

NEO-ORIENTALISM IN DELILLO'S FALLING MAN

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I dedicate this thesis in honour of Syrian people who are struggling and sacrificing their lives for a better future

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The material included in this thesis has not been submitted wholly or in part for any academic award or qualification other than that for which it is now submitted.

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ABSTRACT

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May 2012

NEO-ORIENTALISM IN DELILLO'S FALLING MAN

After the exhausting representation of 9/11 by official authorities and media, a quest for a new critical insight emerging from a cultural realm was eagerly awaited. And, indeed, most critics' eyes were already turned towards Don DeLillo as his oeuvre has long maintained a deep thematic concern with terrorism. Yet, apart from DeLillo's extended engagement with topics like terrorism and violence, the chief factor which aroused both curiosity and considerable interest in DeLillo's literary response to 9/11 was his call for *counter-narrative* which trumpeted in the essay he penned two months after the attacks. In fact, this study seeks to investigate the DeLillo's idea of *counter-narrative* that crafted and propagated in his essay "In the Ruins of the Future", and then got fleshed out and developed it into a whole novel; the *Falling Man*. Therefore the largest portion of this study will be allocated to question whether the *Falling Man*; the literary *counter-narrative* DeLillo designed and called other writers to participate in, could be distinguished from the oversimplified neo-Orientalist narrative that surfaces in governmental and popular discourse.

Key words:

Orientalism, Postmodernism, Counter-narrative, Grand narrative

KISA ÖZET

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Mayıs 2012

DELILLO’NUN FALLING MAN ROMANINDAKİ NEO-ORYANTALİZM İZLERİ

11 Eylül, Amerikan medyasında ve hükümetinin resmi söyleminde gereken ilgiyi gördükten sonra gözler kültür-sanat alanına çevrildi. 11 Eylül’ün yepyeni açılardan yeniden yorumlanması hevesle beklemekteydi. Şüphesiz akla gelen ilk isim İtalyan asıllı Amerikalı yazar Don DeLillo’ydu. Elbette, DeLillo’nun birçok eserinde terörizm temasının işlemiş olması DeLillo’nun kaleminden çıkacak bir 11 Eylül romanı beklentisini yükseltmişti, ancak asıl ilgiyi ve beklentiyi kabartan sebep DeLillo’nun 11 Eylül olaylarından sadece iki ay sonra kaleme aldığı “In the Ruins of the Future” adlı makalesinde yatıyordu. DeLillo makalesinde teröre karşı karşı-anlatı olarak tanımladığı edebi mücadeleyi açıklıyor ve diğer yazıları bu karşı-anlatıya katılma çağrısında bulunuyordu. Böylece, DeLillo makalesinde ilerde 9/11’e karşı-anlatı niteliği taşıyan bir eser tasarlayacağını sinyallerini veriyordu ve öyle de oldu. DeLillo 2007 *Falling Man*’ı yayınladı. Bu çalışmada DeLillo’nun romanı *Falling Man* bir edebi eser veya bir *karşı-anlatı* olarak 11 Eylül sonrası Amerikan siyasi retoriğin ve Amerikan popüler kültürün parçası haline gelen Neo-Oryantalist söyleminden farklı bir yorum getirip getirmedeği mercek altına alınmaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler:

Oryantalizm, Postmodernizm, Karşı-anlatı , Global söylem

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INTRODUCTION

No doubt, 9/11 was such an unusual and shocking event that not only Americans but also the whole world was deeply affected by it. Actually, with the help of the modern media the world simultaneously witnessed the attacks on the World Trade Center and Pentagon. The stunning view of the burning towers and their subsequent horrendous collapse had etched the date September 11th, 2001 in our memories. And by the very nature of things fathoming these catastrophic events in the immediate aftermath was extremely difficult. Yet this initial and ephemeral sense of confusion in people's minds right in the wake of the attacks had vanished gradually as responses by the government and the media started to provide people with explanations helped to frame what was going on.

There was, to be sure, a reactionary mood in American society about what had befallen them. Fear and anger were the stronger emotions felt in the wake of the events. So in this kind of intense atmosphere a certain mind-set has dominated every possible discussion and debate that related to events at that time. In fact almost all the responses to the attacks whether it is from official authority, news commentaries, journalistic texts, or political analyses all generated and disseminated a set of ideas that absorbed from the society without being exposed to any critical consideration. In other words, the general conception of 9/11 as being an unprecedented national catastrophe created some kind of ideological barrier that led to a very crude understanding of the events, while excluding any attempt that might deviate from this wholesale interpretation of the events. Yet, this kind of monolithic approach to the events in the days immediately following the events was to some extent

understandable. Apart from people's perception of the 9/11 as a national tragedy, actually two other factors played an essential role in giving 9/11 an epochal flavour. The first one was the bizarre method of the attacks. It is true that the domestic passenger jets crashing into the towers created a horrific scene of burning and collapsing, however what intensified the shock and the impact of this event was; its lack of comprehensible meaning. More precisely, when the first crash occurred on the North Tower, people thought of it as an accident. After the South Tower was attacked, however, people realized that this was not an accident, it was an attack. Then an inevitable question occurred in the minds of people "what was behind these enigmatic attacks?" The official and the media-driven answer to this question, which was supposed to uncover the ambiguity of these attacks, did nothing but added more darkness to the situation by describing the attacks as being 'Islamic Terrorist Attacks' of course this explanation placed the attacks in some sort of context, yet the fact that America was attacked by unknown "outsiders" was a chief factor in making 9/11 an enigmatic epochal event in the eyes of American people. Thus, the bizarre method of the attacks which were carried in became even more bizarre by the story of its perpetrators. The odd cause behind the attacks quite naturally intensified the anxiety and curiosity of people. Consequently 9/11 crowned as an unprecedented event that had taken place on the American soil, and became as what Baudrillard calls; "the 'mother' of all events"(4).

Whether or not one agrees with the media interpretation, it helped to disseminate information that enabled people to construct a context for 9/11 and it also helped America to reinforce unity in the face of a national tragedy. Yet one should

remember that in our present day the media has become highly profit-oriented corporate enterprise. Thus, in a broad sense we can say that in our current capitalist and consumerist society in which the information provided by the media is a commodity. Therefore, its primary aim of informing people has been superseded by an emphasis on gaining more attention, more audience, and more money. As a result, when a story is reported we can see that certain elements gain more currency while other elements are intentionally or unintentionally ignored. In case of the 9/11 events, this kind of journalism is so evident. In fact, exaggerated stories about the “terrorists”* have eclipsed any other information or study about the events.

In the days and weeks following the attacks people were so horrified that their perception vulnerable to the dominant ideas which were circulating at that time and that was inevitable, as a formidable unilateral 9/11 discourse emerged, empowered by politicians, and the corporate media backed this discourse. Yet, as years passed by, and as 9/11 events started to fade out gradually from the newspapers, fervent news commentaries, and endlessly repeated television images, started to occupy the cultural production of the Western world. So after the exhausting representation of 9/11 by official authorities and media, a new critical insight from a cultural realm was eagerly awaited. Yet, some writers, artists, and intellectuals were not so willing to stand outside the limits of the media-driven political discourse. And the close-knitted cultural productions of these writers and intellectuals proliferated in huge rate in the aftermath of the events:

*I prefer to enclose the word terrorist in quotation marks throughout this study to draw attention to the wrong synonymous usage of the word terrorist with the word Muslim by some writers and thinkers.

Today, bookstores in the US are filled with shabby screed bearing screaming headlines about Islam and Terror, Islam exposed, the Arab threat and the Muslim menace, all of them written by political polemicists pretending to knowledge imparted to them and others by experts who have supposedly penetrated to the heart of these strange Oriental peoples over there who have been such a terrible thorn in “our” flesh. (Said xv)

As previously mentioned, the huge body of cultural productions employed an identical mode of 9/11 representation and started to gain attention, and this of course was not restricted to political oriented nonfiction: a wide range of cultural forms from spy fiction to war films all seemed to take on themselves the responsibility of the corporate media role in disseminating an antagonistic rhetoric against Arabo-Muslim societies. In other words, after the haze of 9/11 events started to wane, the news media which was done with 9/11 handed over her crown to the new emerging power; the cultural field, which seemed to offer a fresh and wide ground for contemporary manifestation of neo-Orientalist ideology.

In fact, without delving into the complexities of the debate about the distinctions between high culture and low culture, the absence of literary or film productions that might provide different ideas from the news media could be related to the monolithic treatment of 9/11 already proliferated to attract as broad an audience, or let us say a wide number of consumers, as possible. Therefore, tracing the general pattern in which 9/11 events were presented in the mass media was an inevitable outcome. However, apart from securing commercial success by appealing to the accepted values and ideas in the society, avoiding the pressure of the *sensus communis* was a

great impetus behind the proliferation of identical cultural productions. In other words, violating the prevalent ideas and coming with critical notions in the face of a national tragedy like 9/11 was regarded as unethical and insensitive act toward both people who lost their loved those and who directly experienced the events, and this as a result created a discourse that was almost impossible to be challenged. Another factor that might have delayed literary responses providing new insights could be the notion that it is 'too soon' for having literary responses free from frivolity and exaggeration in dealing with an event so fresh and so shocking. So if the cultural productions in the immediate aftermath of the events are abdicated from presenting sophisticated critical and artistic approaches because of their urgent response to the events, then it is pertinent to ask whether the literary responses which came after a considerable time managed to offer different perspectives. Or more precisely has the current fiction on 9/11 managed to provide a space of discussion on terrorism and fundamentalism that is not confined with the dominant ideological discourse. To deal with these questions, this study aims to analyze Don DeLillo's novel *Falling Man* which was published in 2007. In fact, along with DeLillo's novel, his essay "In the Ruins of the Future" and other literary and intellectual productions will be examined in relation to the question of how these productions tend to respond to 9/11 events. Yet, extensive attention will be given to: main themes, individual views, and even particular 'positions' which worked throughout the aforesaid texts, because the core purpose of this study is to arrive at a comprehensive understanding of how the discursive practices embodied in these productions are informed by an age-old tradition of Western Orientalist writings, and the way these contemporary narratives tend to act as inheritors of these deep-rooted traditions.

CHAPTER 1

SETTING THE CRITICAL FRAME BY EDWARD SAID

Beyond a shadow of a doubt, one of the most important figures who invested much thought into the interrelationship between cultural production and politics was the Italian philosopher Antonio Gramsci. Gramsci like many Marxist critics was mainly concerned about capitalism and the rise of fascism yet his way of analyzing and challenging fascism was very remarkable; he placed a huge emphasis on the role of the intellectual in changing the already existing social and political conditions:

For a party to exist, in Gramsci's terms, it must contain the following characteristics: a mass element, a cohesive element, and an intermediate element—the intellectuals, traditional or organic. And thus we come to the nodal point in Gramsci's thinking: the point of intersection between politics and culture, if a distinction can be made between the two. In the case of ruling groups, traditional intellectuals provide the intermediate element. The subaltern groups must develop their own intellectuals in the formation of their own power base. One of Gramsci's major contributions to an understanding of political change is his emphasis on the importance of intellectuals as playing a significant role in the legitimation of power or in creation of new relations of power. In fact, for Gramsci, the study of intellectuals and their production is synonymous with the study of political power. (Landy 53)

Gramsci believes that the intellectual who refuses to be the ideological apparatus of the dominant coercive ideology has a great potential in transforming the political and social situation in a society. Yet if the intellectual shows adherence to the coercive

prevalent system he will function as a tool for the implication of repressive and hegemonic policies. Worse yet in the absence of intellectuals who resist the prevalent oppressive powers, the masses will be easily influenced subtly or non-subtly by the intellectuals who legitimize the coercive discourses and policies, and as a result of this, consent, or let say, conformism will prevail and replace the potential movement for change in the society.

