

“Why do they hate us?” The motives behind terrorism in Don DeLillo’s *Falling Man* and John Updike’s *Terrorist*

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Abstract: On the 20th of September 2001, Bush asked the inflammatory question that quickly became ubiquitous in national and global conversations about 9/11: “[w]hy do they hate us?”. The simplistic answer he provided focused on “their” hatred of “our” way of life – “the American way”: “They hate our freedoms – our freedom of religion, our freedom of speech, our freedom to vote and assemble and disagree with each other”. This brief characterization of the events, their causes, and the sides involved has potentially been the most significant framing of 9/11. This article explores two of the most iconic 9/11 novels addressing the topic of terrorism: Don DeLillo’s *Falling Man* (2007) and John Updike’s *Terrorist* (2006). I analyze how the novels portray their terrorist characters’ motives – whether they arise from personal, religious, ideological, or historical reasons. Furthermore, this article draws connections between the novels’ portrayal and the dominant 9/11 discourse, which tended to rely on a binary worldview of good and evil, “clash of civilizations”, the idea that 9/11 came out of the blue, and the purported connection between Islam and terrorism. With this article, I critique the United States’ discursive response to 9/11 and argue that while literature would have had a great opportunity to complicate the discourse, it most commonly failed to do so.

Keywords: 9/11 literature; 9/11 discourse; terrorism; Islam; Don DeLillo; John Updike.



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Introduction

On the 20th of September 2001, a few days after the 9/11 attacks had devastated the country, Bush addressed the alarmed American population with the often-quoted question: “Why do they hate us?”. The tone of the question was not meant to soothe the traumatized Americans, but rather to keep them alarmed. This goal was achieved by his reactionary simplistic answer: “They hate our freedoms – our freedom of religion, our freedom of speech, our freedom to vote and assemble and disagree with each other” (Bush, “Address to a Joint Session” n. pg.). This framing, which froze the attacks as an isolated act of terror, powered by evil and the hatred of the “American way”, became quickly popularized in the media and political discourse, creating a narrative of an innocent nation, which had been blamelessly attacked.

Indeed, in framing the terrorist attacks, language proved to be more powerful than ever. According to Jeffrey Melnick, “‘9/11’ is a language. It has its own vocabulary, grammar, and tonalities” (9/11 *Culture* 18). Adam Hodges also emphasizes the role of language in the context of 9/11: “Through language, we name protagonists, ascribe motivations, and provide explanations. Through language, we construct a narrative” (*The “War on Terror” Narrative* 3–4). The narrative, or as I prefer to call it, a discourse¹, was based on binaries, stereotypes, and myths; a narrative where certain roles were assigned to the public, the United States, the terrorists, and the rest of the world, and where emotions, behavior, and speech were confined to follow that narrative. In particular, there emerged two opposite ways of approaching the motives behind the attacks: as Hodges and Chad Nilep phrase it, “Did it happen because ‘they hate our freedom,’ or was it ‘blowback’ for America’s past imperial actions, an unintended consequence of the world’s sole superpower wielding its hegemony in ways that have sewn disdain overseas?” (“Introduction: Discourse, War and Terrorism” 2).

In the political discourse, representing the attacks as an isolated event that came out of the blue could already be seen in Bush’s speech after the attacks: “All of this was brought upon us in a single day -- and night fell on a different world, a world where freedom itself is under attack” (“Address to a Joint Session” n. pg.). Bush appears to decontextualize the attacks with this statement; the suggestion of “a single day” does not only reference the particular day of the attacks but also prevents us from seeing the attacks as a part of a historical continuum, thus implicitly claiming that the United States’ actions before 9/11 could not have affected the events. Some argue that this is exactly the way we should perceive the attacks: Ann E. Kaplan, for example, claims that past foreign policies and imperialist actions “did not ‘cause’ the terrorist attacks nor justify them”; rather, 9/11 “was a separate event” and “[l]inking the attacks to the past actions of the United States” would not be beneficial (*Trauma Culture* 15).

