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Pre-9/11 Islamophobia: A Contrapuntal Reading of Don DeLillo's *Falling Man*

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Abstract: Don DeLillo's *Falling Man* reproduces the same Orientalist mantra of the Muslim terrorist. Although he is much celebrated for writing thrilling terrorism and assassination novels long before the 9/11 event, many critics situated his *Falling Man* within the 9/11 neo-Orientalist framework. This study argues that the 9/11 occurrence (while acknowledging its significance) is not the only trigger behind DeLillo's representation of Muslims in his novel. As such, the study underscores DeLillo's ideological inclinations by examining his records and the contextual circumstances that transpired before 9/11. By rereading *Falling Man*, this study situates the investigation within three parameters: the Iranian Revolution, the Rushdie affair and the Clash of Civilisations thesis, thus appropriating the novel within its Islamophobic implicature. Edward Said's theory of contrapuntal reading, which urges a nonconventional reading of a canonical text, is employed as the theoretical underpinning of this study.

Keywords: Islamophobia, Don DeLillo, Iranian revolution, Clash of Civilisations, Rushdie affair

Introduction

The most cited definition of Islamophobia is from the report compiled by the Runnymede Trust Commission on British Muslims and Islamophobia, titled

"Islamophobia: A Challenge for Us All" (1997). This report defines Islamophobia as "a useful shorthand way of referring to dread or hatred of Islam – and, therefore, the fear or dislike of all or most Muslims" (Runnymede Trust 1997, 5). This old observation about Islamophobia highlights dread and hatred for Muslims, although the substantial analysis of the report is focused mainly on rationalised prejudice of Muslims in Britain, the definition is quite relevant to current situations of Islamophobia. Two decades after, the same commission published a "Twenty Years Anniversary Report" where Islamophobia was redefined as "anti-Muslim discrimination or racism". This new definition was made to reflect the significant shift in anti-Muslim hostility after 9/11 and 7/7 events, respectively (Runnymede Trust 1997, 10). However, the term "Islamophobia" is more recently, often used in reference to a "religiously-motivated hostility directed at Muslims". Runnymede Trust's (1997) report popularised the concept of Islamophobia in Britain, and it became more widely accepted in Europe after the publication of the European Monitoring Centre on Racism and Xenophobia Islamophobia reports of 2001 and 2005 (Zebiri 2008, 12–13). Islamophobia has existed for centuries in the West. Although not referred to as Islamophobia, its characteristics (stereotype, prejudice and marginalisation) are apparent in the anti-Muslim sentiments which prevail in the Western disposition for a very long time. In English history, there has always been a professed enemy on which English superiority and heroism must be demonstrated. Carruthers (2011) sees Islamophobia as only an extension of "Englishness", a cultural civilisation which must demonise a group or the other (the French, Jews, Turks, Catholics or Protestants) to show its simplicity and civility, an observation very synonymous to that of Edward Said. Thus, this "[r]eformed constructions of Englishness" passed on to the Muslims in the later centuries, plays a vital role in contemporary Islamophobia (Carruthers 2011, 106). The general American population who was mostly migrants from Europe conceived Islam as it was back then in the Old and Middle Ages in Europe. This anti-Islamism has remained latent in American culture, politics and discourse until it heightened after the dramatic event of 11th September 2001. GhaneaBassiri (2013, 53) opines that "American anti-Muslim attitudes are as old as the United States". Islamophobia has only recently been the branded name for anti-Muslim sentiments, but throughout American history, "large segments of American society have identified Islam with tyranny, intolerance, misogyny, violence, sexual promiscuity and heathenism" (GhaneaBassiri 2013, 53).

The extent of Islamophobia in America is seen in the level of hate crimes (physical attacks, vandalism or verbal attacks) against innocent Muslims or Muslim looking Asians, especially after every terrorist attack – perceivably Islamic. This spiteful despise of the Muslims grew based on the assumption that the Muslims engineered the 9/11 attacks, which was inferred as a war against the Americans (Baker,

Gabrielatos and McEnery 2013). Meanwhile, GhaneaBassiri (2013, 56) further argues that there is no clear-cut reason for the origin of Islamophobia in America. That, "anti-Muslim attitudes are complex and multifaceted. While public opinion scholars and researchers of Islamophobia agree that anti-Muslim attitudes are on the rise and politically significant, there is no clear explanation of its basis". He, however, attributes the lack of clarity of the origins of Islamophobia in America to the "complex nature of antagonistic relations between the general American population and the Muslim minority within it" (GhaneaBassiri 2013, 56).