It is true that Fascism ceased to be a powerful force yet Gramsci's ideas and writing never ceased to inspire many contemporary thinkers and scholars who try to challenge the coercive powers and ideologies of our time, and Edward Said was one of the thinkers who were heavily influenced by Gramsci's notions. In fact, Said managed to apply Gramscian approaches to his theoretical analysis by providing his own radical perspective, more precisely Gramsci's idea that the 'power' can be exercised by means of coercion or by means of consent was advanced by Said's study of the Western canonical works in terms of their huge importance in maintaining imperial power:

Gramsci has made the useful analytic distinction between civil and political society in which the former is made up of voluntary (or at least rational and noncoercive) affiliations like schools, families, and unions, the latter of state institutions(the army, the police, the central bureaucracy) whose role in the polity is direct domination. Culture, of course, is to be found operating within civil society, where the influence of ideas, of institutions, and of other persons works not through domination but by what Gramsci calls consent. In any society not totalitarian, then, certain cultural forms predominate over others,

just as certain ideas are more influential than others; the form of this cultural leadership is what Gramsci has identified as *hegemony*, an indispensable concept for any understanding of cultural life in the industrial West. It is hegemony, or rather the result of cultural hegemony a work, that gives Orientalism the durability and strength I have been speaking about so far. (7 Said)

In Said's most controversial and influential work *Orientalism* (1978) and in its literary sequel, *Culture and Imperialism* (1993) we can see the extension of Gramsci's key ideas. Especially in *Culture and Imperialism* Said deeply elaborates on the relationship between culture and imperialism. Yet, aside from the fact that Said's major arguments are highly informed by Gramsci's ideas, actually what makes Said's works more pioneering and seminal is the way he espoused Gramscian notions with Foucauldian ones. Actually, Said managed to carry the ideas of Gramsci's concept of *hegemony* a step further, he extended the central idea set out by Gramsci that the ruling class and their interest in any given society is maintained and imposed to the subaltern group not just by applying violent, political or economic means of coercion but also by means of culture, so the domination of the powerful group is achieved by persuasion or consent. In Said's works this idea is explored in a wider context, In other words the power relation between the ruling class and the subaltern groups in any given society is applied to a wider transnational and cross-cultural contextualization. So Said uses the Gramscian concept of *hegemony* to investigate the relationship between the Occident and the Orient in terms of issues like culture and domination. Indeed, along with Gramsci's revolutionary ideas,

Foucault's ideas on knowledge and power were the other source of Said 'inspiration. Notably Foucault's concept of discourse was central to the production of Said's major project *Orientalism* and his subsequent works. Said applied and extended the notion of discourse to explain how the Orient has come into being by the discursive formation of the West. Critics Bill Ashcroft and Ahluwalia encapsulated the basic notions behind Said's *Orientalism* in the following quotation:

This argument for discursive coherence of Orientalism is the key to Said analysis of the phenomenon and the source of the compelling power of his argument. European knowledge, by relentlessly constructing its subject within the discourse of Orientalism, was able to maintain hegemonic power over it. Focusing on this one aspect of the complex phenomenon of Orientalism has allowed Said to elaborate it as one of the most profound examples of the machinery of cultural domination, a metonymy of the process of imperial control and one that continues to have its repercussions in contemporary life. *Orientalism*, then pivots on a demonstration of the link between knowledge and power, for the discourse of Orientalism construct and dominate Orientals in the process of 'knowing' them. (53)

On the whole, it would be fair to say that the Foucauldian and the Gramscian ideas constituted the fundamental pillars of Said's works. Yet aside from the Said's creative amalgamations of Gramscian and Foucauldian notions, Said by his humanistic intellectual endeavour generated his own unique concept of *worldliness*. In fact the concept of *worldliness* will constitute the core elements of this thesis; more precisely it will provide the conceptual frame in which the post 9/11 textualities

dealing with terror and war will be analyzed. Yet before we delve into analyzing the textualities and images in the conceptual framework of *worldliness*, which actually will be discussed in detail in the following chapters, it is better to elaborate on the concept itself. *Worldliness* as a concept brings to light the text's inherited worldly features; namely, historical, social, political and even economical associations which are actually the vital worldly circumstances that brought the text into existence. In "The World, the Text, and the Critic," Said argues that:

The point is that texts have ways of existing that even in their most rarefied form are always enmeshed in circumstance, time, place, and society – in short, they are in the world, and hence worldly. Whether a text is preserved or put aside for a period, whether it is on a library shelf or not, whether it is considered dangerous or not: these matters have to do with a text's being in the world, which is a more complicated matter than the private process of reading. The same implications are undoubtedly true of critics in their capacities as readers and writers in the world. (4)

In fact the concept *Worldliness* evolved as a result of Said's dissatisfaction with the mainstream Western literary theories' reluctance to expose the political function of the literary writings. Not surprisingly, Said's entirely new and fresh concept of *worldliness* which began to take shape between 1970s and 1980s did not receive a warm welcome in academia, since post-structuralism was the dominant cultural theory at that time. And contrary to Said's contention that the text has material and political value, post-structuralism, roughly speaking, holds the view that the text is an abstract entity in which no center or final meaning can be found. So Said's concept

deemed as being too politically oriented and therefore Said was heavily challenged and criticized for his concept of *worldliness*. However, Said's deep commitment and insistence on exposing the inevitable affiliations of the text to the worldly circumstances led him to broaden and nourish his theoretical suggestions by producing works that thoroughly investigate the worldly place of text, namely, *Orientalism* (1978), and his collection of essays, *The World, The Text, and the Critic* (1983) which are in fact "the essays comprising the volume were written before the publication of *Orientalism* and reveal the emergence of the methodology and the concerns which have underpinned all Said's works" (Ashcroft and Ahluwalia 13).

Said did not only address the ways in which the texts operate in our world, he also extensively examined the worldly power of the producer of the texts, the intellectual/critic. That is to say, Said managed to add more theoretical insight to the concept of *worldliness* in his works: *The World, The Text, and the Critic* (1983) and *Representation of the Intellectual* (1994), he extended the idea of the text's *worldliness* by adding the notion of the critic's *worldliness*, so in this way the concept became wider in its theoretical scope that it does not only demonstrate the link between the text and the world but also encompassing controversial and innovative notions related to the public intellectual like: 'amateurism', 'secular criticism,' and the 'role of the intellectual'. It could be said that Said's view of the 'role of the intellectual' mainly sits at the confluence of these two ideas; 'amateurism' and 'secular criticism', these two important ingredients Said put in defining the intellectual/critic function in society, helped him to define the way in which the intellectual can prepare a ground for change in society. For Said

'amateurism' is a key element for intellectual endeavour because it frees the intellectual/critic from being confined to a certain discipline or field, also it frees him from employing certain discourse but this discourse is not necessarily a political one for Said the intellectual should resist being locked in any specialized language whether it be institutional or sheer academic one because besides the fact that addressing a wide range of people with highly technical or esoteric language is difficult or ineffective, the message of the intellectual/critic would be caged in peculiar concerns that are quite remote from people's actual worldly life; "precious jargon has grown up, and its formidable complexities obscure the social realities that, strange thought it may seem, encourage a scholarship of "modes of excellence" very far from daily life in the age of declining American power"(4). The other basic characteristic the intellectual should imbibe and exhibit to achieve *worldliness* is 'secular criticism'. In fact 'secular criticism' is wider in its scope than the amateurism because aside from fostering the idea of professional/amateur split, it contains ideas like 'exile', and 'speaking truth to power.' So it encompasses all the issues Said focused on in developing his notion of *worldliness* of intellectual. Roughly speaking, secular criticism, as its name would suggest, affirms the need for a more critical approach to the dominant values. And this naturally requires the intellectual to have deep critical faith that will distance him or her from the constraints of financial dependences or ideological loyalties to certain social and political structures. Here Said posits that the intellectual can only obtain and maintain his or her critical voice through "exile" even though Said's exile as an intellectual was both an actual and a metaphorical condition, yet in Said formulation of the concept of *worldliness* the idea of 'exile' is more a state of mind that provides the

intellectual a mobility that would enable him or her to navigate freely through ideas and notions:

The pattern that sets the course for the intellectual as outsider is best exemplified by the condition of exile, the state of never being fully adjusted, always feeling outside the chatty, familiar world inhabited by natives. Exile for the intellectual in this metaphysical sense is restlessness, movement, constantly being unsettled, and unsettling others. You cannot go back to some earlier and perhaps more stable condition of being at home; and, alas, you can never fully arrive, be at one in your new home or situation. (qtd. in Ashcroft and Ahluwalia 45)

For said the ultimate function of being outsider or exilic intellectual is the ability of 'speaking truth to power' so in Said's view the exilic intellectual is an intellectual who is not confined into the contours of dogmatic, partisan or nationalistic ideas, thus the voice of such exilic intellectual has the capacity to disrupt the coercive dominant order and provide a ground for social transformation, it should be noted that Said's positing of the intellectual as a figure who has the potential for social transformation marks a return to Gramsci's founding premise: that the intellectual is a man who is capable of disrupting the status quo and shift the power relationship, in other words, intellectuals can act as a double edged sword, they have the potential to legitimize the coercive discourses and policies, and they also have the potential to turn the hegemonic power into a counter hegemonic power. So all depends on the role the intellectual wants to take on, the intellectual can act as a committed public figure who challenges dogma, injustice, and tyranny by promoting freedom, or he

can remain engaged with the dominant order and act as an advocate for maintaining the status quo.

In fact the general development of ideas in this thesis about the role of the contemporary thinker and the function of his or her cultural productions, will follow the ideological map that Said drew by combining Foucault's concept of *discourse*, Gramsci's notion of *hegemony*, and of course his own concept of *worldliness*. Especially the subsequent chapter will be heavily concerned with the idea of to what extent do writers, thinkers or intellectuals of our time manage to remain 'exiled' in Saidian sense. And the key point of discussion will be on whether the productions of these thinkers or intellectuals can be considered as discursive agents that provide grounds for more freedom and social transformation, or whether they can be seen as discursive agents that shaped by the dominant order in order to serve and maintain the status quo.

CHAPTER 2 THE MEDIUM

In the earlier sections of this study we noted that extensive attention will be allocated for analyzing the essays produced by some acclaimed writers and cultural theorists regarding one of the main issues preoccupied the new millennium which is the September 11 attacks, yet before we embark on the detailed analysis of these essays it will be useful to briefly explain why we attempt to survey the cultural responses to 9/11 via the essays of critics and writers. The essay, Said notes, is “an act of cultural survival of the highest importance” (qtd. in Ashcroft and Ahluwalia 37). For Said the essay is the best tool that the intellectual can use in disseminating his views because the essay embrace and assist *worldliness*: this means that the essay by its nature and by its own textuality does not draw strict dividing lines between the professional and amateur/nonspecialist therefore the intellectual is offered a wide ground for his or her critical voice by the essay:

the preferred genre for Said is the essay, for him, the essay can escape the bondage of tradition, because it emphasizes the personal while at the same time entailing a political dimension which is encapsulated in the adage that the ‘personal is political’. This form is critical to Said because the ‘critic cannot speak without the mediation of writing’(1983: 51) and the essay, more than any other form, liberates the worldliness of the writer. (Ashcroft and Ahluwalia 36)

so in the light of the quotation above we can say that the essay is a perfect mean for non-specialists, self-conscious, independent, antithetical and oppositional criticism

since it can resist complacency to the strict thematic and aesthetic rules. Moreover it does not require the intellectual to have specialized knowledge in order to express his or her notions and ideas about a specific issue, so by freeing the writer or the intellectual from dealing in single thematic framework it provides more room for intellectual mobility and freedom and this by the very nature of things makes the intellectual more *worldly* in Saidian sense.

Shortly after the September 11 attacks a large corpus of textual/cultural responses emerged from the fields of politics and international relations. Yet the problem of how to respond to 9/11 had been a difficult and pressing issue to the realm of literature and culture, than the realm of (inter)national politics. Thus, September 11 presented a dilemma for writers and intellectuals; would they use a type of response that focuses on the traumatic effect of the attack and add more emphasis to the already pumped popular narrative of fear, loss, and victimhood, or would they employ the ‘big-picture’ approach by critically examining the political conditions that gave rise to the events of 9/11. Yet the issue hinges more on whether there is a way to employ the big-picture approach in a climate where media fabrication and statecraft’s populist views eclipsed all alternative views. As Žižek puts it:

This is the dilemma of Cultural studies: will they stick to the same topics, directly admitting that their fight against oppression is a fight within First World capitalism’s universe– which means that, in the wider conflict between the Western First World and the outside threat to it, one should reassert one’s fidelity to the basic American liberal-democratic framework? Or will they risk

taking the step into radicalizing their critical stance; will they problematize this framework? (48-49)

In the quotation above, Žižek raises a fundamental critical question. He asks whether the contemporary intellectual would chose to employ politically convenient discourse and assist the very process of manipulation and falsification or whether the intellectual would manage to distance himself or herself from the power structures and take up a moral leadership to provide oppositional criticism that would challenge the dominant ideology. Actually Žižek marks a return to Said's founding premise: that the intellectual must be committed 'to speak truth to power' regardless of the costs. In the forthcoming sections of this study we shall address the question posed by Žižek and we shall interrogate the representation and the interpretation of 9/11 by examining the theoretical insight provided by DeLillo and by some other thinkers and cultural theorists.