Some, nevertheless, dared to argue the opposite case. Susan Sontag’s comments

¹ My understanding of discourse relies on Michel Foucault’s “The Order of Discourse”, which provides an important part of the theoretical background of my research. Therefore, by 9/11 discourse, I refer to the ways that the event was contained in a certain way of representation, regulated by power.

regarding the topic became particularly infamous in the 9/11 discourse, as she asked already days after the attacks: “Where is the acknowledgment that this was not a ‘cowardly’ attack on ‘civilization’ or ‘liberty’ or ‘humanity’ or ‘the free world’ but an attack on the world’s self-proclaimed superpower, undertaken as a consequence of specific American alliances and actions?” (“Tuesday, and After” n. pg.). In the immediate aftermath of the attacks, this was not a popular opinion to have; as Gail Sahar suggests, intellectuals such as Sontag, “who have suggested some causal role of American foreign policy in the attacks, have been treated as traitors to the country” (“Patriotism, Attributions” 189). She argues that “[t]he Bush administration repeatedly referred to the perpetrators as motivated by ‘evil’ and hatred of American freedoms, suggesting that all causal responsibility fell on them” (“Patriotism, Attributions” 189). She continues to explain that “endorsing jealousy and personal characteristics of the terrorists as important causes was associated with holding the terrorists more responsible and the United States less responsible for the attacks” (“Patriotism, Attributions” 193). David Holloway suggests that the claim that 9/11 was brought on “because of ‘who we are’, rather than because of the policy-making of US political administrations since the 1950s, made it easier for citizens to live with the realities of war, not least because it dovetailed so neatly with official explanations of events” (*9/11 and the War on Terror* 10–1).

The 9/11 terrorist were not the only people the discourse incited hatred towards; there was a marked change after 9/11 regarding the attitudes towards Muslims, Islam, and “the East” altogether.² Nevertheless, it is important to note that the negative, simplistic, and stereotypical ideas of “the East” did not appear out of nowhere: we can trace the roots of these beliefs to what Edward Said has termed as the Orientalist discourse, which he introduced in his seminal study *Orientalism* (1978). However, Said notes in his 2003 preface for *Orientalism* that the Orientalist discourse gained new power after 9/11 (xii–xiii). Peter Morey and Amina Yaqin argue that everyday print and television media presented us with an uncontested image of Muslims as “unenlightened outsiders who, while they may live and work in the West, still have an allegiance to values different from those recognized in Europe and North America”; therefore, they are “troubling those values of individualism and freedom said to define Western nations” (*Framing Muslims* 1) – a point of view that clearly reflects Bush’s notion, “They hate our freedoms”. This idea of “us” and “them”, divided by value and cultural differences – i.e. “the Clash of Civilizations” – was most famously described already in 1993 in an article by Samuel Huntington, which he expanded into a book in 1996, stating: “The underlying problem for the West is not Islamic fundamentalism. It is Islam, a different civilization whose people are convinced of the superiority of their culture and are obsessed with the inferiority of their power” (*The Clash of Civilizations* 217).

² While the focus here is on the discursive development, it should be noted that these changes resulted in real-life consequences, which have been well-documented, for example, in the works by Lori Peek, who explains that 9/11 “provoked a nationwide surge of retaliatory attacks against Muslim and Arab people and their property” (*Behind the Backlash* 95) and Michael Welch, who suggested that people were targeted through “scapegoating”, “displacing aggression onto innocent people selected as suitable enemies due to their perceived differences in race, ethnicity, religion” (*September 11th* 4).