Muslims have been criticised for "using [the] cries of Islamophobia as a shield from critical scrutiny" (Malik 2018, 24), this study will, however, endeavour to separate and acknowledge constructive criticism of Islamic related cultural practices from defamatory hate speeches directed at the generality of Islam and Muslims. Although the precise definition of Islamophobia remains uncertain, this study will adopt an amalgam of the definitions here provided for the interest of the research analysis. While engaged in the discussion and analysis of literary issues about Oriental representations of Islam, it does not approve of atrocities committed in the name of Islam. Thus, the article appropriates the clichés of traditional Orientalism with modern forms of Islamophobia. It traces elements of pre 9/11 Islamophobia in Don DeLillo's *Falling Man* (2007). Contrary to the general assumption that Islamophobia emanated after 9/11, this study argues that the same Islamophobic clichés used for Muslims now have existed in literature decades before 9/11.

Literature Review

Vakil and Sayyid's (2023) chapter *Towards a Grammar of Islamophobia*, offers a critical Muslim studies viewpoint on Islamophobia, emphasising its part in the fight for social and intellectual justice. Several recent articles on Islamophobia have asserted Islamophobia as a disturbing global phenomenon that needs to be tackled. Edin and Torkel (2023), Iselin (2023) and Ganesh, Frydenlund and Brekke (2023) have attributed the current trends of global Islamophobia to (Buddhist) nationalism, American imperialism or specific religious hatred that has its roots in cultural history. Additionally, Minnema (2023) comparatively sees Antisemitism and Islamophobia as particular types of discrimination that feed into hatred against certain religions and vary depending on the situation and period of time.

Bryon Peter Smith, in his study of Islam in English literature from Chaucer to early Victorian Age, submits that the literature of Chaucer, Sir John Mandeville, Lydgate, Shakespeare and other later writers reveal the extent of Western prejudice and ignorance of Islam, most of whose information about Islam was gotten from a

second-hand source. The horrors of Muslims became a common ground in Europe with such literary depictions, and especially with the first and second crusade stories told of war-front experience reinforcing the stereotype of Muslims as violent murderers (Smith 1977). In concurrence to this, Professor Mustafa Şahiner (2008, 136) argues that:

> The representations of the Turks in the early modern plays assume a tone which is different from the representations of the other eastern races. The Turks, unlike other "inferior" races, are represented in the early modern writings as the "grand evil" whose infidelity and apparent power are such a great threat to the Christian world that they must be stopped and destroyed.

Similarly, Ain Jenkins examined some works of 16th-century writers like John Foxe, Sebastian Munster, Neils Hemmingsen, George Sandys, who have associated Muhammad with violence and forced conversion - best known as conversion by the sword. Among others, Henry Smith and Louis Leroy, see Muhammad's violence ingrained in his pursuit for power and authority. Other writers such as Thomas Newton, Meredith Hanmer and Henry Smith, perceive Muhammad's violence and forced conversion as a framework he had set for his followers and successors. These early modern accounts of Muhammad highlights Islam as a religion that encourages violence with a motivation of rewards in the afterlife, thus forms the basis of Muslims' identity. With the concepts of *jihad* (holy war) and *shaheed* (martyr) engrained in these accounts, they become "so familiar in representations of Islam in the modern world" (Jenkins 2007, 347). Therefore, throughout the 16th to 19th centuries, the image and representation of the Turks revolve around the violent murderers – an idea rooted in Muhammad's teachings and personality. Early modern literary representations of the Turks depict them as the worst dissipations of cruelty, always ready to engage in a holy war. An example of these vilifying representation is found in Thomas Kyd's *Soliman and Perseda* (1592). In this regard, Said (2003, 161–162) notes that:

> Not for nothing did Islam come to symbolise terror, devastation, the demonic, hordes of hated barbarians. For Europe, Islam was a lasting trauma. Until the end of the 17th century the "Otto-man peril" lurked alongside Europe to represent for the whole of Christian civilisation a constant danger, and in time European civilisation incorporated that peril and its lore, its great events, figures, virtues and vices, as something woven into the fabric of life … what remained current about Islam was some necessarily diminished version of those great dangerous forces that it symbolised for Europe.

