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“Writing Back” to Don DeLillo’s *Falling Man*

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Abstract

Since the catastrophic events of 9/11 and its aftermath, the discourse of terrorism has become one of the dominant preoccupations of American literature. Don DeLillo is one of the preeminent masters of contemporary fiction whose novels of terror, both before and after 9/11, have spurred a great deal of criticism. What distinguishes his novels from the spate of 9/11 fiction is his obsession with the terrorist narrative long before the day “silver cross[ed] the blue.” This study will focus on his *Falling Man*, which directly gets to grips with the terrorist attacks of 9/11 and is credited with being one of the most genuine responses to it to date. In this novel, DeLillo (2007) manifestly identifies terrorism with Islam. Adopting an orientalist position, the writer tells the story of a group of Muslims who blatantly conduct the terrorist attacks of 9/11 in an attempt to take revenge on the West for its unrestrained growth in the course of modernity. As such, he lays the blame on Islam as being incompatible with the West’s history of civilization. Thus, in his putatively historiographic rendering of 9/11, DeLillo, focusing on the American, or generally speaking “hegemonic,” side of the event, complies with the governmental discourses and presents a totalizing reading of it. Drawing on Edward Said’s theories, this paper aims to shed light on DeLillo’s inscription of Orientalist discourse in *Falling Man*.

Keywords: Don DeLillo, *Falling Man*, Orientalism, Terrorism, 9/11, Islam, Iran.

1. Introduction

“What is bad about all terror is when it is attached to *religion* and political abstractions and *reductive myths* that keep veering away from *history* and sense” (emphasis added, Said, 2001: 1). Edward Said’s (2001) apt remark gets at the heart of what this paper is concerned with. Stressing the historicity and the contextual “materiality” of terrorism, Said (2001) draws our attention to the power relations working behind and through terrorism as a discourse. In response to terrorism, literature, or precisely saying, literary fiction has been one of the consistent means through which the “reductive myths” are produced and consequently kept in circulation. What is occluded in these “myths” is, in Said’s (1983: 39-40) terms, the “situatedness” of the terrorist event in the world, its being anchored in myriad “worldly” circumstances and interrelated histories. The *locus classicus* for this judgment is perhaps Don DeLillo’s *Falling Man* (2007) which, intended or not, by representing 9/11 through the restricted lenses of Orientalist discourse, aligns itself, in Bakhtinian terminology, with the “word of

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Fathers," the 'word of power' (2000: 42). And as such, it has a/n (New-) Orientalist propensity to identify the signifier terrorism with the Orient, or more precisely saying, with Islam as the signified. The manifest 'Orientalizedness' of the terrorists portrayed in the novel testifies to this claim. Exploring DeLillo's Orientalist representation of the terrorist figures in the novel, the writers discuss how DeLillo's (2007) representation of 9/11 turns into an 'un-postmodern' monologic narrative.

2. Muslims as "Global Outlaws"

Comparing the war on terrorism with the Cold War, Walter Benn Michaels (2003: 105-113) examines the important differences between the two. What makes the war on terrorism new, he observes, is its lack of a clear enemy. Unlike the Cold War, it is not a war against some fixed ideology, say Communism (such as the Maoist group in DeLillo's 1991 novel *Mao II*). Yet, it is not clear from which nations the terrorists come either. Thus, the war is no more between liberal capitalism and socialism, neither is it simply the war between liberalism and Islam (Michaels, 2003: 106). Thus the question of enemy in the war on terrorism is much more complicated than that of the Cold War. Though he does not flatly identify terrorism with Islam, Michaels (2003: 107) tends to introduce the terrorists as global outlaws whose only objective is to threaten the universal law of world citizenship. Referring to Fukuyama's *The End of History*, according to which the end of the Cold War is seen as the end of ideological conflict, Michaels (2003) argues that since the enemy "can no longer be ideological or national," he should be defined as "a kind of criminal ... who represents a threat not to a political system or nation, but to the law" (107). Adopting this position, Michaels (2003) champions an "internationalization," or better to say, globalization of the discourse of war on terrorism. Here, though, it is not clear whose law is under discussion. This haziness however paves the way for re-enactment of the bulk of Orientalist archive in evoking the long-established image of the Orient as the other. This is one of the primary discursive functions of Orientalist discourse, after all. "[B]y setting itself off against the Orient as a sort of surrogate and even underground self," Edward Said notes, "European culture gained in strength and identity" (Said, 2003: 4). In this regard, Ian Almond (2007) aptly observes that the Orient takes up different identities in different contexts all marked with varying degrees of Otherness. And this Otherness, "like the volume control of any stereo or radio, can be turned up or down according to the required context" (Almond, 2007: 195). In the context of 9/11 terrorism, it seems that the volume of this Otherness reaches its peak as is reflected in the post 9/11 fiction. DeLillo largely draws on this Othering in his construction of Muslim terrorist identities in *Falling Man*.