While the dominant 9/11 discourse relied on such black-and-white framing, the 9/11 novel would have been the perfect form to challenge the dominant 9/11 discourse and to create a “counternarrative”.³ DeLillo famously phrased this in the following way: “The Bush administration was feeling a nostalgia 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” (“In the Ruins” n. pg.). Many scholars have suggested that such an aim has been achieved; that the 9/11 novel, indeed, offers us something inherently different from the simplistic juxtapositions of “us” and “them” and good and evil. Arin Keeble, for example, argues that this group of novels “both reflects and represents the divided response to the attacks”, concluding that “the first decade of 9/11 novels does truly provide a ‘counternarrative’” (*The 9/11 Novel* 8). I believe that the relationship between the 9/11 novel and the 9/11 discourse is more complex than the novels simply providing a counternarrative as this implies that the novels merely oppose the dominant discourse.

Many scholars have indeed suggested that the 9/11 literature has failed to provide such a counternarrative – or simply failed in general. Richard Gray famously declared in his 2011 study that due to the “domestication” of the novels, they have “failed” both formally and politically (*After the Fall* 16). These ideas were already present in Gray’s 2009 article, to which Michael Rothberg responded with a similar discourse of “failure”, agreeing with Gray that 9/11 fiction has not succeeded in approaching the topic properly, calling instead for “fiction of international relations and extraterritorial citizenship” (“Open Doors” 153). In agreement with Gray and Rothberg, Rachel Sykes also suggests that these authors have “fail[ed] fully to interrogate the idea of September 11, 2001 on a national or international scale” (“A Failure of Imagination” 249). Gray, Rothberg, and Sykes all, to some degree, reiterate the criticism that Pankaj Mishra already expressed in 2007, stating that 9/11 fiction in general lacks “a capacious moral vision” and ignores the larger social and political reality of the event (“The End of Innocence” n. pg.).

The discussions outlined here in the Introduction are what incite some of the main questions of this study. Do these novels provide a counternarrative to the dominant 9/11 discourse or rather indirectly support it? When answering the question, “Why do they hate us?”, are the terrorists’ motivations shown to arise from personal, religious, ideological, or historical reasons?

DeLillo’s *Falling Man* and Updike’s *Terrorist*: an introduction

DeLillo’s *Falling Man* and Updike’s *Terrorist* have been among the most researched works of 9/11 literature since the beginning of the scholarship. As both of these authors have a towering presence in the canon of the contemporary American novel, the audience was keenly looking forward to hearing their thought on the attacks. It was considered that particularly DeLillo would be the author who would most likely offer a perceptive understanding of the attacks, as he has insightfully discussed terrorism in his previous novels such as *Mao II* (1991) and *Players* (1977). The scholarly reception of the

³ Largely because the novel allows for the presentation of “a multiplicity of social voices”, which Bakhtin calls “heteroglossia” (“Discourse in the Novel” 484).

novels has been mixed to say the least. The criticism of the works has ranged from the general “failure” of 9/11 fiction proclaimed by Gray, Rothberg, and Mishra to more specific condemnation of each work’s terrorist characters: for example, Sascha Pöhlmann and Bahramand Shah on *Falling Man*; Birgit Däwes and Muhammad Safeer Awan on *Terrorist*, and Lenore Bell, who criticizes both works. While both works have drawn wide criticism, some scholars have offered a more positive view of the works; regarding *Terrorist*, for example, Peter C. Herman, Kristiaan Versluys, Dagmar Dreyer, and Anna Hartnell, who, while acknowledging the problematic nature of the work, considers it to be “significantly underrated” (“Violence and the Faithful” 468), and regarding *Falling Man* Callie Ingram, Linda S. Kauffman, and Catherine Morley.