CHAPTER 3

THE DICHOTOMOUS TONE OF “IN THE RUINS OF THE FUTURE”

11 September 2001 which was seen by many politicians, commentators, and critics as being an epochal event – a “turning point in history” : as has been referred by Tony Blair, at the Labour Party conference– has received so much attention across the political, journalistic and literary spectrum. Thus a plethora of 9/11 texts and narratives was created, and among these generic category of 9/11 representations DeLillo’s essay and novel were chosen to be the focus of this study. Actually the reason that DeLillo’s works are laid under the critical prism in this study is due to the fact that DeLillo’s oeuvre has long maintained a deep thematic concern with terrorism, but besides that DeLillo’s works offer the best test case in terms of analyzing the role of the intellectual or the writer in our time, and the function of his or her production in society, because DeLillo’s essay and novel provide a fertile ground in analyzing the political and literary discourses surrounding the terrorist attacks, as in these two texts reside the juxtaposition of political and literary discursive aspects, one reflected in the form of essay and the other in the form of a novel. Of course drawing strict lines between these two pieces of writing and classify one as sheer political and the other as purely literary aesthetic text void of political aspect would be misleading, also it should be noted that the novel *Falling Man* could be seen as an aesthetic elaboration and extension of the ideas DeLillo put in the essay. Yet for Said, as was previously mentioned, the essay by its very nature embraces and assists *worldliness* more than any other genre; thus the essay by its own textuality provides a convenient outlet for the political, personal and critical expressions more than any genre as it has the possibility to escape from the bondage

of strict thematic and aesthetic rules, so we shall have to consider whether DeLillo managed to realize the essay's substantial potential to convey a comprehensive critical interpretation or whether his essay was one of the numerous essays which acted through the convenient and conventional line of the dominant discourse.

In post-9/11 climate it has been pointed out again and again that 9/11 was an event that is unlike anything has come before. This is also a point made by DeLillo in his essay "In the Ruins of the Future" DeLillo says: "This catastrophic event changes the way we think and act, moment to moment, week to week, for unknown weeks and months to come, and steely years. Our world, parts of our world, have crumbled into theirs, which means we are living in a place of danger and rage (3). Yet, what is more interesting and remarkable about this quotation is that in it lays the gist of DeLillo's essay which is rooted in two fundamental premises: first, that 9/11 is an epochal event which marks a point at the beginning of the twenty-first century that attempt to divide history from September 11, 2001 and onward. Second, the reliance on the mode of the representation of *otherness* and highlighting it by employing dichotomous words, like the ones used in the quotation above: "our" and "theirs. The particular focus on epochal and traumatic account of the event, which put at the very beginning of DeLillo's essay and reworked through the whole essay will be discussed in greater detail later. Yet we shall begin our analysis by discussing the presence of *otherness* in the DeLillo's essay which suggesting relevant engagement to the leading topic of the day: Islam versus modernity; an idea which gained some momentum in post-Cold War era and reached its apogee at the turn of the millennium. There is now a large literature on this topic, which keeps growing, and DeLillo's essay "In the Ruins of the Future" and his novel *Falling Man* to a large

extent reflect on the same literature. Thus, if we look at DeLillo's essay "In the Ruins of the Future" we can see that his remarks happen to be heavily relied on dichotomous categorization in which "Islam" as a religion, ideology or a system is set against the "West" in an astonishingly explicit way. Therefore, DeLillo's contention strongly echoing Samuel Huntington's article "The Clash of Civilizations?" which was published in 1993 and expanded into a book after three years. Either Huntington's essay or its extended version; the book, both revolve around the central idea of dividing the world's population into rival and conflicting entities, as the word "clash" itself -which exist in the title of the two works- unfortunately, seems not to suggest anything other than conflict and opposition. Therefore, it could be said that Huntington's theory took its basic life force from the inevitability of the possibility of civilizational clash, which involves chief civilizations and these civilizations according to Huntington "include Western, Confucian, Japanese, Islamic, Hindu, Slavic-Orthodox, Latin American and possibly African civilization". Even though the starting points of Huntingto's thesis suggests conflict between these seven or eight primary civilization, yet it zooms in on how Islam happens to be the dominating source of international conflict. "Most of the argument in the pages that followed relied on a vague notion of something Huntington called "civilization identity" and "the interactions among seven or eight [sic] major civilizations," of which the conflict between two of them, Islam and the West, gets the lion's share of his attention." states Edward Said in his essay "The Clash of Ignorance" which was written as a critical response to Huntington thesis.

Now let's put DeLillo's work into play with Huntington's thesis of "the clash of civilizations" to see how the two works share strong ideological parallels with each other. Indeed, being among the vast number of collection of essays addressing 9/11 in the immediate aftermath of the events, DeLillo's essay "In the Ruins of the Future" did little to shake itself loose from the prevalent idea that sets Islam as the archenemy of the West, thus, it should be no surprise to see that most DeLillo's notions were essentially built on the core ideas expressed in Huntington's thesis; especially the one that tends to set a deep chasm that separate the Western world from other civilizations, especially the Islamic one, by the values and principles they allegedly hold. It should be noted that Huntington basically tends to organize the world as "the West and the Rest" of course, with placing more emphasis on the primary rivalry and conflict between the West and Islamic-Confucian civilizations, while the gist of DeLillo's essay rest completely on the sheer dualistic categorization that divide the world into two entities one revered and the other reviled, and Islam in DeLillo's article is put as the title under which all the reviled anti-Western values fall. And this is nowhere more evident than in the following quotation:

Technology is our fate, our truth. It is what we mean when we call ourselves the only superpower on the planet. The materials and methods we devise make it possible for us to claim our future. We don't have to depend on God or the prophets or other astonishments. We are the astonishment. The miracle is what we ourselves produce, the systems and networks that change the way we live and think.

But whatever great skeins of technology lie ahead, ever more complex, connective, precise, micro-fractional, the future has yielded, for now, to

medieval expedience, to the old slow furies of cutthroat religion. Kill the enemy and pluck out his heart.

If others in less scientifically advanced cultures were able to share, wanted to share, some of the blessings of our technology, without a threat to their faith or traditions, would they need to rely on a God in whose name they kill the innocent? Would they need to invent a God who rewards violence against the innocent with a promise of “infinite paradise,” in the words of a handwritten letter found in the luggage of one of the hijackers?

For all those who may want what we’ve got, there are all those who do not. These are the men who have fashioned a morality of destruction. They want what they used to have before the waves of Western influence. They surely see themselves as the elect of God whether or not they follow the central precepts of Islam. It is the presumptive right of those who choose violence and death to speak directly to God. They will kill and then die. Or they will die first, in the cockpit, in clean shoes, according to instructions in the letter.
(37-38)

The essence of the quotation above is nothing but a reaffirmation of the widely held assumption about Islam that occupies the Western intellectual and political debate; the notion that Islam is the locus of the most severe manifestations of anti-Western/anti-modern values. In this context, now let us study in detail the segregation points between Islam and West that put by DeLillo in the quotation above. First, DeLillo calls our attention to the one of the basic features that differentiates the West from the so called Islamic world: the Western scientific

superiority, DeLillo states: “The materials and methods we devise make it possible for us to claim our future. We don’t have to depend on God or the prophets or other astonishments. We are the astonishment”. Here again DeLillo is recycling the same popular notions that elevate the Western values above the values Islam is allegedly claimed to have. For DeLillo the West and especially the West’s big brother: America, crowned as the leading superpower due to its achievements in the fields of science and technology. So, unlike the West which embraces the belief of endless progress and for that reason always looks forward for the future, Islam characterised as a religion and/or ideology which rejects to break with the past, hence, for DeLillo, the Islamic world which persistently tries to look back to the original ethos of Islam; to Mecca, cannot and will never be able to face the changing conditions of modern life. Therefore, the current conflict between the West and the Islamic world explained in DeLillo’s essay by the very simple cause and effect concept; “Technology is our fate, our truth. It is what we mean when we call ourselves the only superpower on the planet” for him the West’s mastery and domination over the rest of the World stems from the fact that science and technology have altered the scale of leading the world, thus the progress and technology of the West have not only enabled the Westerners to designate their future but it made it necessary for them to claim and designate the future of the rest of the world. Societies which ,in DeLillo’s words, “depend on God or the prophets or other astonishments” will never *witness the dawn* of true modernity unless they shake themselves loose from holding on to the past and try to face the reality of the day. DeLillo goes on and say “We are the astonishment”; the main idea which succinctly stated in DeLillo’s words is that the West no longer guided by traditional and religious structures, it is no longer

impressed by the wisdom of ancient texts and prophets the way the Islamic world is. Because the West was enchanted and now guided by the scientific progress and technology, which are the fruits of deserting the supreme rule of religion. Thus, DeLillo boldly acknowledges the West as the astonishment of our modern times. And he adds: “The miracle is what we ourselves produce, the systems and networks that change the way we live and think” perhaps, this could be regarded as a quite explicit statement that explains DeLillo’s logic about how the Western civilization prospered and became the leading power. Indeed, the Western “systems and networks” adopted and adapted by millions of people worldwide, hence, the Western civilization did not only transformed itself by the magic of its scientific progress but also succeeded to cast the enchantment spell upon the whole world by the blinding glare of its achievements and products: computers, cyberspace, aero planes, skyscrapers, satellites, and many more things.

Huntington who severely criticized by some of academic writers and post-colonial critics for his concept of “the clash of civilizations”, and who is accused of drawing a very simplistic picture that divides the world with a very reductive language of binary opposition, could be seen as much more milder and sophisticated in terms of language Huntington articulates when compared to the approach and language DeLillo employs in his essay, more precisely, DeLillo shows no reservation to refers to the religion of the hijackers; Islam, by using phrases like: “cutthroat religion”, or “aggrieved belief”. Thus, even though DeLillo main arguments go in line with Huntington’s concept of civilizational clash, it is noteworthy the fact that as a political scientists Huntington managed to maintain a more calmer attitude than

DeLillo did, who presumably might have a stronger hold on aesthetic values and naturally a more refined model of expression was expected from an acclaimed novelist like him, yet, indeed DeLillo shows very little or no tendency to resort to use any euphemisms or implication when referring to the religion of the hijackers; Islam, he instead refers to it throughout the essay by using phrases astonishingly hostile like: “cutthroat religion”, or “aggrieved belief”. The following quotation is a clear example of this:

But whatever great skeins of technology lie ahead, ever more complex, connective, precise, micro-fractional, the future has yielded, for now, to medieval expedience, to the old slow furies of cutthroat religion. Kill the enemy and pluck out his heart.

If others in less scientifically advanced cultures were able to share, wanted to share, some of the blessings of our technology, without a threat to their faith or traditions, would they need to rely on a God in whose name they kill the innocent? Would they need to invent a God who rewards violence against the innocent with a promise of "infinite paradise," in the words of a handwritten letter found in the luggage of one of the hijackers?