Similarly, DeLillo's *Falling Man* (2007) associates Islam with advocacy of terrorism. DeLillo is a renowned American writer whose long history of writing novels that foretell terrorism in America made his novel *Falling Man* (2007) a much-awaited masterpiece. As a post 9/11 novel, it narrates the aftermath of the attack on the World Trade Centre (Twin Towers) in New York. Keith Neudecker is the protagonist in whose engagements we see the traumatic effects of the attack on the Americans. The framing of the Muslim terrorists is perfectly accomplished through the character development of Hammad; the central tool of the attack, and that of Amir; the coordinator of the attack among others. This framing of Muslims as fundamentalists or terrorists has been the trend with most post 9/11 novels. The novel has been criticised on an Orientalist basis. Several critiques have underpinned DeLillo's subscription to Orientalism and/or his advancement of the post 9/11 ideological tendency of neo-Orientalism (Aldalala'a 2013; Aldukhina 2015; Alireza and Khademi 2015; Gheorghiu 2016; Marandi and Tari 2012)

Through the representation of the Muslims as potential enemies and of Islam advocating the antagonistic behaviours towards the non-Muslim West. DeLillo's novel is found to succumb to the long rooted historical endeavour absorbed in a geopolitical circumstance which discloses the facets of Western prejudices (Alosman, Raihanah and Ruzy Suliza 2019, 33; Lee 2012; Pirnajmuddin and Borhan 2011a). It is evident that so many efforts have been put in criticising DeLillo's neo-Oriental dispositions in the novel *Falling Man*, yet the relationship of such Oriental claims remains without constructive connection to the author's ideological inclinations. This study thereby, intends to undertake an exploration of the Oriental representations of Muslims in DeLillo's text, the motivation behind such representations by drawing from pre-9/11 contextual realities to understand the Islamophobic implications.

Methodology

To understand the authors' attitudes and the ideological conjectures silently illustrated in the text, Said urged the critical reader to embark on a contrapuntal reading to uncover the submerged details. Developed in his book *Culture and Imperialism* (1994), Said's argument on contrapuntal reading is essentially to "read the great canonical texts with an effort to draw out, extend, give emphasis and voice to what is silent or marginally present or ideologically represented in such works". He added that this "can be done by extending our reading of the texts to include what was once forcibly excluded" (Said 1994, 78–79). In this approach, the critic offers the affiliations of the text, its origin in cultural and social reality instead of the usual mere canonical criteria in the literary text. That enables

the critic to uncover or find out the political or cultural implications that are not explicitly addressed in the text (Said 1994, 56).

This is to say; contrapuntal reading gives us the ability to look beyond the text; to draw upon contextual references in other to give meanings to utterances or events in the text, just as Metres (2010, 86) acknowledges that a contrapuntal reading enables a reader to "grant to each discourse its own internal logics and references, but to refuse to end the discussion there, and consider its coexistence, its impacts on others". To achieve this, the reader has to concentrate on the possible connectedness and intertwined experiences, both past and present (Bilgin 2016, 5). Said's emphasis on "contrapuntal awareness" and "connectedness" in "contrapuntal readings", suggests that the "overlapping and intertwined histories" of what is popularly referred to as "Western" or "non-Western" ideas are discovered. Therefore, this approach of reading canonical texts contemplates not only the inclusive aspects of the text but also, the excluded, by reading beyond the constraints of narration (Said 1994, 66–67).