Relying on the Orientalist thesis of the incompatibility of Islam with Western modernity, DeLillo introduces Muslims as violators of American style of life, a criminality rooted not in their being individually seditious but in their collective Islamicism. Describing the secret life the small group of (terrorist) Muslims lead in New York— where "every cabdriver ... [is] named Muhammad"— (*Falling* 28) the omniscient narrator, for instance, says "they were in this country to pursue technical educations but in these *rooms* they spoke about the struggle" (79). The "rooms" generally refers to the prayer rooms in which Muslims gather to say their prayers and often share their memories and experiences. "The mosque" (77, 80, 81, 82, 176), "the portable prayer room at the university" (80), "the apartment on Marienstrasse" (79), and "dar al-ansar" (83) are some examples the narrator catalogues for such spaces. This preoccupation with the concept of space implies a sort of agoraphobia, fear of open spaces (which may symbolically imply their narrow-mindedness), on the part of Muslims. More pointedly, Muslims are represented as seeking refuge in enclosed spaces sheltering from what they consider as the corrupt West:

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* 80)

From narrator's perspective, Muslims' fear of the place also hints at their, in Bruce Janz's words, "inability to come to terms with the other," the West (191). Pondering over this fact, the narrator winds up his contemplation with a short, but revealing sentence: "they needed space of their own" (*Falling* 80). Thus, since Muslims cannot accommodate to the West's civilization, they find themselves imprisoned in the Western societies, suppress their xenophobia, and finally, turning into global "parasites," decide to destroy their host community.

The fact that the target of terrorists' attack in 9/11 is the World Center Towers in the US has inspired many terrorism scholars to ponder over its symbolic significance. One of these scholars is Bruce Janz (2008) who studies the cultural narrative of terrorism in relation to the notion of the place as "reinforcing personal and cultural identity" of a nation (191). He observes that the narrative of place is "meant to establish home as constitutive of the self, as a place of dwelling in a Heideggerian sense" (Janz, 2008: 192). Seen in that light, George Lakoff (2004), in the wake of 9/11, says the Twin Towers "were intimately tied up with our identities and with a vast amount of what we took for granted about our everyday life ... it became a symbol of America" (52). What is usually highlighted in such writings is the terrorists' "tendency to dissipate the place identity of America as the world's 'cosmopolis'" (Janz, 2008: 192). In response to this deconstructive tendency, however, the discourse of "war on terrorism" is employed in order to "re-legitimize" the place identity of the United States. As such, ironically, terrorism as a narrative helps to reinforce the place identity of the target of the attacks. Pace this critical stance, Peter Boxall (2006) casts doubt on the epistemological certainty of "the meaning and historical location of the [9/11] attacks, about whether they represent transformation or continuity" of the US foreign policy (230). Boxall (2006) further suggests that "the disappearance of the towers may not signal a break in the historical continuum, but might rather turn out to be a part of it; an endorsement of the Virilian acceleration of time, a correction of it" (230).