Now let us go into detail about how DeLillo has charted Islam’s relations to our modern day. It seems that DeLillo draws a clear horizontal stream of past, present and future, and he perceives and reflects Islam as a religion and an ideology which fixed in one point on this temporal continuum, centuries have passed and by the advance of technology and science the future rushes toward us, but the Muslim world’s eye persistently slips into the past, into a 1,400-year-old moment as a source of wisdom. Unquestionably, the aforesaid arguments and ideas were expressed by

DeLillo in his essay after having them reduced to their crudest and simplest forms and one clear example of this could be: “the future has yielded, for now, to medieval expedience, to the old slow furies of cutthroat religion”. DeLillo’s remarks embody evident anxiety about Islam; a fear about how the future will be a hostage to Islam and he expresses this anxiety with an open disdain towards Islam; so the content of his argument and the way it is conveyed could be classified as a perfect epitome of an already well-established anxiety which reached its apogee after September 11. Indeed, if we look at the contemporary scholarship and debate, we can see two major themes feed this anxiety: the first one is the assumption that Islam is backward and uncivilized; the second one is the deep worry about the possibility of Islamic revival. In the same way, DeLillo’s essay revolves around these two major themes and thus it could be regarded as one sample of the voluminous post-September 11 academic, literary and policy literature that harbours deep anxiety about Islam. Hence, with notably rare exceptions, we can see that the arguments of the most contemporary authors, researchers, scholars, policymakers, or media pundits in the West, operate from the similar paradigm of “the clash of civilization”; a paradigm which is built upon the claim of Islam’s inherent incompatibility with Western civilization.

With the collapse of the Soviet Union and the end of Communism the political jigsaw puzzle set by the West lost a chief piece: the communist archenemy, so the West felt that an alternative should be sought and Islam seemed to be a perfect substitute that would fill the void left by the communist threat. And indeed the idea to recast Islam as the primary source of danger for the democratic civilized West fitted perfectly the well-established political dynamics of the West. As a result there

was no need for devising a new political trajectory for the new rival, and no need for dissolving the old myths and shaking the pieces of West's political jigsaw puzzle because everything was to stay the same. And more than any other time in history, now the rhetoric of "us" versus "them" could be articulated loudly and boldly, so contrary to what was believed, the end of the Cold War which brought the new danger: the Islamic threat, was not ushering to a completely new phase which is known as New World Order, as it was assuring to the maintenance of the old world order in a new and fresh form.

As was previously mentioned, the new phase which was emerging gradually through the timeline between the Cold War and 9/11 did not required tailoring of a whole discourse as the "us" versus "them" discourse structure was already in play, especially in the Cold War times, yet structuring the world dichotomously stretches back even long before 9/11 and Cold War times, so the forceful promoting of dualistic discourse is not a sheer nostalgia for the polarized world of the Cold War era, it is far beyond that, the Western anxiety towards Islam is a deep rooted one. When we look at the West's relationship with the Islamic world, right from the onset of Islam, we can see that the nature of this relationship has always been controversial and arousing strong debates. Edward Said is one of the scholars who have elaborated on this subject extensively. In his influential work, *Orientalism*, Said explains how the deep-seated antagonistic approach against Arab-Islamic Orient took shape through the timeline that begin with West's encounter with Orient/Islam and how this approach continued to get more solid as a result of perceiving Islam as an archrival:

Consider how the Orient, and in particular the Near Orient, became known in the West as its great complementary opposite since antiquity. There were the Bible and the rise of Christianity; there were travelers like Marco Polo who charted the trade routes and patterned a regulated system of commercial exchange, and after him Lodovico di Varthema and Pietro della Valle; there were fabulists like Mandeville; there were the redoubtable conquering Eastern movements, principally Islam, of course; there were the militant pilgrims, chiefly the Crusaders. Altogether an internally structured archive is built up from the literature that belongs to these experiences. Out of this comes a restricted number of typical encapsulations: the journey, the history, the fable, the stereotype, the polemical confrontation. These are the lenses through which the Orient is experienced, and they shape the language, perception, and form of the encounter between East and West... If the mind must suddenly deal with what it takes to be a radically new form of life—as Islam appeared to Europe in the early Middle Ages—the response on the whole is conservative and defensive. Islam is judged to be a fraudulent new version of some previous experience, in this case Christianity. The threat is muted, familiar values impose themselves, and in the end the mind reduces the pressure upon it by accommodating things to itself as either "original" or "repetitious." Islam thereafter is "handled": its novelty and its suggestiveness are brought under control so that relatively nuanced discriminations are now made that would have been impossible had the raw novelty of Islam been left unattended. The Orient at large, therefore, vacillates between the West's

contempt for what is familiar and its shivers of delight in—or fear of—
novelty. (58-59)

So in the light of Said's contention we understand that the histories of the so-called Christian world and the Muslim world are inextricably intertwined, yet these interwoven lines of history most of the time characterised by being tense and highly charged. In the quotation above Said defines the Near Orient as being the West's "great complementary opposite since antiquity" and this brings up the question: what really made the Near Orient to be "complementary opposite" of the West? The answer lies in Said's two words "complementary" and "opposite"; much can be discerned in these succinctly yet perspicaciously put words. Yet, let us take Islam as one of the dynamics which made the Near Orient as a "complementary" and "opposite" part of the West; Islam could be seen as a complementary to Western Christendom in a sense that it shares the same Abrahamic ancestry, yet the very genealogical descendance of Islam which goes back to Adam and Abraham did not draw Islam near to the Western Christendom on the contrary this shared heritage was creating even more anxiety and remoteness. In fact, the kinship of Islam with the other two major Abrahamic monotheistic religions was crystal clear, as Islam acknowledges that the monotheistic faith which was revealed to the prophet of Islam Muhammad, was also revealed to the earlier prophets like: Abraham, Moses, and Jesus. Yet, Islam do also affirm that in the long line of monotheistic faiths which succeeded each other throughout history, Islam represents the last chain which carries the final and the complete message sent to mankind. So the combination of the two afore-explained factors: the affirmation for its shared Abrahamic heritage

and the declaration of its finality, made Islam to be perceived by the medieval Christendom to be “complementary” and “opposite”; actually if we reflect on these two words we can see that they strongly point to the process of constructing “The Other” so in this context we may contend that Islam’s *otherness* shaped through two factors that the first one is; its self-evident familiarity and the second one is its enormous difference and novelty. So if we go back to the aforesaid quote from Edward Said, and especially if we focus on the very last words we can see the clear manifestation of the two elements which played role in *othering* Islam, yet considering what we discussed so far can we say Islam’s otherness implicates the involvement of these two factors alone, or is there another factor that set the definitive frame around the otherness of Islam.

Unlike Christianity, Islam holds to a strict practice of monotheism and it regards idol worship, prophets worship, saint worship, or intercession to be associating partners to God, which is called in Arabic *shirk* which means polytheism; the only unforgivable and unattonable sin in Islam. Therefore, one obvious and primary point of departure with Islam was the fundamental Trinitarian doctrine of Christianity. It should be noted that, although Islam exalts and reveres Jesus Christ as one of the great Prophets of God, but it does not recognize him as a divine being, as this statues was not assigned even to the prophet Muhammad, because Islam rejects any concept or idea that lead to associate or equal any deities or beings with *Allah*; the creator who does not resemble his creation or anything that exists. So Islam’s strong emphasis on monotheism represents the major fault line between Islam and Christianity. Therefore, Islam’s shared Abrahamic prophetic tradition passed by as

an indication of its unauthenticness, also Islam's intrinsic differences form Christianity deemed it as being an alien and deviant religion, but are these perceptions about Islam alone corralled it under the umbrella of *otherness*? In fact, this question brings up another question: why Judaism the older brother of Christianity was not pushed to the realm of *otherness* the way the younger brother was? Interestingly, compared to Christianity, Judaism has more emphasis regarding the oneness of God and like Islam it has its intrinsic differences, and one major one is that it denies Jesus Christ as the awaited Messiah and it did not even honour him as a prophet the way Islam does but nevertheless it has not been assigned the position of being the archenemy in Christendom eyes. However, it is important not to overlook the fact that even though Christianity's roots chiefly embodied in Judaism and in the Hebrew Bible; it is misleading to assume that the relationship between Christianity and Judaism was exempt from any enmity and ambiguity. And without delving into much detail we can say that, historically, the Christendom attitudes towards Judaism was swinging back and forth between having high view of Judaism for owning it the birth of the Christian faith on one hand, and manifesting hostility for its unresolved differences on the other hand, yet this paradoxical relationship did not produce a standard view on Judaism. So when the two basic elements of *otherness* we discussed earlier applied to Judaism we can see that it did not entail constructing a strong belligerent image of Judaism the way Islam was depicted. So if the two legs on which the *otherness* functions, namely; the familiarity and the intrinsic difference, were not definitive elements in designating strong *otherness* regarding Judaism, then the question that poses itself is: where does the *otherness* of Islam hinges on?

After Christianity triumphed and became the dominant religion of the Roman Empire it has pursued and enjoyed an exclusive authority and power in the religious domain, and with the advent of Islam Christendom started to worry excessively about a possible shifts in power that might lead the Christendom's dominance to slip away under its feet, because unlike Judaism which was hardly a rival, Islam was seen as a big challenge and a strong rival which was posing a great danger to its well-established position.

Surrounded by very powerful empires like The Sassanid Persian Empire and Byzantium, Arabia gave birth to a new religion, this new born religion with all the humble and harsh circumstance of Arabia made a successful and rapid growth; it managed to extend its influence beyond the confines of its cradle in Arabia in a very short period of time. Actually, Islam started to mount serious advancement to regions like Levant, which termed as *Bilad al-Sham* in Arabic, this very penetration of Islam right into the heart of Christendom was the source of deep concern and anxiety. Indeed a strong contender was looming on the horizon, and unlike Judaism, Islam was not a mere theological rival that could be tolerated, Islam was seen as a religion which had a great potential to provide powerful and organized alternative to Christianity, in other words, with the rise of Islam, Christianity's well-established position which has been pursued exclusively disrupted and threatened by a strong rival, a rival with a potential to not only challenge Christianity's authority yet even to supersede and abrogate it. So here if we go back to the question that has been stated before: Where does the *otherness* of Islam hinges on? And if we attempt to answer this question, either through Lacanian psychological perspective or through Saidian

postcolonial perspective, we can say that what clearly seems lying at the core of Islam's *otherness* in Christendom's eyes was the challenge Islam posed. In other words, the alarm and anxiety caused by the possibility of losing grip on power, made Islam a perfect object of otherness for the Christian world:

Doubtless Islam was a real provocation in many ways. It lay uneasily close to Christianity, geographically and culturally. It drew on the Judeo-Hellenic traditions, it borrowed creatively from Christianity, it could boast of unrivaled military and political successes. Nor was this all. The Islamic lands sit adjacent to and even on top of the Biblical lands; moreover, the heart of the Islamic domain has always been the region closest to Europe, what has been called the Near Orient or Near East. Arabic and Hebrew are Semitic languages, and together they dispose and redispense of material that is urgently important to Christianity. From the end of the seventh century until the battle of Lepanto in 1571, Islam in either its Arab, Ottoman, or North African and Spanish form dominated or effectively threatened European Christianity. That Islam outstripped and outshone Rome cannot have been absent from the mind of any European past or present. (Said 74)

Despite the rapid growth of Islam, what made Islam as the Christendom contender of power was the strong structure of Islam, in other words, Islam did not emerge on the historical stage with a doctrine based on abstract religious notions, Islam provided its adherents with a sophisticated and comprehensive doctrine that guides all their actions and interactions. So, it could be said that Islam's doctrine encompasses all worldly and spiritual affairs of Muslims whether related to personal

affairs, social affairs, or political affairs, it has a comprehensive structure that legislates all facets of life. Hence, Islam managed to assert and affirm its strong identity in myriad arenas, be they: spiritual, military, social, or political. However, the catalytic factor that ascribed Islam a special status was the concept of *Ummah*, which basically means the Muslim community. In fact, the only tie that bounds this community was, and still is, Islam. So neither geography nor race, Islam represents the spiritual backbone that gathers the Muslims into a single body. And indeed besides the basic spiritual element, the concept of *Ummah* has multi-layered social and political implications which, when considered as a whole, create an overarching communal attitude between Muslims. It should be noted that the very concept of *Ummah* actually reflects the quintessential universal aspect of Islam. Therefore, unlike the concept of a “Chosen Nation of Israel” in Judaism, which reflects the strong nationalistic aspect of the Jewish faith and which entails a kind of passivity and vulnerability in the face of other religions that hold strong missionary zeal, Islam’s concept of *Ummah* served as a great international unifying agent that increased the momentum of Islam’s rapid growth and expansion. And this very fact awakened the Christendom to realize that a strong competitor was entering the stage of history with a potential to challenge its opponent in arenas that were previously dominated and influenced by the Christianity.

