.42*).

The picture of violence is also painted by his friends who call him "Gunny". During Robert's funeral, his friends and teacher express their love towards him but this happens in a violent way. One of them reads a poem called " Gunny finally got His Gun" (2009, p.296). More importantly, this poem is reinforced by the rifles fired in the air in the cemetery, with the statement which says "More guns for Gunny" (2009, p.301). Both the title of the poem and the action which accompanies it allude to violence.

Messud, in turn, does not attribute violence to Reza who is labeled "a terrorist" and is supposed to be "violent" in the post 9/11 context as previously explained, but to Owen and his friends who are Americans. Owen is "a large boy and stupid one," as Nora observes. In the school yard, he punches Reza in the ears and calls him "a terrorist." He thus performs two types of violence, verbal and physical, together with three other Western bullies Bethany, Margot and Sarah who somehow have contrieved not to see anything as Nora states. This is also the case with the second time Owen attacks Reza. The second attack conducted "more surreptitiously, more brutally," (Messud, 2013, p.98) also takes place at school. There were "two dozen kids" (Messud, 2 98) or so, among them Owen, the "evil spore" (2013, p.98) as Nora depicts him. He packs a snowball with rocks, "and the misfortune that he chose a sharp one" (2013, p.99). The attack is so violent that Reza "fell at once to his knees," (2013, p.99) and the girl who stands next to him "could see blood through his fingers" (2013, p.99). This girl also "heard the fat boy [Owen] mutter "Oh, shit" before he turned and ran away" (2013, p.99).

In post 9/11 novels such as Dellilo's*Falling Man* and Jonathan Safran Foer's *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close,* Americans play the role of victims of violence. Two examples to mention are Delillo's Justin and Foer's Oskar . Justin is a child character in *Falling Man. He* is as deeply and badly affected by the events as his parents Keith and Lianne and experiences "expansive fantasies about "Bill Lawton," a comfortably anglicized version of Bin Laden" (Smith, 2011,p.83). Foer'sOskar , the narrator, is a nine year old autistic character. In the novel, "the "ineffable tragedy" of autism stands in for the tragic events of 9/11, so that the autistic child who is unable to communicate, unable to answer the vital message of his father reflects a mourning nation unable to find words in the face of tragedy" (Loftis, 2015, p.109).

While these characters are victims of violence carried out by Arab "terrorists", Messud'sReza takes the role of the victim of violence instead of the victimizer. He is attacked violently two times by school bullies throughout the novel. He is thus the victim of violence. This is emphasized through Nora's sympathy towards him. Her special treatment of Reza after each attack and her comments about the attack highlight this. She carefully takes care of him just after both attacks and does her best to calm him down, being sometimes furious "with the three bullies, with Bethany, Margot and Sarah, who somehow had contrived not to see a thing, and somehow furious also with Reza's mother for leaving him unprotected in a strange land"(Messud, 2013,p.31). She explains that these attacks took some time to be plain and they are discussed in relation to Owen's uncle who seems to have a bad experience in Iraq which caused him suffering from PTSD (Post Traumatic Stress Disorder). However, as Nora comments "nothing, frankly, could excuse or explain the whole appalling fiasco" (2013, p.30). By reversing the roles of victim and victimizer and re-inforcing the image of the Arab victim through Nora's sympathy towards him, Messud challenges the narrative of American victimhood in the aftermath of the 9/11 events.

II. CONCLUSION:

To conclude, we can say that Claire Messud's*The Woman Upstairs*, Loraine Adams' *Harbor* and Lorrie Moore's *A Gate At the Stairs* contradict the culturally structured notions and stereotyping established by white Americans in the aftermath of the 9/11 attacks. The way the writers'Arab/Muslimprotagonists are presented to the reader stands in opposition to post 9/11 Americanfictionalstereotypicalportrayals. Ouranalysis ofthe novels'Arab/Muslim characters has unveiled considerable unexpected positive depictions that dismantle the common post 9/11 cliché of these people as predominantly violent and draw a positive image of peaceful

Arabs /Muslims. Indeed, the writers'aim intheir novels seems to be the same as Edward Said's in his *Orientalism* in which he explicates that his idea is "to open up the fields of struggle, to introduce a longer sequence of thought and analysis to replace the short bursts of polemical, thought-stopping fury

that so imprison us in labels and antagonistic debate" (Said, 1978, p. xix). Likewise, Claire Messud, Lorraine Adams and Lorrie Moore have provided a different representation of Arabs /Muslimsin an attempt to dismantle the old cliché and open the door for new tolerant possibilities of thoughts. Presenting Arabs /Muslims in the post 9/11 context positively is thus exceptionalsince the great majorityofpost 9/11American narratives provide a negative depiction of these people. In this connection, further research is needed to find out aboutAmericanwriters (other thanthe ones dealt with inthis article) who debunk the common post 9/11 clichés.

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