This being the case, the Other against whom the identity of the place is to be constructed becomes Islam in post 9/11 fiction. In his early representation of the Muslims in *Falling Man*, the narrator, in free indirect speech, reads Hammad's mind this way: "Islam is the world outside the prayer room as well as the sūrah's in the Koran. Islam is the struggle against the enemy, near enemy and far, Jews first, for all things unjust and hateful, and then the Americans" (80). Thus, to "satisfy the need for a clear enemy and a coherent narrative" (Janz, 2008: 193), DeLillo has recourse to the construction of a threatening Islam— as the only enemy and Other of the United States.¹

Richard Gray (2009: 128-151) also touches upon the issue of Islam as the Other of America's post-Cold War. He maintains that "with the collapse of Communism," America lost its oppositional identity, and, as such, needed to reconstruct a new other that would enable it fashion a new globalized identity (Gray, 2009: 135). Accordingly, the theme of what is to be American comes to the forefront of post-Cold-War fiction, and is mainly explored in the encounters between Americans and non-Americans or preferably anti-Americans. Gray proposes that the missing piece of 9/11 puzzle is what Deleuze and Guattari call strategy of "deterritorialization" whereby the novelist can explore the relations between different cultures and identities constituting American nation— the effort DeLillo makes in *Cosmopolis* (141). Gray (2009) observes that in the multicultural society of America, the boundaries between "center" and "margin" have been violated (129) and that makes America vulnerable to the constant threat of cultural clashes. The idea that Muslim identities are taking benefit from the fluidity of the boundaries in American society is very well reflected in the following passage in *Falling Man*:

¹ This recalls Coetzee's (2004) *Waiting for Barbarians* in which the writer represents the imperial forces as being in dire need of an imaginary enemy as an excuse for the state to maintain its totalitarian control over townspeople.

The men [Muslims] went to Internet cafés and learned about flight schools in the United States. Nobody knocked down their door in the middle of the night and nobody stopped them in the street to turn their pockets inside out and grope their bodies for weapons. But they knew that Islam was under attack. (82)

In this short passage, DeLillo very aptly both foreshadows the plane attacks of 9/11 by Muslim terrorists, who had learnt about flight in American schools, and more importantly answers the question of the motivation behind their terrorism— defending Islam against Western cultures, hence the idea of the invisibility of Muslim identity in American fluid society.

Without giving a clear picture of their social life, the narrator merely depicts Muslims as being living in a utopian land— “the land of the free—” in which every body is equally entitled to the right of absolute liberty. While enjoying the benefits of American civilization, these ungrateful Muslims, take up arms against it and vehemently seek its fall and destruction. The footprints of the same “statement” can be traced in DeLillo’s earlier novels as well, which taken together, construct, in Edward Said’s (1993) terminology, an underlying “structure of attitude and reference” based on which further propositions are less disturbingly made (61). One of the discursive functions of the marginal characters such as Omar Neely in *Mao II*, Ibrahim Hamadou in *Cosmopolis*, and Omar H. in *Falling Man* is this. They create a cultural “topography” in DeLillo’s Orientalist oeuvre making possible, maintaining, and reinforcing the Orientalized textual attitude toward Arab figures that turn up as Muslim terrorists in *Falling Man*.

From the narrator’s perspective, there is a strong “struggle” between Islam and “the enemy, near enemy and far, Jews first, for all things unjust and hateful, and then the Americans” (*Falling* 80). By “struggle,” he means the clash between Western and Islamic cultures. In another passage, it is said that, to the young Muslims, everything seemed to be “corrupt of mind and body, determined to shiver Islam down to bread crumbs for birds” (79). Generally speaking, the theme of cultural clash between Islam and the West pervades the novel. Aside from the Muslim terrorists, there are some other characters marked with Islam who take on diminutive roles in the novel. One of them is Elena who lives in the same apartment building together with the main characters of the novel, Keith and Lianne. She is used to playing a kind of music which appears to Lianne as belonging to “another set of traditions, Middle Eastern, North African, Bedouin songs perhaps or Sufi dances, music located in Islamic tradition” (67). Trying to come to terms with the trauma of 9/11 event, Lianne becomes “ultrasensitive” (120) to and suspicious of all values and beliefs in terms of which she had lived her whole life. Things appear differently to her as though the whole world has changed its meaning. Elena’s alien music is of course no exception to this fact, hence re-inscription of the discourse of American multiculturalism. To Keith, who is one of the survivors of the events, “it’s only music anyway” (68). He tries to persuade her not to fuss about it. She, however, “wanted to knock on [her] door and say something to Elena. Ask her what the point is ... Ask her why she’s playing this particular music at this highly sensitive time” (68). Instead of going directly to Elena and talking about the loud music, recalling Eric Packer’s treatment of Ibrahim’s mysterious “ravaged eye” in *Cosmopolis* (194), she starts constructing an Orientalist image of her in her mind: “They’re the ones who think alike, talk alike, eat the same food at the same time ... Say the same prayers, word for word, in the same prayer stance, day and night, following the arc of sun and moon” (*Falling* 68). Elena’s unsympathetic behavior toward the injured feelings of her American neighbors is also noteworthy. She is represented as being totally oblivious of what had happened to the victims of terrorist attacks of 9/11. When finally Lianne asks her why she goes on playing the harsh music in “this particular time” and “under these circumstances,” Elena calmly answers: “there are no circumstances. It’s music ... it gives me peace” (119).