Over time, the political, religious, social, economic and military systems and institutions in the Islamic world became more mature and continued in prospering; this advancement of Islam in various areas was ensuring more gain in lands, power, and prestige. And, inevitably, the points of contention between the two religions

were increasing as Islam continued to grow and thrive; thus, rivalry evoked not only in theological spheres but also in cultural and philosophical one. Hence, it became plain for the Christendom that Islam was as a looming ‘alien’ force which has already penetrated the heartland of the Christian world, and unless effective means of confronting and dismantling this momentous threat were implemented, the consequences would be disastrous. And indeed, formidable struggle against Islamic threat was waged in many fronts and arenas, yet what is central to our analysis is the discursive war waged by the Christendom in the ideological arena. Therefore, what we discussed so far in our thumbnail summary of Islam’s appearance on the stage of history was to highlight the circumstances that triggered the process of constructing Islam discursively. And since the issue of *otherness* is extremely relevant to our contemporary world, locating its emergence historically would allow us to trace and analyze how the very idea of *othering* Islam was born and how it has been evolving until it took its final shape in our postmodern times.

To understand the complexity and depth of the very process of *othering* Islam it was prerequisite to highlight the backdrop against which a discursive construction of Islam took shape. Therefore what could be clearly discerned from what we have discussed so far that Islam did not become the vicious enemy of the Western civilization overnight. Yet, oddly, most intellectuals and academics refers to the late 1980s and 1990s as the period that heralded a dawning of a new phenomenon which called the “Islamic threat”, while it is true that the times that brought the collapse of the Soviet Union, Islam was put under the spotlight for being the new political foil. But to assume that it was the Post–Cold War era which bred a new idea or concept that pits the Islamic east against the Christian West would be very misleading.

Actually, Ibrahim Kalin In his essay, “Roots of Misconception,” explains how the misrepresentation of Islam emerged almost simultaneously with its birth, and how it has always kept evolving down to our present day:

Two major attitudes can be discerned in Western perceptions of Islam. The first and by far the most common view is that of clash and confrontation. Its roots go back to the Christian rejection of Islam as a religion in the 8th century when Islam first arose on the historical scene and was quickly perceived to be a theological and political threat to Christendom. The medieval European view of Islam as a heresy and its Prophet as an ‘impostor’ provided the religious foundations of the confrontationalist position which has survived up to our own day and gained a new dimension after 9/11. In the modern period, the confrontationalist view has been articulated in both religious and non-religious terms, the most famous one being the clash of civilizations hypothesis, which envisions the strategic and political conflicts between the Western and Muslim countries in terms of deep religious and cultural differences between the two. (144)

After centuries of thought and scholarship that led to the emergence of myriad revolutionary ideas in the cultural spheres of Western Civilization, be it; art, literature or philosophy, it is a very striking fact to see that the manners and the modes through which Islam is debated has changed so little. Currently, whenever Islam is debated whether it be in academic or public spheres, one theme come to the forefront and dominate the discussion; it is the contention that Islam is inherently a violent religion. Yet this is hardly a new idea because the seed of this idea was

planted back in the medieval times, when Christian theologians first labelled Islam as a 'religion of the sword'. Then, along with the essential medieval trope of Islam as a violent religion a set of negative views and statements as a whole continued to thrive during the time of Crusades, until they took an organized and coherent form of discourse in the classical colonial era. According to Edward Said the time period between 18th and 19th century, marks the systematic construction and development of the Orientalist discourse. The fact that the coherent discursive construction of the Orient* reached its maturity during the heyday of Imperial and colonial powers, takes us to the equation of power/knowledge on which Said's Foucauldian conception of Orientalist discourse was erected. Thus, drawing on Said's ideas we can say that the supremacy of the West has brought forth the authority to institutionalize and legitimate the system of statements that constructed the East scientifically, imaginatively and morally through Eurocentric lenses. Yet, it should be noted that while the superior position of the West led to the establishment of a huge coherent body of scholarly works designating the Orient, in the same way the very accumulation of this knowledge served the West to further maintain its upper hand over the Orient. So here it became clear that the machinery of domination is operating through the two-way nature of the relationship between the knowledge and power.

If the medieval seeds of prejudicial representation have continued to grow until it bloomed in 19th century when colonial power reached its zenith, then, the question

* I refer to the Islamic Middle East as 'the Orient' for the sake of convenience

which poses itself urgently is: what has befallen the Orientalist discourse with the breakdown of colonial domination in 20th century, did it remain unchanged or did it evolve into a much more formidable form? Actually, a brief thumbnail historical analysis would help us map some answers to the aforesaid question. By the end of the 20th century when European influence in the world began to wane, the helm of dominance was handed over to United States which became the leading power of the Western world. Actually, the greatest step for United States toward achieving global leadership was made following World War II, when the competition between United States and the Soviet Union for global hegemony. The contest arrived *to* its end gradually by United States affirmation of its military, economic and technological supremacy over its rival which brought the end of the Cold War with the collapse of the Soviet Union. Yet, more than anything else the ideological defeat of Communism in the face of free-market capitalism and liberal democracy, symbolized the final and the most significant triumph of American values.

The defeat of the last alternative to liberalism, and the announcement of the ‘New World Order’ by both Mikhail Gorbachev and George H. W. Bush, interpreted as the signs that ushering to a new dawn. Yet this new dawn begged a new model for organizing the dynamics of power and ideology. In fact, the void left by President Reagan’s “evil empire” could only filled with another one, because without opposition United States as a hegemonic power would not be able to affirm and preserve its identity and superiority. Therefore the eye of the West’s leading superpower directed at the millennial enemy; Islam, by which the fire of ancient animosity and rivalry could be ignited. However, a glance at the Muslim world of

20th century is enough to see how the Muslim world is too far from providing the West with a powerful rival. Also noteworthy is the fact that that even though the new enemy would fall short in providing, economic, military, or political rivalry for the West, the possible ideological challenge and opposition Islam could pose, would make even communism pale in comparison.

The triumph of Western liberal values over fascism, monarchism, and socialism did not have the same fascinating impact on the Muslim World which is too weary and tired from its past experience with the West's colonial and imperial domination that followed by the implementation of dictators via the invisible hand of the neo-colonialist powers which thrived on the so called democratic and liberal ideologies of the West. By turning blind eye to the historical developments that shaped the current situation of Muslim world, fingers of blame pointed toward Islam for the primitive, unprogressive and threatening nature of the Muslim world, while hundreds of years of exploitation and suppression in the hands of Western powers deemed irrelevant.

Once the age-old enemy; Islam resurfaced and substituted for the previous archenemy, the very process of constructing it discursively could be set forth. In fact, there was no need to invent a whole discourse from the start, as historically Islam already constructed by Christian West discursively with certain tropes and motifs. However, these olden tropes and motifs needed to be sharpened and modified so that it would gain currency in our contemporary world. So now along with "Pentagon planners and defence industry executives who may have temporarily lost their occupations after the end of the cold war but have now discovered a new vocation for themselves"(Said70), yet, other devices were needed to work in accordance with the

newly crafted politic trajectory. And, indeed, journalists affiliated with establishment media, and academic entrepreneurs associated with government started to develop ideas and theories in support with the government bodies which were promoting the implication of “us” and “them” rhetoric to construct Islam as a hostile and culturally inferior *Other*.

In 1990s there was a theory boom, and the majority of politicians and pundits were generating notions that set Islam on one side and the West on the other side of the global struggle equation. And the leading figures who channelled their energies to marginalize Islam, to name just a few: Samuel Huntington, Francis Fukuyama Judith Miller, and the most ardent one Bernard Lewis whose works revolve around one central theme which is how Islam is violent and culturally incompatible with the West. In fact, wide array of things fall under this main theme, Islam is characterized with values like backwardness, barbarism, orthodoxy, isolation which stand in firm opposition to the Western liberal and democratic values like; freedom of expression, human rights, progress, and, especially, scientific superiority. So from 1990s and onwards the process of *othering* Islam by employing a dichotomous language became so prevalent in political and cultural arenas, needles to mention the mass media.

While we briefly discussed the extent to which Islam was represented and dealt with in 1990s, one might wonder how this reinvigorated *Orientalist* discourse manifested itself in the post-9/11 era. In fact, 9/11 could be described as the apogee of the neo-Orientalist discourse as it opened the floodgate of criticism about Islam. Indeed, words and phrases like; Muslim extremism, Islamic terrorism, jihad,

fundamentalism, became substitute terms when referring to Islam or Arabs. And DeLillo's essay for *Harper's Magazine* "In the Ruins of the Future" which was analyzed in the previous part of this study could be seen as a perfect case in point of how gross generalization and using derogatory terms stripped from all kind of euphemism became the accepted norm when Islam debated or discussed in post-9/11 era. Yet, aside from its contribution to the large corpus of textual, cultural and journalistic productions which harbour huge misgivings about Islam, DeLillo's essay heavy reliance on the reductive discourse of binary opposition and his adoption of notions and ideas manifested in works of neo-Orientalist thinkers, poses a critical question about the role of the novelist and his cultural and literary production in our contemporary world. This question shall be addressed in the forthcoming section via analyzing DeLillo's novel the *Falling Man*.

CHAPTER 4

FALLING MAN: COUNTER-NARRATIVE

This part of the study will be allocated to question whether DeLillo's *Falling Man*, which was saluted by many critics for its sober approach to 9/11 events, could be distinguished from the literary production which were intoxicated or affected from the fixed ideologies produced in the aftermath of the events. The primary focus in this section will be to interrogate the literary response of DeLillo to the events by analyzing his novel *Falling Man* which was published in 2007. Indeed, after having analyzed DeLillo's essay "In the Ruins of the Future" in relation to Huntington's thesis "clash of civilization", its affiliation with latent Orientalist discourse was brought to light. Therefore, by drawing on what we have discussed in the previous parts of this study we will be able to trace to which extent DeLillo's ideas and notions have undergone changes and alteration. Or more precisely, we will set DeLillo's essay into play with his novel, to see whether his novel continues the cycle of *othering* Islam that initiated in his essay or whether DeLillo managed to employ a completely different discourse in his novel which followed his essay after six years.

In fact, what even deserves more serious attention is DeLillo's call for *counter-narrative*. In his essay "In the Ruins of the Future," DeLillo argues that terrorism is a competing world narrative and therefore creating a *counter-narrative* according to him is a responsibility that falls on the shoulders of ordinary people, writers and intellectuals. Hence, he calls on to them to join him in creating a *counter-narrative* to terrorism, DeLillo says: 'it is left to us"—writers, among others—"to create the counternarrative"(34). So through reading his novel we would be able to see the nature of the *counter-narrative* DeLillo initiated in his essay and then employed in

his novel. Finally, putting all these elements together we shall address the question whether DeLillo's novel *Falling Man* could be situated within the spectrum of the post-modern fiction.

After 9/11, a spotlight was cast on the American writer of Italian descent; Don DeLillo, who was eagerly awaited to respond to the uncanny events as he known for his deep thematic concern with terrorism: "Since the very week of September 11, 2001, commentators have remarked on DeLillo's clairvoyance" (Laist 193). In fact, DeLillo's longstanding concern with themes like; environmental disaster, globalization of capital, and terrorist violence led some critics to describe his works as startlingly prophetic. Accordingly, much scholarly and media's attention has been given over to DeLillo's prescience themes and depictions. Actually, the cover of DeLillo's most praised novel *Underworld* (1997) which bears a gloomy image of World Trade Center towers has ensued heated discussions. For many critics, the issue of featuring the scene of the Twin Towers on *Underworld* which already preceded by producing novels that deal with terrorism like *Libra* (1988) and *Mao II* (1991) was a testament to DeLillo's visionary power. Yet, when we drop the prevalent idea that "history begins at the ground zero of 9/11" (Rowe and Malhotra 58), we will no longer feel astonished by the so called prophetic productions of DeLillo. Or more precisely, would the references and allusions for the towers found in DeLillo's pre-9/11 works be regarded as an uncanny literary geniusness if they situated in material and historical context. A little background knowledge on the part of the reader related to contemporary history would be enough to rescue him or her from the so called enchanting features of DeLillo's works. Apart from the fact that

right from their birth the Twin Towers were part of American culture as they represented America's global identity, the simple act of recalling the bombing of World Trade Center in 1993—which happened only four years before the *Underworld* came out—would make the appearance of the Twin Towers in a novel nothing but a recycling of themes which were currently popular among people of the post-modern age. Therefore, when DeLillo's texts analyzed through the prism of historical and sociological realities of the contemporary society it will become obvious that DeLillo's trademark themes are merely long-established notions and issues which were already preoccupied the consciousness of late 20th century people. And no doubt reflecting these themes craftily and creatively in literary work deserves appreciation; yet to ascribe the writer an uncanny foresight for using ideas and notion which have already been haunting the imagination of the contemporary Western society would be nothing more than a lack of critical attention. And unfortunately the same uncritical attitude adopted towards the novel *Falling Man*, which will be analyzed in the forthcoming section.