To introduce the novels briefly, they both offer us protagonists preparing to conduct a terrorist attack. In *Falling Man*, the focus is on Hammad, whom the reader follows in three different parts of the novel, all named after their location, which are the actual places where the 9/11 attackers gained the knowledge needed to perform the 9/11 attacks. What also adds some verisimilitude to the narrative is the inclusion of the character Mohamed Atta, who guides Hammad on his journey. Therefore, while Hammad is a fictional construction by DeLillo, the story otherwise mixes facts and fiction, unlike Updike’s work, where all the events and characters are purely fictional. *Terrorist* follows a pious 18-year-old American Muslim, Ahmad Ashmawy Mulloy, through his last high school year to after graduation, when he begins working at a transportation firm. The two influences that aim to convince Ahmad to participate in the terrorist plot to blow up the Lincoln tunnel are his imam, Shaikh Rashid, and his co-worker, Charlie Chebab.

Islam and the hatred of “the American way”

One of the questions this article aims to answer is whether Ahmad’s agreement to the suicide bombing is a result of outside influence or rather arises from himself. Many scholars have suggested that Ahmad is guided towards terrorism by Rashid and Charlie. Ewa Kowal claims that Ahmad is “easily led by his imam” and points out that Rashid, for example, guides Ahmad to switch to a vocational track instead of going to college (*The “Image-Event”* 105). Charlie, whom Ahmad appears to admire, tries to influence Ahmad with his political, anti-American speeches. Dreyer, for example, suggests that Ahmad is “manipulated into his mission” by Charlie (“Letters to Osama” 112). Some scholars have gone far enough to conclude that Ahmad is, in the end, a victim himself. Kowal claims that Ahmad is “an essentially innocent, sensitive, easily manipulable teenager and basically a puppet” (*The “Image-Event”* 106), while Dreyer asserts that by the end of the novel, “Ahmad almost appears as a victim” (“Letters to Osama” 114).

However, the theory that Ahmad is influenced or even “brainwash[ed]”, as Shah suggests, by Rashid and Charlie, has several issues (*Orientalism, Occidentalism* 47). Firstly, Ahmad is fairly critical of his imam. Already at the beginning of the novel, he disagrees with his teacher:

But Ahmad does not like Shaikh Rashid’s voice when he says this. It reminds him of the unconvincing voices of his teachers at Central High. He hears Satan’s

undertone in it, a denying voice within an affirming voice.

When the murmuring of the devils gnawing within him tinges the imam’s voice, Ahmad feels in his own self a desire to rise up and crush him ... The student’s faith exceeds the master’s ... (*Terrorist* 6–7)

The quote implies that Ahmad does not, in fact, trust his imam completely nor believe his teachings regarding the Quran. Even more, Rashid’s words anger Ahmad and induce him to have violent visions about “crushing” his teacher because he feels that his faith is stronger than the imam’s. Ahmad’s views about Rashid are also evident in his suspicion that “God has secretly fled from behind his pale Yemeni eyes” and that the imam has been “infected” with doubts about “the perfect and eternal nature of the Book of Books” (*Terrorist* 39, 271–272). With such suspicions regarding Rashid’s teachings and faith, Ahmad could not possibly have been indoctrinated by his imam in the way scholars have claimed.

If we observe more closely Charlie’s influence over Ahmad, it does not appear to be as indisputable either. Let us take a look at a scene where Charlie attempts to convince Ahmad with political and economic arguments by saying, “The Western powers steal our oil, they take our land—” (*Terrorist* 188). Ahmad, nevertheless, disagrees:

“They take our God,” Ahmad says eagerly, interrupting his mentor.

Charlie stares for a second, then agrees slowly, as if this had not occurred to him.

“Yes. I guess so. They take from Muslims their traditions and a sense of themselves, the pride in themselves that all men are entitled to.”

This is not quite what Ahmad said, and sounds a bit false, a bit forced and far removed from the concrete living God who stands beside Ahmad ... (*Terrorist* 188)

The quote suggests that Ahmad, in fact, does not agree with Charlie’s reasons for jihad but has his own motives. Moreover, Ahmad appears to be aware that he is being manipulated by others, as the conversation he has with his imam about accepting the mission suggests: “The boy knows he is being manipulated, yet accedes to the manipulation, since it draws from him a sacred potential” (*Terrorist* 237). The quote implies that Ahmad does not mind this attempt at manipulation, for it will help him with his “sacred” mission; in other words, he has his own reasons for participating in the plot, and he is, in a way, using his imam to fulfill them. Therefore, instead of being the innocent puppet that Kowal claims Ahmad to be, he has his own mind and motives.