In another passage, the conflict between “us and them” is harped on respectively from the points of views of Lianne, her mother, and her mother’s ex-friend Martin who argue about the causes of terrorism. Repeating George Haddad’s (the spokesman for the terrorist group) theory of “terrorizing the innocent” established in *Mao II* (157), Lianne’s mother says that “it’s

sheer panic. They attack out of panic ... there are no goals they can hope to achieve. They're not liberating a people or casting out a dictator. Kill the innocent, only that" (*Falling* 46). Martin, who is "unflinching in fact, and smart in his work" (46), points to another authorized discourse already developed in *Cosmopolis*, American "vulnerability." He suggests that what they achieve is "to show how a great power can be vulnerable. A power that interferes, that occupies" (*Falling* 46). And finally, Lianne's offhand comment points to the heart of the Orientalist nature of the novel:

It's not the history of Western interference that pulls down these societies. It's their own history, their mentality. They live in a closed world, of choice, of necessity. They haven't advanced because they haven't wanted to or tried to. (47)

Lianne's comment is illuminating for it testifies to DeLillo's "cliché" method of measuring the Orient with the yardstick of "modernity." David Keller's representation of Iranians in *The Names* (1982) is predicated upon the same discourse. In that novel, recounting his experiences of Tehran before the Islamic Revolution, David says that to Iranians, "a moving vehicle is no different moving backwards than it is moving forwards, especially when the driver regards the whole arrangement as if he were on foot, able to touch, to bump, to brush his way past vague obstacles in the street" (*Names*, 1982: 65). According to this orientalist topos, the "decline of Islam [is] blamed firmly on its alleged failure to modernize [itself]" (Sardar, 2002: 80). From this standpoint, that Islam has not been able to adjust itself to the West's modern developments indicates its inherent inferiority and consequently its inevitable decadence.

3. Orientalized Muslims as Terrorists

"[T]he only possible heroes [of] our time," says George Haddad in *Mao II* (1991), are "the lethal believer[s]," those who "kill" and "die for faith" (158). This idea takes less than two decades to be fully realized in *Falling Man*. Once Abu Rashid the Arab Maoist, and now Hammad the Arab Muslim, both filtered through the Orientalist outlook, take up this "heroic" role fitting the dominating paradigm. The characterization of Hammad as the central Muslim character of the novel exemplifies DeLillo's Orientalizing conceptualization of terrorism.

As a young Muslim who has the citizenship of United States, Hammad becomes involved with a terrorist group whose members are Muslims from different countries around all over the world. "They read the sword verses of the Koran ... [and were] determined to become one mind" (*Falling* 83). Influenced by his charismatic friend, Mohamed Mohamed el-Amir el-Sayed Atta, he is initiated into the clandestine meetings of the group and finally turns out to be the terrorist who headed the airplanes toward Twin Towers. Despite having the authority of omniscient point of view, the narrator evades developing a multidimensional character for Hammad, portraying him, with an Orientalist tendency, as "a bulky man, clumsy ... [who] thought all his life that some unnamed energy was sealed in his body, too tight to be released" (79).