Finally, the long-awaited novel the *Falling Man* was published in 2007; the 9/11 novel which was written by the novelist who “have seen it coming”. Therefore, high expectations were arisen in terms of how DeLillo addressed the events which happen to bear the confluence of themes that preoccupied his previous works. However, the primary factor aroused both curiosity and considerable interest about DeLillo's literary response to 9/11 was his call for *counter-narrative* that inaugurated in his essay which was penned only two months after the attacks. So a great deal of attention has been attracted to the nature of narrative DeLillo employed as he himself

was the originator and the propagator of the very idea of creating a *counter-narrative* in the face of 9/11 and its perpetrators.

So, by examining DeLillo's *Falling Man* we would be able to identify the form and the essence of the *counter-narrative* he created and championed. Yet, before going through the novel it is worth pointing out that DeLillo's essay "In the Ruins of the Future" offers much more than being only the medium for DeLillo's proposal. The essay itself lays out clear clues about the kind of literary response DeLillo was suggesting since in the essay itself resides the early form of DeLillo's *counter-narrative*.

Even though DeLillo's essay deemed by many critics as the earliest non-journalistic responses to the events, however, when we take a closer look into the whole essay with its fictional stories and its evident political component, the strong journalistic flavour will reveal itself very clearly. Indeed, a number of clichés sprung in media coverage of 9/11 also happen to show themselves in DeLillo's essay, and particularly interesting is the fact that DeLillo present these platitudes as components of his *counter-narrative*. One of these famous platitudes is that "after 9/11 nothing will be the same" DeLillo keeps recycling this notion more than once in his essay, he says: "All this changed on September 11" (33) and in the next paragraph he expands more on the so called transformative aspect of the events, then he continues by saying that: "This catastrophic event changes the way we think and act, moment to moment, week to week, for unknown weeks and months to come, and steely years" (33). Another overused idea DeLillo heavily relies on is the cliché that 9/11 is "beyond words". So, 9/11 seemed to be portrayed as unprecedented calamity that befallen America. Therefore, DeLillo along with many writers and commentators

claimed that describing the horrendous day of 9/11 was such an overwhelming issue that words fall short in conveying the profound effect of it. Drawing on this prevalent notion DeLillo's maintains: "The event itself has no purchase on the mercies of analogy or simile." (39). So for DeLillo the events rejects being contained in any linguistic devices; as probably any attempt to encapsulate 9/11 in language would lead to the shattering of the very symbolic resources used. As no simile, metaphor or analogy could possibly bear the enormous traumatic weight of those events. Yet, paradoxically, DeLillo's essay is highly burdened with the idea of constructing a cohesive and definitive theorization of response in the face of the very events DeLillo defines as unspeakable and unrepresentable. So in the forthcoming part we will analyze how DeLillo; one of the masters of postmodern fiction, tries to "present the unrepresentable" by prescribing and producing a monolithic collective narrative.

For DeLillo, part of the *counter-narrative* lies in, first; proliferating spontaneous memorials used in the wake of the events, and second; creating fictional stories with myths about the events. In other words, one of the narrative strategies DeLillo proposing in creating *counter-narrative* to 9/11 is merging the huge pile of memorials: flags, flowers, candles, crosses and photographs of the missing persons with myths and fictional stories about the pain and the loss experienced at that day. DeLillo says: "This is also the counter-narrative, a shadow history of false memories and imagined loss" (35). What DeLillo is basically trying to do is to emphasise and sharpen the trauma experienced in the wake of the events and calling others to join him in magnifying the horrors of that day. It is noteworthy the fact that DeLillo's theorization of his *counter-narrative* done in a quite direct edifying manner in his essay. For example; when he presenting the idea of creating fictional stories about

9/11, DeLillo remarks: “This is part of the counter-narrative”(39). Here, we can see that DeLillo does not show any reservation in setting quite precisely the framework of the kind of *counter-narrative* that should be created in the face of 9/11. So he is directly setting the formula or the “recipe” for creating that collective narrative. However, when it comes to the core ingredient on which the whole idea of *counter-narrative* is built on, interestingly, it seems to be acknowledged somewhat implicitly by DeLillo. Even though not called by name or stated clearly, the way it is spilled over the whole essay signals its tremendous importance. So what gives DeLillo’s *counter-narrative* a final shape is inherently residing in the term itself. In other words, what really calls attention in DeLillo’s essay is basically the enormous weight put on the prefix “counter-”; and this heavy reliance on opposition which dress his essay with an unmistakable antagonistic tone.

While most critics agree that DeLillo clearly declares narrative battle between “writers” and “terrorists” which seems quite plausible upon reading these lines: “Today, again, the world narrative belongs to terrorists”(33), yet what really escapes attention is the word “again”. When DeLillo says at the beginning of his sentence “today, again” the sentence clearly suggests that the “world narrative” some time in history was in the hands of the “terrorists” and now back in our present day they are asserting their dominance again, to put it very crudely, what DeLillo is trying to say is that history repeats itself, then one might wonder when in history did the “terrorists” asserted such an extraordinary power before 9/11? And to add on top of this if we question the claim of DeLillo and others critics that 9/11 was unprecedented catastrophe in history, then the word “again” seems to be quite out of context. Yet, a simple act of substitution of the word “terrorists” with the “Islamic

world”, we can see that the whole picture becomes clearer. Then, indeed, reflecting on DeLillo’s sentence or let say on his whole essay, it will become obvious that the problematic word was not “again” instead it was the word “terrorists” in which DeLillo tried to confine the whole Islamic world.

So what actually frames this *counte-narrative* and gives it final shape is the binary line that drawn by the dichotomous language of “us” versus “them as DeLillo shows heavy reliance on the binary logic. So the categorical division which runs through the whole essay, involving big dividing lines like: values, mindset, lifestyle and culture, can hardly be encapsulated in two narrow entities like the “terrorists” and “writers”. Therefore, the real binary is in fact indented to be between more major categories that miniaturised into these two allegedly opposing blocks.

Now we are going to analyze how the idea of *counter-narrative* DeLillo crafted in his essay, got fleshed out and developed it into a whole novel by DeLillo himself. Let us start with the title. The title *Falling Man* comes from one of the most iconic images of 9/11 events, it is an image of a man falling headfirst from one of the World Trade Centre Towers, and what really made that image so iconic and memorable is the way it captured a moment where the person who is diving earthward alive but at the same time heading to a certain death. So the readers of DeLillo’s *Falling Man* before even getting involved in the story, they are confronted and reminded with the most traumatic image of 9/11 events. Indeed, by naming his novel with such a title that incarnates a very tragic and vivid image, the process of mediating and representing 9/11’s traumatic effect has been already established before even the reader opens the cover of the novel. Of course the occurrence of the “Falling Man” is not restricted to the title, nor is it confined to one chapter; in fact it is a recurring

theme throughout the novel. Yet, its reappearance does not rely on a series of repeated memories or flashbacks as DeLillo finds a more effective formula to recycle the theme while keeping it alive, he uses a character who is a performance artist that mimicking the very traumatic moment by jumping off buildings in various parts of New York City. It is true that this character serves DeLillo in regenerating that tragic moment over and over again; however no matter how strong that theme is, as the novel proceeds it eventually gets exhausted from constant repentances.

Yet along with the strong uncanny theme of the performance artist which relives the traumatic events, a combination of other visual elements and themes happen to assist the process of sharpening the representation of 9/11 traumatic effects. Indeed the opening scene of the novel bears a huge visual weight, the reader introduced with the horror of the day by the main character Keith who used to work in the towers and had just managed to escape out of them after the crash, walking out of the rubble into the chaotic and nonsensical post-9/11 world Keith observes other surviving victims:

He was walking north through rubble and mud there were people running past holding towels to their faces or jackets over their heads. They had handkerchiefs pressed to their mouths. They had shoes in their hands, a woman with a shoe in each hand, running past him. They ran and fell, some of them, confused and ungainly, with debris coming down around them, and there were people taking shelter under cars. (DeLillo 3)

After the title that reinvigorated the controversial and dramatic image of the “Falling Man” which circulated across multiple media channels, the reader is confronted with

another iconic image of the tragedy that transformed into an opening scene by DeLillo. The novel begins with images of people running for their lives as the towers came down. Images that saturated the media in the days and weeks that followed. So here we can see that DeLillo preferred to welcome the readers by images and scenes which were deeply burned into the national consciousness or let say the global consciousness because the images of clouds of smoke and rubble with people running in horror for their lives, are not only familiar to the American public but to the quarter of the world's population who witnessed 9/11 live on TV and others who viewed it via other media channels.

Conveying the immediate aftermath of the so called defining moment of the new millennium by the protagonist Keith, then the novel proceeds to tell us more about the life of this central character who was directly affected by the events of 9/11. The mediation of the trauma goes on in the novel as the impact of 9/11 on the characters' lives gets unfolded. First Keith's disorientation and confusion is recounted as he experienced 9/11 directly as a survivor then through him a window opens into the lives of his estranged family, which serves the author to furnish the readers with a collection of lives that are shattered by the impact of the events on their life. Lianne the estranged wife of Keith, who runs therapeutic writing workshops for Alzheimer's patients, is portrayed as a woman who is trying to deal with the trauma of the attacks yet at the same time struggling to preserve the unexpected reunion with her husband which eventually leads to even a greater detachment of Keith. Their son Justin with his bizarre monosyllabic speech develops a habit of spending much of his time "searching the skies by binoculars

for Bill Lawton” (74) which is in fact a mispronunciation of bin Laden. Lianne’s mother Nina also had her share from the attacks the unsettling effect of the events on her escalate into arguments and disagreements with her long-time mysterious European lover over the reasons that gave rise to the attacks.

Yet apart from the struggle of the other characters in terms of adapting themselves to the new reality in their lives, Keith’s deep detachment from life with Lianne’s confusions and psychological reverberations, seem to preoccupy most of the novel’s traumatic terrain. However, while all these traumatic workings are going on throughout the novel, a subtle Orientalist shadow which cast over the traumatic experience of the main characters could be spotted quite easily in some parts of the narrative. And a clear example of how an Orientalist narrative is painfully toiled along the traumatic narrative could be the scene in which Keith’s thinks that “it might be hard to find a taxi at a time when every cabdriver in New York was named Muhammad,”(28). Also Lianne receiving a postcard bearing a cover design from Shelley’s poem “The Revolt of Islam” and her unquenchable frustration upon hearing “music located in Islamic tradition”(67) are the parts in the novel which bear quasi-obvious Orientalist undertone set in mutual interaction with the strong traumatic tone that surfaces the whole narrative.