I argue that Ahmad’s ultimate reason for participating in the plot is, in fact, made evident already in the opening of the novel: “*These devils seek to take away my God*” (*Terrorist* 3).⁴ With his powerful relationship with God, he feels his faith is more holy and genuine than the faith of others, such as his imam’s, as was previously established. Furthermore, when Ahmad sees some Arab-Americans in their baggy jeans, hoodies, and

⁴ This statement is followed by his long hyperbolic inner monologue regarding everything he hates about “the West”: from revealing clothing, corrupt values, lack of religion, television, alcohol, divorces, and the Government even to, rather bafflingly, sciences such as chemistry and physics.

sneakers, he thinks, “To these coreligionists, Islam is less a faith, a filigreed doorway into the supernatural, than a habit” (*Terrorist* 244). Ahmad evidently considers these “Americanized” Muslims’ faith, like his imam’s, to be inferior to his own. Moreover, he feels that the weakness of their belief and what he perceives as the “American way” is a threat to his own faith. In fact, he even admits that this supposed threat, not the imam’s advice, is the real reason why he did not continue his education: “More education, he feared, might weaken his faith. Doubts he had held off in high school might become irresistible in college” (*Terrorist* 216). Moreover, during a conversation with Jack at the beginning of the novel, when asked what he thinks about “the American way”, Ahmad says that it “is the way of the infidels”, and that it is “headed for a terrible doom” (*Terrorist* 39). At the same time, we are told that he hides his true thoughts: “He does not say, *America wants to take away my God*. He protects his God from this weary, unkempt, disbelieving old Jew” (*Terrorist* 39). Ultimately, it is the fact that Ahmad is terrified that American pluralism, secularism, and materialism will “take his God” that drives him to participate in the terrorist plot. It is evident that Ahmad is not the innocent victim scholars have claimed him to be and that he chooses terrorism of his own volition.

Like Ahmad, DeLillo’s terrorists are driven by the same hatred for the American lifestyle and values:

This entire life, this world of lawns to water and hardware stacked on endless shelves, was total, forever, illusion. ... They fired weapons and set off explosives. They received instruction in the highest jihad, which is to make blood flow, their blood that of others. People water lawns and eat fast food. ...

The people he looked at, they need to be ashamed of their attachment to life, walking their dogs. Think of it, dogs scraping at dirt, lawn sprinklers hissing. When he saw a storm bearing in from the gulf he wanted to spread his arms and walk right into it. These people, what they hold so precious we see as empty space. (*Falling Man* 219, 226)

The passages offer vague clichés about the American lifestyle and materialism as the primary reasons for terrorism: lawns, fast food, and shelves full of products. By listing such harmless, ordinary parts of life as the reasons for the characters’ hatred, their ideology is portrayed as exceedingly irrational. This is also highlighted in Hammad’s thoughts about the people around him: “These people jogging in the park, world domination. These old men who sit in beach chairs, veined white bodies and baseball caps, they control our world” (*Falling Man* 220). By associating innocent, non-threatening figures such as joggers and people sitting in beach chairs with “world domination”, the novel creates a comical contrast and ridicules the terrorists’ opinions. Indeed, according to DeLillo’s novel, what incites the terrorists’ hatred is ordinary American people, their culture, and their materialistic lifestyle.