Hammad's peculiar contact with the world outside the "room" testifies to his unhealthy relationships with non-Muslims. Before his assimilation of Amir's subversive ideas, he is described as a sensual, bodily young man leading a hedonistic life, and his experiences of the reality are mainly rendered through sensory impressions. His first appearance in the novel is a good example: "[he] cupped his hands to his mouth and exhaled six or seven times, slowly and deliberately, feeling a whisper of warm breath on his palms. A woman on a bike went past, pedaling hard" (77). Immediately after this scene, he is again described with the same implications and in similar moods:

Hammad stood nodding. He felt the cold in his bones, the misery of wet winds and northern nights ... waiting for the rain to stop, and he kept thinking that another woman would come by on a bike, someone to look at, hair wet, legs pumping. (78)

The trope of body consciousness becomes a metaphor for Hammad's essential sensuality in the course of novel. And interestingly enough, the only aspect of Hammad's life

which is developed in detail is his sexual relationships with his roommate Leyla who is “German, Syrian, what else, a little Turkish” (81). What is attractive to Hammad, the narrator says, is her “dark eyes and a floppy body that liked contact” (81). In fact, DeLillo magnifies Hammad’s sexual self at the expense of his social, cultural, and religious selves in order to give a unified picture of his identity.

Hammad is reduced to the level of a pleasure seeking man whose identity is torn between strong instinctual desires and religious demands. The narrator observes that “he had to struggle against himself, first, and then against the injustice that haunted their lives” (83). On the one hand, he dreams of getting married with Leyla to have babies, and on the other hand, as Amir’s reproachful comments suggest, he finds himself guilty of being too corporeal. The following passage makes the point clear:

Amir looked at him, seeing right down to his base self. Hammad knew what he would say. Eating all the time, pushing food in your face, slow to approach your prayers. There was more. Being with a shameless woman ... What is the difference between you and all the others, outside our space? (83)

In another scene, Hammad commits a sort of, in Chomsky’s (2002) terms, “retail” terrorism—it is committed by individuals or groups as opposed to the “wholesale terrorism” of governments— (9). In this passage, DeLillo wants to complete his Orientalist picture of Hammad representing him as a dim-witted ruthless murderer. Together with two other Muslims, Hammad goes for hunting a man whose identity remains unclear. Being unsure what that act is all about, Hammad hits the guy three or four times and readily leaves the place. Afterwards, thinking over what he has done, Hammad hypothesizes that perhaps he was “the guy paying an Albanian whore for sex or the guy not growing a beard. He had no beard, Hammad noticed, just before he hit him” (*Falling* 82).

The obsession with the matter of “growing beard” becomes an element of humor in characterization of Muslims, adding to their abnormal habits and single-mindedness. The narrator says that Muslims were all growing beards and “one of them even told his father to grow a beard” (79). Hammad who has recently joined the group feels a bit uneasy with growing long beard: “he spent time at the mirror looking at his beard, knowing he was not supposed to trim it” (82). However, he gradually gets used to it and even feels more secure with it:

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

Another trademark motif deployed by DeLillo as an Orientalist writer is his representation of the Muslims as an indistinguishable mass with an un-pliable fixed identity. Exploring the ways neo-Orientalism, in post 9/11, allows writers to fabricate enemy, Steuter and Wills aptly observe that “seeing the enemy as an indistinguishable mass is an essential strategy” employed by novelists in the process of constructing the other (27). That would enable the West to justify the carnage of the civilians in their war on terrorism because if the terrorists allegedly lack of individual identity, every citizen of their country becomes a terrorist as well. In short, to advance the discourse of war on terrorism, they have to become as indiscriminate as their bombs (Steuter and Wills, 2008: 27).

Furthermore, the Muslims’ lack of individual identity, epitomized in Hammad’s blind capitulation to Amir’s authoritative rhetoric, is to designate their willingness to be ruled over by fascist systems. In the small community of Muslims portrayed in the novel, this is charismatic Amir who appears to be manipulating the lives of the members. His description, time and again, evokes the image of a fascist leader: Amir is “the man who led discussions ... he was intense, a small thin wiry man who spoke to Hammad in his face. He was very genius, others

said" (*Falling* 79). Or in another passage: "this was Amir, his mind was in the upper skies, making sense of things, drawing things together" (81).