DeLillo's *Falling Man* (2007) which reproduces the same Orientalist mantra has been situated within the 9/11 neo-Orientalist framework in previous studies, and this study argues that the 9/11 occurrence (while acknowledging its significance), is not the only trigger behind DeLillo's representation of Muslims in his novel. As such, the study underscores DeLillo's ideological inclinations, by examining his personal records and the contextual circumstances related to Islamic terrorism that transpired before 9/11. This approach provides a counter-narrative which infiltrates underneath the surface of a text – to elaborate the existence of Orientalist attitudes of the author in canonical literature and to disclose the political worldliness of the text (Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin 2000). This study undertakes a contrapuntal reading of *Falling Man* (2007) to consider those facts "marginally silenced" and submerged through a contextual understanding of DeLillo's affiliation to pre-9/11 Islamophobia.

Analysis and Discussion

The following sections will discuss DeLillo's artistic reproduction of traditional Orientalism in his novel *Falling Man* (2007). Drawing from Said's contrapuntal reading, the discussion will demonstrate DeLillo's adherence to the themes of Islamic terrorism in his pre-9/11 publications. It will particularly look at the historical situation of DeLillo's adoptive use and association of terrorism with Islam to contextualise his pre-9/11 framing of the Muslim terrorists.

The Muslim orient in DeLillo's *Falling Man* (2007)

In the wake of 9/11, DeLillo's novel introduces the image of Islam by alluding to P.B. Shelley's 1817 poem *Revolt of Islam*. Three days after Islamist terrorists attacked the twin towers, Lianne receives a postcard from a friend in Rome which was supposedly sent one or two weeks earlier. This card carries a beautiful "reproduction of the cover of Shelley's poem in twelve cantos, first edition, called *Revolt of Islam*" (DeLillo 2007, 8). This allusion is interpreted as DeLillo's emphasis on America's negligence pertaining to the matters of Islamic terrorism. Rome signifies the home to the first language of serious Islamic studies. As discussed earlier, the first European translation of the Quran, other Islamic works and scriptures was done in Latin, in a project led by Peter the venerable, a work considered as a landmark in European academic study of Islam (Southern 1962, 37). These translations were full of negative annotations and misinterpretations, Peter's conclusion regarded Islam as a heresy of Christianity and Muhammad as a violent murderer and sexually self-indulgent (Kritzeck 1964). As such, they instituted the earliest Orientalism of the Muslims academically different from the imaginative narrations about the Muslims already in circulation in Europe (Goddard 2000).

Similarly, the 13th-century Italian scholar, St Thomas Aquinas, who is regarded as one of the most eminent medieval philosophers and theologians that cannot be ignored in matters of medieval Christian literature, offered a piercing critique of Islam. In his *Summa Contra Gentiles*, a voluminous work written between 1258 to 1264, Aquinas argued that Muhammad's claims of prophethood appealed only to the brutish, ignorant, desert wanderers and carnal men. Thus, through these crocked followers, he spread Islam by "violence and armed power" – the sword (Curtis 2009, 31). For his reputation in Catholicism (which cannot be emphasised any better), this argument went a long way in impeding the European perceptions of Islam till date. That been said, Islam became synonymous with brutality and violence in medieval and early modern Europe to which P.B. Shelley's poem, as the title suggests, advocates for a *Revolt of Islam*, through an ironical narrative of the oppressiveness of religion.

Given the discussion, it is inferred that DeLillo's allusion to Shelly's title also indicates an old understanding of Islam as a violent religion. He carefully made these connections to introduce the historical predicaments of the relationship between Islam and the West; the tough and rough memories of violence and terror which permeates Islam and Muslims since old age. Therefore, insinuating that the Orientalist warning about the dangers of Islam taken for granted has manifested in a greater form – the 9/11 attacks. To this end, Islam stands as the forever violent enemy. In that, a beautiful postcard was seen by Lianne at a time of distress. The

postcard not only soothes her but also embodies a solution to the problem, to revolt against Islam. DeLillo himself notes that "[i]t was a matter of simple coincidence, or not so simple, that a card might arrive at this particular time bearing the title of that specific book" (p. 8). How DeLillo carefully crafts this introduction is beyond artistic purpose; it pioneers a deeper significance of difference. A difference between the enlightened West (American) and the Muslim "other". Said (1994, 324) notes that:

> The commonest sequence is the old one that America; a force for good in the world, regularly comes up against obstacles posed by foreign conspiracies, ontologically mischievous and "against" America. …These subliminally available capsule histories are refracted superbly in the novels of E.L. Doctorow, Don DeLillo and Robert Stone, and mercilessly analysed by journalists like Alexander Cockburn, Christopher Hitchens, Seymour Hersh and in the tireless work of Noam Chomsky. But these official narratives still have the power to interdict, marginalise and criminalise alternative versions of the same history in Vietnam, Iran, the Middle East, Africa, Central America, Eastern Europe.