Like Updike’s novel, DeLillo’s work also portrays the terrorists’ deviant worldview as ultimately arising from their faith. The narrative emphasizes the connection between Islam and violence:

Hammad had begun to understand death is stronger than life. This is where the landscape consumed him, waterfalls frozen in space, a sky that never ended. It was all Islam, the rivers and the streams. Pick up a stone and hold it in your fist, this is Islam. God’s name on every tongue throughout the countryside. There was no feeling like this ever in his life. He wore a bomb vest and knew he was a man now, finally, ready to close the distance to God. (*Falling Man* 218–219)

Islam is portrayed as something mystical and nature-related: the waterfalls, the sky, rivers, and stones are Islam. This beautiful description is then connected to violence and terrorism by having Hammad mention the bomb vest he is wearing and that he is “ready to close the distance to God”, in other words, to kill himself and thousands of others with the planned suicide attack. Islam and violence are connected again in Hammad’s thoughts in the following passage: “There was the claim of fate, that they were born to 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” (*Falling Man* 222). In this description, Islam appears as an arcane, fatalistic force of nature which has “chosen” Hammad to be a terrorist. Both passages suggest that violence is something that is inherently a part of Islam.

The “clash of civilizations”

Instead of considering particular personal, historical, or political reasons that lead to radicalization, DeLillo’s novel relies on vague generalizations echoing the “clash of civilizations”: “There was the feeling of lost history. They were too long in isolation. This is what they talked about, being crowded out by other cultures, other futures, the all-enfolding will of capital markets and foreign policies” (*Falling Man* 101–2). In the absence of political and ideological motivations, the novels suggest that the mere “magnetic effect of plot” is enough to inspire the characters to terrorist acts: “They felt things together, he and his brothers. They felt the claim of danger and isolation. They felt the magnetic effect of plot. Plot drew them together more tightly than ever. Plot closed the world to the slenderest line of sight, where everything converges to a point” (*Falling Man* 221–222). The lack of actual purpose is even explicitly stated in Hammad’s thoughts: “He didn’t think about the purpose of their mission. All he saw was shock and death. There is no purpose, this is the purpose” (*Falling Man* 226). Understanding the actions of the terrorists is therefore made impossible as the novel provides no reasons for what may have developed their hateful attitudes and radicalized them. Not merely lacking the context of their mission, the characters themselves lack context: they gain no personal history or features that would help the reader to see them as “real people” with understandable motivations. As Morey and Yaqin argue, such an approach is necessary when creating a stereotype: “the stereotype seeks to fix an image of the Other, to freeze it at a particular present-centered moment in time, then the eradication of the historical perspective—both personal and cultural—becomes crucial. We must not concede to the stereotype any existence or prehistory outside the straitjacket of representation in which it is encased” (*Framing Muslims* 27). This is, indeed, what happens to the terrorists of

DeLillo's novel: the few features they have, irrationality, hatred, and religious conviction, merely exist to construct them as the image of an evil, Orientalized terrorist. As Pöhlmann states, "*Falling Man* fails to imagine the Islamist terrorist in terms that are different from or more sophisticated than the dominant post-9/11 Orientalist discourse" ("Collapsing Identities" 53). He concludes that "DeLillo's depiction of Hammad fails because he is less a character than a narrative device that is too obviously introduced for the single purpose of committing a terrorist act" ("Collapsing Identities" 59–60).

The "clash of civilizations" that has echoed through the novels is culminated in the endings of both works. Hammad's narrative ends once the plane he is on crashes into the North Tower. This scene brings together Keith's and Hammad's stories, which so far have been separate, by changing the focalization from Hammad to Keith in the middle of a sentence: "A bottle fell off the counter in the galley ... he watched it spin more quickly and then skitter across the floor an instant before the aircraft struck the tower, heat, then fuel, then fire, and a blast wave passed through the structure that sent Keith Neudecker out of his chair and into a wall" (*Falling Man* 306). This passage has been exhaustively analyzed by scholars; however, the interpretations vary greatly. Some critics, such as Morley, have claimed that the scene emphasizes "the likeness between West and East, between 'us' and 'them'" ("How Do We Write" 253). Similarly, Pöhlmann suggests that with this scene, "the narrative forces readers to connect two characters despite an ideological reluctance to see them as anything but radically opposed to one another" ("Collapsing Identities" 57). Shah, however, suggests that the fact that the two narratives do not meet until the end of the novels signifies that they cannot "align peacefully except in a violent and destructive clash" (*Orientalism, Occidentalism* 45). I am inclined to agree with Shah's interpretation, as it corresponds to the binaries of "us" and "them", victim and terrorist, and "the West" and "the East" that can be observed throughout the novel. Therefore, the ending of the novel shows concretely that when these two sides are combined, the only possible result is mutual destruction.