Eric Fromm is one of the theorists pursuing the link between dispersal of the individual identity and totalitarianism in modern time. His argument can shed some light on our discussion. According to him,

[b]y becoming part of a power which is felt as unshakably strong, eternal, and glamorous, one participates in its strength and glory. One surrenders one's own ... freedom; but one gains a new security and a new pride in the participation in the power in which one submerges. One gains also security against the torture of doubt. [He] is saved from making decisions, saved from the final responsibility for the fate of his self, and thereby saved from the doubt of what decision to make. He is also saved from the doubt of what the meaning of his life is or who "he" is. (qtd. in Shaffer, 2006: 68)

DeLillo's characterization of Hammad very well concurs with Fromm's theory. Hammad as a self-divided person is depicted as being in dire need of a totalitarian leader like Amir to decide for him and thereby give meaning to his life. In fact, this is through the filter of Amir's identity that he gains meaning. When he was initially doubtful about the whole affair, the narrator says "Hammad wasn't sure whether this was funny, true or stupid. He listened to everything they said, intently" (*Falling* 79). Even when he had become an inseparable part of the group, he could not totally drop his hesitation: "Hammad in a certain way thought this was unfair. But the closer he examined himself, the truer the words" (83). The truer Amir's words appeared to him because this was Amir who thought in his stead. Even, in the last minutes of his life, the time he is heading the plane toward the intended tower, he finds peace only in Amir's commanding words: "Forget the world. Be unmindful of the thing called the world ... This is your long wish, to die with your brothers" (238). On the Orientalist motif of the Orient as an indistinguishable mass, Sara Mills writes: "[t]he fact that sweeping generalizations were made about particular cultures made them less communities of individuals than an indistinguishable mass, about whom one could amass 'knowledge' or which could be stereotyped: the inscrutable Chinese, the untrustworthy Arab, the docile Hindu, and so on" (109).

Generally speaking, one can detect a dynamic Orientalizing praxis in almost all interpretations of 9/11 terrorism in contemporary post-9/11 fiction. Thus, DeLillo's representation of Hammad as an Al-Qaeda terrorist characterizes the general Orientalist nature of the post-9/11 fiction. Dominic Head's (2008) survey of John Updike's *Terrorist* (2007), Amis's (2006) short story "The Last Days of Muhammad Atta" and McEwan's (2006) *Saturday*, as exemplifying some of the major novelists' response to the attacks, bears witness to the novelists' more or less "rudimentary character portraits" (120). Criticizing Updike (2007) for his "unnaturally reductive portrait" of Ahmad, the Hammad-like Al Qaeda terrorist, Stephen Abell aptly notes that since characterization of Ahmad "is not contextualized," he stands "for nothing other than his religion" and so "is no more than a Muslim Metonymy" (qtd. in Head, 2008: 117). A polyphonic characterization of the terrorists would certainly take into account the counter-narratives implicated in their multi-sided reality(-ies). Relevant to this issue is Knudson Hoffman's (2002) idea that "an enemy is a person whose story we have not heard" (1). Conversely, to construct an enemy, we can either totally censor his story or at least distort it to our own advantage.

4. Un-postmodern Reductive Representation of 9/11

One of the fundamental criticisms to be leveled against DeLillo's fiction, especially reflected in his *Falling Man*, is his representation of 9/11 terrorism from a restricted (hegemonic) point of view which consequently results in an incomplete single-sided view of reality. By categorizing the terrorist events of 9/11 under the flag of Islam, DeLillo tries to unify its meaning(s) and create a totality of its reality(-ies). This totalization, as Hutcheon (1988) puts, "does not just mean to unify, but rather means to unify with an eye to power and control" (xi).

That is why DeLillo consciously repudiates the most important premise of postmodernist art: provisionality and relativity of truth(s). According to this notion, the reality is no more seen as a single and monologic phenomenon, but rather, a nexus of competing realities. More pointedly, a single event is reckoned as constituting a series of playful meanings and as such can be represented from different perspectives. This "postmodern strategy," Hutcheon (1988) observes, "leads to the acknowledgment, not of truth, but of truths in the plural, truths that are socially, ideologically, and historically conditioned" (19). *Falling Man* apparently fails to uphold this avowedly postmodern "critical distance" from the historiography of 9/11 events, and consequently, installs an unpostmodern account of it.

De-contextualization and de-politicization of the 9/11 terrorism are the means through which DeLillo represses any recognition of the contingency of the historical conditions in which that event takes place. "Not to threaten the rationality and the truth enclosed within" the discourse of power, in Said's (1997: 308) words, DeLillo contains the "political worldliness" and the "material context" implicated in that event, and as such, presents a monologic representation of its interrelated heterogeneous realities. The international trauma of the events is depicted from the limited point of view of the individuals who had been actual victims of terrorism. In this way, not only does DeLillo evade his responsibility of demythologizing the grand narrative of terrorism, but also contributes to its damaging effects by replicating its image as occurred in reality.