Said reveals America's self-victimisation as purported by influential American writers. The excerpt is about the centrality of narrative, which gives credence to the exact kind of story expected by the American audience – America as a force of good against the evil enemy. Fortunately, Said mentioned DeLillo as one of those American writers who sugarcoat, the American support for liberalism in other countries against communism, authoritarianism or (now) terrorism. As one of the most proclaimed novelists in America for almost fifty years (Nance 2012), DeLillo's novels receive a wide readership, a New York Times bestseller and certainly a literary influencer. Thus, his proclamation of Islam as a religion that advocates terrorism goes a long way in swaying the general public. Especially with his invocation of historical predicaments at the beginning of the narrative.

DeLillo's novel was published six years after 9/11, drawing heavily from the event, the novel is designed to navigate the experiences of the survivors of the attack as well as the inner psyche of the attackers. As discussed in the above section, the novel maximally subscribes to earlier chants of Orientalism of Muslims. Although analysts say it is difficult to understand DeLillo's agenda from his books and his limited public appearance (Passaro 1991; Nance 2012), DeLillo's preoccupation with the perception of Islam as problematic and incompatible with Western and/or American liberty will be investigated by examining the events surrounding Muslim discourse before 9/11. What could influence his ideological inclinations towards Muslims?

Framing the pre-9/11 terrorists: The Iranian Revolution and Rushdie affair

DeLillo's novels from the onset, are mainly engaged with the theme of terrorism. He reveals in an interview with Stéphane Bou and Jean-Baptiste Thoret that the assassination of the American President J.F. Kennedy (afterwards will be referred as "JFK") ignited the writing spirit in him. The interview, which questions terrorism becoming "the world's main plot", unearthed the motivation behind DeLillo's writings about terrorism. For DeLillo, the feeling of terror became dominant in the 1960s after the assassination of JFK which he describes as the "sense of fatality, of widespread suspicion, [and] of mistrust" (Bou and Thoret 2005, 2). Thus, the overbearing domination of his novels with the themes of terrorism. Several critics have observed the prominence "of irruptive acts of terrorism in resistance to the cultural and political hegemony of the West" in such novels as *Players* (1977), *The Names* (1982) and *Mao II* (1991) (Conte 2011, 55). This study will at this moment look at the historical situation of DeLillo's adoptive use of the theme of terrorism to contextualise his pre-9/11 Oriental framing of Muslims as terrorists.

DeLillo's novel *The Names* (1982) is considered "a turning point" in DeLillo's career. In this novel, he underscores the issue of terrorism beyond the American border for the first time (Pirnajmuddin and Borhan 2011b, 62). Unlike his earlier novels which all focused on local terrorism or tension within an American setting. Novels like *Americana* (1971), *Endzone* (1972), *Great Jones Street* (1973), *Ratner's Star* (1976), *Players* (1977) and *Running Dog* (1978) fall under this category. In 1978, DeLillo received the award of Guggenheim Fellowship with which he funded a trip, for three years, to India, around the Middle East and later settled in Greece (Balachandran and Raja 2005). The output of this travelling is his novel *The Names* in which "Islamic fundamentalism" pervades the Oriental representation of Muslims (Pirnajmuddin and Borhan 2011b, 71) Pondering on the events and experiences surrounding DeLillo's travel, Balachandran and Raja (2005, 159–160) note that:

> It was in this time when the war between Iran and Iraq had abated but the tense standoff between Greece and Turkey continued over [N]orthern Cyprus. Middle East was still in the throes of violence with Lebanon remaining in a state of perpetual civil war. Ayatollah Khomeini had the Muslim youth under his thrall. Hostage taking had become the strategic and the most effective weapon in the hands of a new breed of suicide bombers. After a failed rescue mission of its diplomatic staff held hostages in Teheran, America woke up to the threat of terrorism by disgruntled Islamic youth… At this critical moment of poor relationship between America and the rest of the world, beyond the West, DeLillo happened to be in places hostile towards American interest. It gave him an invaluable

> opportunity to study the sentiments of the local people towards America. At the same time, he became fully aware of the newfangled phenomenon of international terrorism and its anarchic, pyrrhic and eschatological view of the world. DeLillo successfully incorporated the empirical and sensory data, which he painstakingly collected with telling effect in the novel to follow.

In America, the effects of the Iranian revolution and the hostage crises was perceived in the American culture and the redundant media discourse of the Muslim terrorists. Watson (2005, 95) observes in his thesis that "the events of 1979–1981 mark a turning point in popular discourses of American Orientalism". In that, the Muslims were dominantly illustrated as violent terrorists. Drawing from earlier Orientalist representation of the Arabs as terrorists, Watson (2005, 96) added that "the discourse of terrorism in the news and the culture of 1980 drew upon the previous representation of Arabs (usually Egyptian) as terrorists stemming from the 1967 and 1973 wars between Israel and its Arab neighbours". Iranian Revolution of 1978 and the Americans Hostage Crisis that followed become the main preoccupation of DeLillo's novel. However, Americans' treatment of the hostage crises has raised a series of questions about the "American national identity" (Pirnajmuddin and Borhan 2011b, 74). As Balachandran and Raja noted earlier, DeLillo at this critical time became aware of other people's sentiment towards Americans. While reflecting on America's loss of control in Iran, the novel illustrates the Muslims as a different type of humans, difficult to deal with – angry terrorists.

> The American media's reaction to Hostage Crisis is emblematic (and perhaps the cause) of Americans' failure to perceive the symbolic meaning of it. Instead of viewing it as the Iranians' objection to the US's long record of interventions in Iran's internal affairs since the 1950s, the media narratives, translated the event, mainly through decontextualisation", into a heinous assault committed by Iranian "mad" masses upon a bunch of innocent American individuals. Subsequently, this violence was admittedly identified with terrorism. (Balachandran and Raja 2005, 76)

Similarly, during the Salman Rushdie event, DeLillo is one of the prominent American authors who staunchly expressed his support for Rushdie's freedom of expression against the hate speech argument posed by the Muslims. Among the many supports which DeLillo showed Rushdie includes participating in discussion and reading of Rushdie's work at New York City. In solidarity and support for Salman Rushdie, this event was organised by PEN American Center, the Authors' Guild and Article 19, a British human rights organisation focused on defending the

freedom of expression and information (Goldman and Getlin 1989; Passaro 1991) Similarly, DeLillo and Paul Auster authored a pamphlet on the defence of Salman Rushdie five years after the death fatwa was issued; they reiterated the decline of free expression and democracy to "religious dogma". While sympathising with Rushdie's situation (of fear and solitude), they challenged the American government to protect Rushdie and help regain his freedom even if it has to "exert due pressure" against Islamic Iran (DeLillo and Auster 1994). This feeling would be the theme of his very next novel.

In a retrospective fictionalisation of the struggle between arts and reality, DeLillo, in his novel *Mao II* (1991) illustrates the challenges of a novelist in the face of terrorism perpetrated by religious fundamentalists. *Mao II* examines the close link between Christian fundamentalism and fascism (operating in Japan) as well as the severity of Islamic fundamentalism.

The fear of an unprecedented attack that engulfs DeLillo's novel *Mao II* marks his creative problematisation and antagonism with Islam. Expressed through this narrative, the occurrence of an attack at the end of the novel, satiated the readers' suspense and established a sense of fear and loss – the progressive but lone novelist losing it all to the terrorists. DeLillo makes a case for the decline of successful writing as an art. In that, the ability of the novelist to influence a society becomes overtaken by the actions of the "immediate and spectacular terrorist" and the efforts made by "catastrophe journalism" in sensationalising terrorist acts (Knight 2011). DeLillo affirms in the novel, the wretchedness of Muslim terrorists. Through the character George Haddad, a political theorist and a close ally to the Beirut terrorist group, DeLillo says:

> In societies reduced to blur and glut, terror is the only meaningful act. There's too much everything, more things and messages and meanings than we can use in ten thousand lifetimes. [. . .] Who do we take seriously? Only the lethal believer, the person who kills and dies for faith. Everything else is absorbed. The artist is absorbed, the madman in the street is absorbed and processed and incorporated. Give him a dollar, put him in a TV commercial. Only the terrorist stands outside. The culture hasn't figured out how to assimilate him. (as quoted in Knight 2011, 38)

In the excerpt, DeLillo asserts the toxicity and deadliness of the Muslim terrorists who kill for the sake of religion. Although his prime concern is about the attention the terrorists are snatching from the novelist, he persistently reiterated the threat of the Muslim terrorists, connecting their actions with Islam.

In an interview with Bruce Passaro, DeLillo affirms that his novel *Mao II* was about the events surrounding the Rushdie affair of 1989 – the death fatwa, the constant fear Rushdie must live with and the support DeLillo can give him as an author. He states:

> I don't know how deep it is … but it's there. It's the connection between the writer as the champion of the self, and those forces that are threatened by this. Such totalitarian movements can be seen in miniature in the very kind of situation Rushdie is in. He's a hostage. (Passaro 1991, 30)

This declaration establishes DeLillo's diehard support for Rushdie against Islamic extremism, his representation of Muslim terrorism in *Mao II* illustrates the earliest expression of his resentment for Islam. DeLillo navigates religious fundamentalism in different faces whereby he sees "the jihadist [as] a 'lethal believer' who reduces the world to one plot" (Kauffman 2010, 20).

In *Falling Man* (2007), through the plot development, DeLillo discusses the inherence of terrorism to Islamic faith through the characters of Hammad, one of the pilots that flew the hijacked aircraft, and Amir, the mastermind of the attacks. First, introducing them as devout Muslims and then explicating their faithfulness in Islam through the concept of *jihad* and sworn enmity towards the Americans and Jews. While Amir summoned the terrorists about the true meaning of Islam, he states that "Islam is the struggle against the enemy, near enemy and far, Jews first, for all things unjust and hateful, and then the Americans" (p. 80). This insinuation gives the reader an inference of Islam as an intolerant religion perpetuating hatred against Jews and Americans. DeLillo further reiterates the above assertion as he notes that, "They [Hammad and his colleagues] sat around a table on day one and pledged to accept their duty, which was for each of them, in blood trust, to kill Americans" (p. 171). America is once again the victim of Islamic terrorism without paying heed to the fact that America decisively destabilised other nations in the name of liberal democracy.

Strategic enmity: The Clash of Civilisations thesis

Almost a decade before the tragic occurrence of the 9/11 event, a History and Oriental Studies professor, Bernard Lewis, published his groundbreaking article "The Roots of Muslim Rage" (1990). The article which deeply penetrated the Americans and the entire West. This effect is because he has been laudably respected as "the most influential Orientalist thinker of his generation" (Diab 2018, 1). Quoting from Abraham Udovitch, a Professor Emeritus of Jewish Civilisation in the Near East, Aronson of Princeton University venerated Bernard

Lewis as, "the most eminent and respected historian of the Arab world, of the Islamic world, of the Middle East and beyond" (Aronson 2018, 3).

Lewis' article summarises the focal attribute of contemporary Muslims using such words as bitterness, resentment, revulsion, rage, hatred, revenge, "holy war against the infidel enemy", struggles, attacks, hostility and rejection. For Lewis, the core problems of the Islamic world (extremism and fundamentalism), are deeply rooted in its history and culture. His Clash of Civilisations thesis argues that Islam sees the West as a "millennial enemy" that has to be defeated (Lewis 1990, 49). In that, he culminates the history of Islam and the West as, "a long series of attacks and counterattacks, jihads and crusades, conquests and reconquests" (ibid.). He further emphasised that the Muslims' loss of glory – centuries of enjoyed imperial triumph and advancement – to the Western world results to their resentment for the Westerners. Therefore, the quest to regain their lost political success yielded to readiness for revenge on the Westerners. Besides, the nature of Islamic principle is one of leadership over the infidels – the "enemies of God", a principle which has as well been indoctrinated into the Muslims' cultural practices. More so, the spirit of religious revival in 21st-century Muslims identified America as the "infidel enemy" which must be fought (Lewis 1990, 52) One, for her support for Israel and two, from an inherited German philosophy of anti-Americanism. Thus, his argument pinpoints the roots of "Muslim rage" in the civilisation and culture of the Islamic world as legitimately opposing to the West.