Updike's novel ends with a similar suggestion about the incompatibility of "the East" and "the West" and Islam and the United States, even though the actual clash remains missing since Ahmad ultimately does not complete his mission. Nevertheless, this incompatibility is brought to attention in Ahmad's motives for terrorism and in the reasons for which he changes his mind about completing the planned act of terror. The ending of the novel has been interpreted in several different ways. One interpretation is that it is Jack's interference in the situation that causes Ahmad to reconsider his mission. Dreyer, for example, suggests that Jack's intrusion is of "utmost importance" because Jack manages to explain to Ahmad that Charlie was, in fact, an undercover CIA agent ("Letters to Osama" 113). He claims that "it is not until Jack takes charge and pretends not to care about death – even offering to set off the detonator himself – that Ahmad gives up" ("Letters to Osama" 113). While Jack, indeed, does all this, there is no indication that these are the aspects that change Ahmad's mind. Instead, when Jack encourages Ahmad to think about his mother and that he is about to kill many innocent people, it is stated that "Ahmad begin[s] to take pleasure in not being moved by this intruder's arguments" (*Terrorist* 293). Neither does the information that Charlie was an undercover CIA agent and that he has been beheaded by terrorists move Ahmad in any manner. When Jack urges

that Charlie never meant for Ahmad to finish the mission, Ahmad only concludes, “It would be a glorious victory for Islam” (*Terrorist* 292).

This supports the interpretation that Ahmad is not participating in the plot because of Charlie but is driven by his own motive: his faith. Some critics have concluded that it is the children who stare at Ahmad from a passing car that ultimately change Ahmad’s mind. Versluys, for example, claims that “[h]e recognizes their irreducible uniqueness and their undeniable appeal as fellow human beings, which no ideology or religion can gainsay” (*Out of the Blue* 180). Similarly, Dreyer concludes that the children activate Ahmad’s empathy (“Letters to Osama” 113). However, Ahmad keeps ignoring the children, and his epiphany to abort the mission does not appear to be caused by them but rather by the same influence that brought him there to begin with: Ahmad suddenly recalls the fifty-sixth sura of the Quran, which states that “God does not want to destroy: it was He who made the world” (*Terrorist* 306). The fact that Jack’s rational arguments or seeing innocent children have no effect on Ahmad and that the reason for his change of heart is religious, suggests that terrorists are ultimately beyond rational reasoning and human compassion.

After Ahmad gives up on his mission, he bitterly concludes in the last line of the novel, echoing the first line of the novel, “*These devils ... have taken away my God*” (*Terrorist* 310). He feels that because he did not complete the act of terror, God has left him. Thus, the novel appears to imply that without terrorism, there can be no Islam. Additionally, it shows Ahmad’s fear, which we have seen throughout the novel, becoming true: The United States has finally taken his God.

Conclusion

Ultimately, the novel leaves the reader with the same message as DeLillo’s work: the main reason behind terrorism is Islam, the perception that it is under attack, and the absolute incompatibility of the United States and Islam. In their representation of the reasons behind the 9/11 attacks, the novels disregard personal, political, and economic motives for the cultural and religious ones. By presenting terrorist characters whose motivation arises namely from cultural difference characterized by Islam, the novels hauntingly echo Huntington’s the “clash of civilizations” and the dominant 9/11 discourse.

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