5. Reiterating the Governmental Discourse of Iran as "Axis of Evil"

One of the thematic strands of DeLillo's Orientalist novels is its implicit association of Islamic Republic of Iran with the terrorist movements marked with Islamic fundamentalism. This issue dates back to his 1982 novel *The Names* which marks the beginning of DeLillo's career as a postmodern Orientalist demonstrating his abilities in the field of novel writing. Introducing Iran as "the black hole" in that novel (1982: 233), DeLillo does his best to give an "order," through his narrative, to the un-discursive events of Iran's pre- and post- Islamic Revolution. In *Falling Man* (2007), he returns to Iran this time more straightforwardly and, one could say, crudely, through the dominating discourses flourished in the wake of 9/11 terrorism. Having an eye upon the discourse of Iran as the axis of evil, for instance, DeLillo, now a celebrity author², tries to establish, though subliminally yet effectively, an ideological relationship between 9/11 terrorism and Iran as an Islamic nation. The references made to Iran constitute one of the subplots of the novel narrated within the sections devoted to the terrorists' narrative.

The story of the terrorists begins with Hammad's listening to an "older man's story" (*Falling* 77). The "older man" talks of his experiences in the war against Iran when he was "a rifleman in the Shatt al Arab, fifteen years ago ... a soldier in Saddam's army" (77). The picture he draws of the war teems with Orientalist images with the focus on Iranians, depicting them as "fanatical," "violent," "dull," "irrational," and "superstitious," whose only motivation behind war was to avenge "the Shia defeat and the allegiance of the living to those who were dead and defeated" (78). Besides being "revengeful," Iranians are represented as being inherently "fanatical" and "superstitious," the two Orientalist codes which would bind them with the Islamic fundamentalist terrorists. The motif of Iranians' fanaticism is developed in four succeeding paragraphs all about Iran's war. "The older man's story" has it that:

thousands of shouting boys. Some carried rifles, many did not, and the weapons nearly overwhelmed the smaller boys, Kalashnikovs, too heavy to be carried very far. He was a soldier in Saddam's army and they were the martyrs of the Ayatollah, *here to fall and die*. They seemed to come up out of the wet earth, wave on wave, and he aimed and fired and watched them fall. He was flanked by machine-gun positions and the firing grew so intense he began to think he was breathing white-hot steel. (emphasis added 77)

² Joe Moran (2000: 116-131), in his study of the literary celebrity in America, devotes a whole chapter to Don DeLillo as one of the major celebrities of the contemporary American society.

Of the “thousands of shouting boys,” says the Iraqi soldier, “many did not” carry rifles, and more notably, they were “here to fall and die” (77). Being fanatical, irrational, and superstitious, Iranian “boys,” and not soldiers, all of a sudden decide that they should fulfill their “allegiance” to their fathers “who were dead and defeated” (78), wage war on Iraq, and enter their neighbor’s lands only “to fall and die” (77). This story is furthermore consolidated in other paragraphs:

he said he was twice regretful, first to see the boys die, sent out to explode land mines and to run under tanks and into walls of gunfire, and then to think they were winning, these children, defeating us in the manner of their dying. (78)

The significance of this story is made clear when later on the narrator says Muslim terrorists “looked at videos of jihad in other countries and Hammad told them about the boy soldiers running in the mud, the mine jumpers, wearing keys to paradise around their necks” (80). When pieced together, these scattered images reveal a unified message, and that is introduction of Iranians’ “manner of dying” as one of the possible models for terrorists’ suicidal acts. This issue is more pointedly revealed in the following passage describing the moments before “the aircraft [hijacked by Hammad] struck the tower” (239):

[Hammad] didn’t know how he’d been cut. He’d been cut by one of his brothers, how else, accidentally, in the struggle, and he welcomed the blood but not the pain, which was becoming hard to bear. Then he thought of something he’d long forgotten. He thought of the Shia boys on the battlefield in the Shatt al Arab. He saw them coming out of trenches and redoubts and running across the mudflats toward enemy positions, mouths open in mortal cry. He took strength from this, seeing them cut down in waves by machine guns, boys in the hundreds, then the thousands, suicide brigades, wearing red bandannas around their necks and plastic keys underneath, to open the door to paradise ... Every sin of your life is forgiven in the seconds to come. (238)