Now moving from the Orientalist tone that showed itself half-heartedly in the post-traumatic narration that fed into the stories of 9/11 victims, we will examine the full-hearted manifestation of Orientalist tropes and modes used in the characterization of the “terrorists” along with their networks and motivations. However, apart from the three chapters titled “On Marienstrass”, “In Nokomis”, and

“In the Hudson corridor” which directly deal with the story of Hammad who happens to be one of the hijackers, the scenes in which Lianne, Nina and Martin discuss the attacks do embody strong Orientalist assumptions. So, now let us take a closer look at this very scene where the discussion starts off mildly by Lianne mother Nina who comments: “What old dead wars we fight. I think in these past days we’ve lost a thousand years”(44) Here, Nina is trying to point to the symbolic nature of the attacks, for her the attacks was nothing but a revolt, in fact this very idea was implicitly presented in the beginning of the novel when Lianne received the postcard on which the statement “The Revolt of Islam” was written. So this idea is redeployed explicitly via Nina’s comments. For Nina Islam is rebelling and the impetus behind this rebellion is the long humiliating wait under the shadow of Western domination and advancement, yet, the only consolation that will remain for Islam is the hope of regaining its glorious past, but how could this happen while the West maintains its monopoly on the present and the future by its advancement, then the only way left for Islam is to challenge the West by dragging it into the past. Therefore the attacks on the Twin Towers harbours deep symbolic impact far beyond the physical damage, and this is exactly what lies under Nina’s statement: “we’ve lost a thousand years”.

Yet, the so-called “The Revolt of Islam” or “Islamic revival” is hardly a new idea. And quite interestingly, along with DeLillo’s *Falling Man* in which the title of Shelley’s poem “The Revolt of Islam” with all the possible allusions could be extracted from it, are passionately presented and worked throughout the text, Bernard Lewis also seems to be impressed by this very title. In fact, Bernard Lewis, whose scholarship on Islam has been described by Edward Said as a perfect epitome of

contemporary of Orientalism, makes abundant use of this very title with its variations in his numerous works on Islam:

So intent has Lewis become upon his project to debunk, to whittle down, and to discredit the Arabs and Islam that even his energies as a scholar and historian seem to have failed him. He will, for example, publish a chapter called "The Revolt of Islam" in a book in 1964, then republish much of the same material twelve years later, slightly altered to suit the new place of publication (in this case *Commentary*) and retitled "The Return of Islam." From "Revolt" to "Return" is of course a change for the worse, a change intended by Lewis to explain to his latest public why it is that the Muslims (or Arabs) still will not settle down and accept Israeli hegemony over the Near East. (Said 316)

In fact the whole discussion between Nina, Martin and Lianne revolves around the idea of how Islam poses an existential threat to the West. Yet among all these Orientalist discursive tropes and motifs that embedded and circulated thought the discussion, one sentence shows itself with a remarkable clarity and profoundness of meaning; before Martin and Lianne delve in into the heart of the issue, Nina goes on to say "Dead wars, holy wars. God could appear in the sky tomorrow"(46). Then Martin asks her "Whose God would it be?"(46) she replies with a sentence that probably embodies the core of Orientalism, she says:"God used to be an urban Jew. He's back in the desert now"(46). There could have been no better or more succinct wordings that would bear the deep-seated Christendom/the West narrative that reflects the quintessential *otherness* and inferiority of Islam. Indeed, the same

prejudicial attitudes towards Islam and the Orient could be traced back in medieval cultural productions. And the comments made by Edward Said upon spotting strong marginalizing approach against Islam in Medieval poets and scholars could also be applied to DeLillo's work:

as Dante tried to do in the *Inferno*, is at one and the same time to characterize the Orient as alien and to incorporate it schematically on a theatrical stage whose audience, manager, and actors are for Europe, and only for Europe. Hence the vacillation between the familiar and the alien; Mohammed is always the imposter (familiar, because he pretends to be like the Jesus we know) and always the Oriental (alien, because although he is in some ways "like" Jesus, he is after all not like him). (72)

Actually, Nina's statement: "God used to be an urban Jew. He's back in the desert now"(46) does not only contain the deep sedimented dichotomy of "Jesus versus Mohammed", which reflects a dangerously ill-informed approach towards Islam, the air of superiority embedded in the sentence is so obvious that it hardly needs an explanation, as it simply premised on the categorical split that put Islam under the rubric of stereotypes which represent it as inherently primitive and militant idea that originated from a similarly primitive place like the desert.

So DeLillo chose Nina, the retired academic; the sophisticated old woman, to voice the most prevalent views about the "terrorists" mind-set and motivations, she holds the bare-bones argument that 9/11 attacks were solely motivated only by religious fanaticism. Even though this oversimplified interpretation of the attacks frequently surfaces in academia, in media, in parliamentary discussions, in popular

discourse or even in casual conversation like the one presented by DeLillo, there are some theoretical and philosophical positions that throw into doubt the formidable claim that the attacks were based on sheer religious ground and in the dialogue set in the novel Martin is the character who holds that positions. Yet, it should be noted that even these philosophical standpoints do offer a strong and plausible alternative perspective on the causes of the attacks, they actually do not have currency in the mainstream discourse. In the same way Martin's argument in the discussion presented timidly, for example, when he tries to make a point against Lianne and Nina, he begins his speech with "Yes, it may be true"(46-47). And this reserved manner in which Martin expresses himself does not stem from his personality traits, since Lianne describes him as an "unflinching"(45) person, thus Martin's relatively weak stand on the debate has probably to do with centre-periphery dichotomy, the "center" represented by both Lianne and Nina who hold the prevalent ideas, and on the other hand the "periphery" is reflected by Martin's antithetical views. Yet in fact the balance of power has been already altered against Martin, even before the discussion began. Martin's mysterious life which espoused by a dark past; a past perhaps affiliated with radical activities of 1960s Europe, deems Martin's views on 9/11 as biased and outlandish.

As it has been discussed in earlier parts of this study, the Islamic terrorism with the civilizational clash thesis surrounding it has already preoccupied the political and cultural scene more than two decades. And 9/11 served as a catalyst factor that shut out any shades of doubt related to the assumptions that the attacks were a clear religious war against America and its values. In other words, the generation old theories and studies made about the "Islamic threat" finally fleshed out and became

palpable reality by the events of 9/11. Naturally, one of the by products of 9/11 was the indiscriminate condemnation of Islam for promoting terrorism and fundamentalism. And this by the very nature of things made the voice of civilizational clash champions very loud and unchallengeable, especially in the immediate aftermath when these theories backed with the official and media version of them. Yet, few intellectuals and theorists did manage to voice their dissent in the face of this reductive and oversimplified 9/11 narrative. In fact *The Spirit of Terrorism* by Jean Baudrillard and *Welcome to the Desert of the Real* by Slavoj Žižek are some of the rare treatments of 9/11 that tend to analyze the events in a diachronic and philosophical framework. And DeLillo's *Falling Man* seems to be more concerned about these antithetical positions than the terrorists' narrative. More precisely, DeLillo's *counter-narrative* sounds as targeting the contemporary left-bent theories instead of confronting the religious affiliated narrative of the terrorists. And this could be the chief reasons behind including the character Martin who was associated by Left-oriented radical activities in the past and therefore holding dissenting views about 9/11.

Upon analyzing Martins lines in the dialogue we can see that they are unmistakably rest on Baudrillard and Žižek ideas. So the discussion set in the novel could be regarded as a debate that is divided between two camps. On one hand, we have Lianne and Nina who championing the "clash of civilization" thesis and represent the majority; on the other hand Martin is portrayed as the minority that holds the antithetical and critical views about that civilizatioanl thesis. So now let trace Martin views that bear a striking similarity with Baudrillard's notions in *The*

Spirit of Terrorism. When Nina remarks that the terrorists attacked America out of panic, Martin comments: “this much, yes, it may be true. Because they think the world is a disease. This world, this society, ours. A disease that’s spreading” (46) this correspond with Baudrillard’s analysis that: “For it is that superpower which, by its unbearable power, has fomented all this violence which is endemic throughout the world, and hence that (unwittingly) terroristic imagination which dwells in all of us” (Baudrillard 5). In response to Martin’s view that the Western hegemony might have fuelled hostility and gave rise to an inevitable resistance against itself, Nina says: “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” (46). She basically deploys the popular idea that there is no point in trying to look beyond the surface, there is no point in philosophising about it, the attacks done with sheer barbaric motive that is to “Kill the innocent Americans”, because according to Nina if they were concerned about suppression and hegemony they would try to get rid of the tyrants who oppressing them in their lands but instead they chose the convenient way by attacking America. Aside from the historical and political self-refuting ideas Nina’s statements bear, what needs more critical attention is the manifestation and redeployment of a fundamental paradox that became apparent in the wake of 9/11 and pervaded the whole discourse regarding the events. And Žižek is one of the first intellectuals who managed to detect this contradicting rhetoric regarding 9/11. In his essay “Welcome to the Desert of the Real”, Žižek maintains that: “The safe Sphere in which Americans live is experienced as under threat from the Outside of terrorist attackers who are ruthlessly self-sacrificing AND cowards, cunningly intelligent AND primitive barbarians”. And DeLillo’s portrayal of the terrorists in his essay “In

the Ruins of the Future” and in his subsequent novel *Falling Man* are largely drawn from that paradoxical logic that depicts 9/11 as symbolic and inexpressible event while deeming the people who created that allegedly epochal event as bunch of primitive and coward people. So when the extreme magnification or sublimation of the event coupled with equal excessiveness in devaluation the intellect or the will that shaped it, then the whole issue of addressing the event in that particular way is put into a question.

While weaving two opposing bodies of thought in a dialogue might give the impression that each stream of thought was given equal and fair attention, however when we zoom out from that discussion and take into the account the entire novel *Falling Man*, the inclination of the author towards negating the interpretation of 9/11 that deviates from the conventional accepted standard became very evident. The selective adaptation of some notions that go against the tide of popular opinion by the old leftist terrorist Martin has not been only refuted by Nina’s and Lianne’s arguments, in fact the three chapters dedicated for representing the mind-set and the motivation of the hijackers: “On Marienstrass”, “In Nokomis”, and “In the Hudson corridor” all serve as a proof to show how Martin’s assumptions are fundamentally flawed and problematic.

Indeed, the representation of the hijackers brought to readers even before they introduced to the characters directly in three chapters that contain the narrative about the intricacies of the perpetrators’ dark lives. The reader starts to explore the ideology and the motives that underpinned the attacks right from the dialogue set between Martin, Nina and Lianne and this exploration keeps developing in the

subsequent chapters where the reader gets the opportunity to connect directly to the perpetrators of 9/11. Before the secret world of the hijackers is effectively disclosed through the perspective of the novice recruit Hammad, a good deal is already revealed in the words of Nina and Lianne. Upon Martin's analysis that how the mighty military, economic and technological edge America possesses fell short in the face of a few men willing to die, Nina sardonically respond to this by using the English translation of the Islamic Arabic expression Allāhu Akbar "God is great"(47). Here DeLillo making use of an idea he abundantly recycled in his essay "In the Ruins of the Future" it is the idea that the uncompromising devotion to a cause, to an ideal like Islam is by itself a menace, DeLillo says: We are rich, privileged, and strong, but they are willing to die. This is the edge they have, the fire of aggrieved belief"(34). So what it all boils down to is the notion that the dogmatic zeal these few men makes them capable of shattering even the world superpower dominance.

The only part where the historical narrative is seemingly put into question is when Martin again with a weak attempt tries to convince that historical, political and economic circumstances are what ignite the inner fire of these men. Then comes Lianne's decisive point: "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). Actually, Lianne statement encompasses the basic pillars of the contemporary Orientalist discourse, yet one of the most evident one in Lianne's comment is the condemnation of the whole Muslim world for the attacks, Lianne

does not say “these terrorist” when she speaks about their acts, she prefers to refer to them as “these societies” to quote a succinct formulation related to this particular issue, in *Covering Islam* Said contends that: “Aside from the combination of hostility and reductionism offered by all these misrepresentations, there is the matter of how grossly they exaggerate and inflate Muslim extremism within the Muslim world.”(xxvii). Indeed, Lianne’s statement deeply contaminated with biased judgments about Muslim societies. Yet, bias comes especially in the scapegoating of Islam for the backwardness of the Muslim world. Lianne by her words: “It’s their own history; their mentality” tries to omit the inextricably intertwined history of West with the Muslim world. So the whole legacy of European colonialism and the subsequent American imperialism is simply spirited away by pointing the finger of blame towards Islam.