Reading Hammad’s distressed mind, the narrator speaks of the “strength” that the remembrance of the story of Iranians’ “suicide brigades” conveyed to Hammad, who is now similarly committing suicide. Thus, drawing a parallel between Iranian “boys” and Hammad, both being Muslims, DeLillo puts emphasis on the ideological impact that Iran might have had on these fundamentalist terrorists. This stance toward Iran, as said earlier, is by no means original. DeLillo’s novel is but a repetition of the bulk of discourses reproduced on the “irreducible” Iran since the Islamic Revolution. A broad array of discourses ranging from media narratives to scholarly books and articles disseminate and keep in circulation this ideological proposition. As discussed in the second chapter on terrorism(s), Bruce Hoffman’s (2006) *Inside Terrorism*, Michael J. Stevens’ (2005: 507-526) “What is Terrorism and Can Psychology Do Anything to Prevent It?,” and Jerrold M. Post’s (2005: 451-465) “The New Face of Terrorism,” to name a few, are among the scholarly works aligning themselves with DeLillo’s stance toward Iran.

6. Replicating the Orientalist Image of “Plastic Keys to Paradise”

In the above two passages, DeLillo explicitly makes use of one of the purely Orientalist constructs of Iran-Iraq war: the fictitious image of Iranians’ wearing “plastic keys to paradise” (*Falling* 80, 238). This Orientalist image however has accrued factual status to itself because of its production and constant reproduction within the imperial nexus of power relations and mainly through mainstream media. It bears mentioning that, Azar Nafisi (2004), an expatriate Iranian writer living in America, has already registered this theme in her memoir: *Reading Lolita in Tehran* and has contributed to the strengthening of the discursive validity of the image.³ Her story has it that:

In those days, I had become an avid and insatiable collector. I saved pictures of martyrs, young men, some mere children, published in the daily papers ... I cut out Ayatollah Khomeini’s praise of the thirteen-year-old boy who had thrown himself in front of an

³ Marjane Satrapi (2006) is another Iranian writer to have employed this image in her autobiographical novel *Persepolis*.

enemy tank and collected accounts of young men who were given keys to heaven to wear around their neck as they were sent off to the front: they were told that when they were martyred, they would go straight to heaven. (159)

A brief comparison between Nafisi's and DeLillo's narratives demonstrates how greatly the latter is indebted to the Orientalist motifs and images implicated in the former. What makes DeLillo's intertextual use of this image unpostmodern is its lack of any sense of parody that would problematize its textual historiography.⁴

7. Conclusion

The role of the critic, according to Edward Said (1993), is to "speak truth to power" through undertaking a "contrapuntal reading" of the writings of the empire (78). By "contrapuntal reading," he specifically means "an effort to draw out, extend, give emphasis and voice to what is silent or marginally present or ideologically represented" (Said, 1993: 78). This article approaches DeLillo's (2007) *Falling Man* contrapuntally with the aim of exposing its patterns of affiliations, of "opening it out to what went into it and to what its author excluded" (Said, 1993: 79). Though acclaimed as a postmodern writer, DeLillo, in this novel, greatly relies on the Orientalist discourse, one of the potent meta-narratives of our time, and while preserving its constructed values, enhances the classical structures of othering, silencing, and marginalization. What DeLillo offers in this novel as the "representation" of terrorism is inflected with Orientalist parameters. Don DeLillo's novel indeed turns out to be one of the "writings" of the (American) empire.

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4 It bears mentioning that Seyed Mohammad Marandi and Hossein Pirnajmuddin (2009: 23-47), in their "Constructing an Axis of Evil: Iranian Memoirs in 'the land of the free,'" study the ways some of the Iranian writers' literary memoirs such as Nafisi's, while having internalized the "eye of power," in Foucaultian terms, accumulate a great amount of Orientalist constructs about Iran and consequently accrue to the narrative factuality of the dominant discourses such as Iran as "axis of evil."

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