In fact, whenever the Muslim region’s problems are being discussed the handy shortcut of bringing Islam to the forefront as the source of all ills shows up. And after many Orientalist manifestations in the novel it is no surprise to see that DeLillo also tracing this particular shortcut which has been trodden by many Orientalist scholars and writers. So, Muslim world’s backwardness and isolation blamed on Islam, and centuries-old oppression and exploitation just swept under the carpet. And all this done by the weary assumption that Oriental people are deemed to be hanging back whether economically, politically or socially because unlike the Westerners they failed to challenge the power of religion. Bernard Lewis the British Orientalist scholar begins his book *Faith and Power* with these words:

In a famous passage in the New Testament, Christians are enjoined to “render...unto Caesar the things which are Caesar’s; and unto God the things that are God’s” (Matthew 22:21). In these words, a principle was laid down, at the very beginning of Christianity, that became central to both Christian thought and practice and that is discernible throughout Christian history and all over Christendom.(xi)

The passage Lewis quotes from the News Testament is in fact a quote which is constantly invoked by Orientalis scholars or Western thinkers who want to emphasise the baseline which differentiate between Islamic tradition and Western tradition. According to Lewis and other Orientalist scholars the inherent flexibility in Christianity that stems from the concept of the separation of church from the state signalled the early seeds of democracy which was rooted and thrived in the West. Thus, the fundamental pillar on which the contemporary Orientalism is functioning is the assertion of Post-Christian Western world identity by and in relation to its opposite Islam. So unless Islam breaks with the past and adapts to the Western church-states principle it would never be able to get on the train of modernity and progress. In the conventional neo-Orientalist telling, this very train of modernity and progress which now plowing through the Age of Technology has actually manoeuvred through difficult terrain until it brought the glare of skyscrapers, computers and cyberspace to our time. It has journeyed through the dark tunnel of Middle Ages, managed to pass the Protestant Reformation, then came to the Age of Reason and Age of Enlightenment, and after that this train of modernity sped up to the Industrial Revolution then to meet our modern world. Thus, now the Muslim

world which missed this train of modernity left with only two alternatives: to break with the past and showing allegiance to Western culture which embodies the high values of liberty, progress and democracy, or to hold on to religious beliefs or traditions and lag behind the Western world. This kind of approach towards the Muslim world has many subtle and important implications. For example, the coercive terms of the choice this mind-set poses remains unnoticed except by few critics like Žižek, in the introduction part of his collection of five contemplative essays on 9/11, Žižek does refer to this particular way of dictating on the Muslim world a choice between two entities named by the West: “democracy” or “fundamentalism”, so in case of rejecting Western principles and values, Muslim societies will remain brushed aside from the stage of the World under the label of promoting “fundamentalism”.

What ascribes the West the authority to set the terms and the yardstick for progress and development to other parts of the world is the West self-image as being at the pinnacle of historical development. Thus, the air of superiority which stems from the self-perception of the West as being the product of the Enlightenment; the quintessential Western experience whose early seeds found in Judeo-Christian, does not only entails setting the criterion for universal values, it also entails shaping history. Yet, when we dig beneath this Eurocentric account of Enlightenment we will see that the very tradition which supposed to be antithetical to Enlightenment is in fact one of the forces that gave rise to it:

Most Westerners have been taught that the greatness of the West has its intellectual roots in Greece and Rome, and that after the thousand-year-sleep

of the Dark Ages, Europe miraculously reawakened to its Greco-Roman roots. In the conventional telling, this rediscovery of classical Greece—combined with the moral underpinning of the Judeo-Christian faith—led to the Renaissance and the Enlightenment, and the scientific and industrial revolutions. The intellectual contributions of Arabs, Persians, Indians, Chinese, Africans, and others in the Muslim world are relegated to mere footnotes. (Morgan xv)

There is no wonder that the contribution of Islamic tradition to Western civilization is deprived the recognition it deserves or completely dismissed, because giving credit to the great Arab/Muslim scientists and philosophers of the golden age that contributed to the modern Western thought would disqualify the claim that Western civilization has been inherently superior to other civilizations. In other words, it would have been difficult, if not impossible, to maintain the patronising tone over the Islamic world, if the fact that “ Muslim advancements laid the cornerstones of the European Renaissance, the Enlightenment, and modern society”(Morgan) had been admitted. How plausible and convincing it would be to preach the Muslim world to abandon the faith for the sake of progress or science, while history witnessed the perfect infusion of these two in the Islamic Golden Age. So without obscuring historical realities, constructing myths and using gross generalization about Muslims, the legacy of the West’s unique scientific, cultural and moral superiority would have been shattered.

As has been stated before DeLillo’s novel *Falling Man* could be seen as a version of his essay “In the Ruins of the Future” that took full shape after six years. And

especially the portrayal of the 9/11 perpetrators in DeLillo's novel is largely drawn from his essay. First the reader is introduced to the psychology, mindset and motivation of the hijackers through the discussion in which DeLillo seemingly involves different and contradictory opinions about the events, and then comes the "Hammad" section in the novel where the readers are able to observe and trace what the perpetrators going through till their plane crashed into the World Trade Center's North Tower. Actually, this particular section in the novel could be said to be deeply stamped by Orientalist motifs and tropes as it bears the highest intensity of recurrence of negative stereotypes regarding the Arab-Muslim perpetrators' personalities and acts. Indeed, the characterization of Hammad epitomises the intrinsic difference between the Muslim medieval mind-set and the modern Western mind; Hammad is portrayed as being clumsy, sensual, and gullible and whenever he attempts at a slight critical evaluation of what he is going through he "had to fight against the need to be normal"(DeLillo 83). So as an "Oriental" Hammad's mentality does not seem to match the Western one, and on top of that he is resisting the least inclination to be "normal". And in order to present as many as possible stereotypes related to the Orientalist self, DeLillo assigns the other Oriental qualities left, like; despotism and irrationality to Amir; the mastermind of the events. Yet, apart from Hammad and Amir characterizations, further well-known Orientalist tropes are utilized. One of the images that carved into Western consciousness and redeployed by DeLillo is the image of the sexist Oriental gaze that rendering woman a subordinate position; indeed this theme is taken to its extreme by the following words:"another avoided contact with dogs and women"(DeLillo 80). The other

Oriental virtues that contribute to the massive pile of negative stereotypes employed in text are the backward, fanatic and barbarian nature of the Oriental self:

They made a noise when he did it, he and the camel both, braying, and he felt a deep warrior joy, standing back to watch the beast topple. He stood there, Hammad, arms spread wide, then kissed the bloody knife and raised it to the ones who were watching, the robed and turbaned men, showing his respect and gratitude. (DeLillo 174)

This depiction of the Muslim/Oriental as primitive and bloodlust being is nothing but a genealogical offspring that has its roots in the earliest days of portrayal of Middle Easterners by Hollywood filmmakers. The forthcoming quotation which taken from Jack Shaheen's *The TV Arab* catches one of the most generic images of Arab/Muslim that serves the plot of most Orientalist productions: "consisting of strange, bearded men with burning eyes, hierarchic figures in robes and turbans, blood dripping from the striped backs of malefactors" (Shaheen 77). Here we can see how the depiction of Hammad and the other Oriental characters in DeLillo's *Falling Man* is almost identical to the stereotypical and prejudicial treatment of Arabs/Orientalists in American popular culture. This shows to which extent the way Arabo-Islamic cultures and societies represented remains unchanged over a long the passage of time.

Whether the parts in the novel that deal with the victims' narrative or the sections in which DeLillo yields a caricatured image about the Oriental self via Hammad narrative, the text as a whole contains highly ideologically charged representations. Indeed, after a close analysis of *Falling Man*, it has become clear that the central

themes and ideas in the novel rest on the confluence of the formidable legacy of clash theories and on the unrelieved pervasive Orientalist discourse that regained currency in both government and popular culture rhetoric after 9/11. So, whether in DeLillo's essay "In the Ruins of the Future" or in his novel *Falling Man*, the representation of Islam and Muslims and the way they are associated with 9/11 are done inside a very restrictive discursive frame of *Othering*.

Therefore, contrary to the dominant view of the critics that DeLillo managed to fulfil the role he assigned to literature by offering a "rare treat" of 9/11 by his novel *Falling Man*; our study reveals that DeLillo's novel is, in fact, simply contributing to the already existing monolithic nationalistic interpretations of 9/11. Thus the novel with all the modes of representation it embodies strongly defies being classified as "rare" or exceptional as it puts before the readers a particular agenda of topics and themes that already available in the "official" representation of 9/11 that backed with the mainstream media oversimplified narrative. So let alone offering "rare" or alternative account of 9/11, both DeLillo's essay and novel did little to shake themselves loose from the voluminous corpus of literary, journalistic and policy literature that appeared on the morrow of the attacks.

After interrogating the essay "In the Ruins of the Future," and its extended version the *Falling Man* we can see how DeLillo's conception of literary response participates in, contributes to and reinforces a complex web of ideologically charged modes of representation of Islam. So all the issues being discussed, the question being asked, and the claims being made in DeLillo's works expose the essential outlines of his ideological position related to 9/11, which in fact rest on the

age-old confrontationalist position that revitalized by the current clash theories and then co-opted by Bush administration. This brings up the question, once again, about the relationship between literature and the political hegemonic structures. And this question takes us back to Edward Said's assertion that the most fundamental task of intellectual is to "speak truth to power"(qtd. in Ashcroft and Ahluwalia 39). Yet, according to Said the intellectuals or the artists could not fulfil this task unless they embrace an antithetical and oppositional criticism. And this naturally requires the concerned intellectual to distance himself or herself from the power structures or from any loyalty that would restrain his or her critical voice. Thus, the confinement of DeLillo's fictionalized 9/11 investigation to a narrow discursive space created by the dominant discourse inevitably alters his role from a writer/intellectual who has a potential to disrupt and challenge the hegemonic power into a powerful agent of the coercive prevalent system who helps in maintaining the status quo.

Despite DeLillo's engagement with the dominant Orientalist discourse, which clearly manifested by the ample details lie in his novel and essay, what largely escapes critical attention is how DeLillo's affiliation with Orientalism problematize the postmodernity of his works. Put differently, the inclination of both DeLillo's essay and novel towards the grand narrative of "war on terror" deprives his works from one of the key elements of postmodernism which is the *uncertainty*. Yet, even though *Falling Man* reflects absolute ways of speaking truth, most of critics prefer to situate the novel into a postmodern praxis depending on DeLillo's choice of structure. It is true that when we split the novel into two parts, we can see that the

part which deals with the victims does bear shades of postmodern tenets since it is almost told in fragmentary and disjointed style that fit the characters' extreme disorientation and shock in the face of so called "unfathomable" events. However, when we look to the other side of the coin, the part that bears the hijackers story, the clear straightforward narration of this part will manifest itself very clearly, which probably has been designed in that particular way so that it would fit the allegedly primitive and uncritical mind of the hijackers. Yet taken as a whole, the traces of postmodern narration DeLillo employed here and there could not secure his *Falling Man* from falling outside the realm of postmodernism since the whole novel lend itself completely to the "grand narrative" of the twenty-first century. Indeed, it would be very misleading to ascribe the *Falling Man* a strong postmodern spirit, the way most critics do, solely on the basis of the postmodern style and artistic modes DeLillo utilized:

A discussion that focuses entirely on the stylistic features of postmodernist culture without investigating the social, economic and political contexts from which it emerges is too crude an undertaking to be particularly helpful to any serious critic of either postmodernism or postmodernity. (Malpas 30)

This could be applied to all social, cultural and artistic productions of postmodern culture, including novels. Therefore, to judge *Falling Man* in terms of narrative style and structure, without taking into consideration the political and ideological implication it has, would be turning a blind eye to the core essence of the novel. So the deep lack of critical edge and the ideological agreement *Falling Man* shows with the monolithic 9/11 government/media narrative shatters the novel seemingly postmodern image.

Whether DeLillo's immediate engagement with 9/11; "In the Ruins of the Future" or his later literary response *Falling Man*, both works do contain almost identical themes and motifs. Yet what further tightens the knot between these two texts is the unmistakable Orientalist tone they bear. Therefore, *Falling Man*; the literary production of a contemporary Italian American writer Don DeLillo could be easily situated among its medieval ancestors; as it rests on the rich legacy of "Orientalizing" Islam. Indeed, the way Medieval Italian poet Dante Alighieri chose to place the prophet Muhammad in the inferno, DeLillo preferred to portray Islam as the inferno or the hell itself which looms over the West.

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