It is remarkable that such a prominent historian as Lewis should reduce at one stroke the 1400 years history of Islamic and Western worlds to "attacks and conquests" and contribute to the monolithic perception of Islam as a menacing power bent on destroying Western civilisation. Lewis' attempt to summarise the present reality of the Islamic world in terms of rage and resentment against the West leads to gross generalisations and misrepresentations that one would normally expect only from an uninformed or deliberately misleading historian.

Corresponding to Bernard Lewis' thesis is Samuel Huntington's foundational lecture on "The Clash of Civilisations" at American Enterprise Institute in 1992 and the publication of the same in, Foreign Affairs Magazine in 1993. He later developed his argument into a book in 1996 titled *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order*.

Huntington argued that, after the Cold War, world politics would enter a "new phase", the globe will undergo a new world order. In that, future wars would no longer be fought between dependent or independent countries, but between cultures (Huntington 1993). Global conflicts would move beyond the political or

economic interest of sovereign states to people's religious and cultural identities, and that the principal menace to world peace will be Islamic extremism. While his contemporaries like Fukuyama are consumed with the ideas of liberal democracy, secular modernity and the capitalist free market, as the conclusion of global ideological history, Huntington argues that the world will move beyond ideological to religious and cultural conflicts. It will be characterised by a clash of civilisations worldwide such as Western, Orthodox, Confucian and Islamic cultures, where Islam will be the next domineering problem of the Western world (Turner 2002, 36). The basis for Huntington's assertion is that "Western ideas of individualism, liberalism, constitutionalism, human rights, equality, liberty, the rule of law, democracy, free markets, the separation of church and state, often have little resonance in Islamic societies" (as quoted in Kumar 2010, 259).

Both Bernard Lewis and Samuel Huntington's thesis have influenced the Western perceptions and predictions of Muslims in the 90s, especially among political elites. It became a go-to manual for understanding and situating Muslims after 9/11; their thesis facilitated the creation of a new Muslim enemy. Even George Bush and Tony Blair drew from this thesis directly or indirectly to lobby support for the invasion of Iraq and War on Terror. In that, a new wave of Orientalism and Islamophobia was unleased (Kumar 2010, 259–260). Said critiqued both Lewis and Huntington in his 2001 article refuting the ignorance they both displayed about the vagueness of concepts like Islam and the West, which they both use reductively. Said (2001, 3) states that:

> In both articles, the personification of enormous entities called "the West" and "Islam" is recklessly affirmed, as if hugely complicated matters like identity and culture existed in a cartoonlike world where Popeye and Bluto bash each other mercilessly, with one always more virtuous pugilist getting the upper hand over his adversary. Certainly neither Huntington nor Lewis has much time to spare for the internal dynamics and plurality of every civilisation, or for the fact that the major contest in most modern cultures concerns the definition or interpretation of each culture, or for the unattractive possibility that a great deal of demagogy and downright ignorance is involved in presuming to speak for a whole religion or civilisation. No, the West is the West, and Islam.

Professor Deepa Kumar (2010, 261) similarly asserts that the Clash of Civilisations thesis, as the new avatar of classical Orientalism of Muslims, reduced the totality of Islam to a monolithic entity. To emphasise the threat of non-Western civilisations like Islam, Huntington stressed the necessity of creating, knowing and maintaining an enemy in the very first chapter of his book. That, "[t]here can be no true friends without true enemies. Unless we hate what we are not, we cannot love what we are.

These are the old truths we are painfully rediscovering after a century and more of sentimental can't" (Huntington 1996, 20). Thus, understanding the Muslims as enemies or potential enemies for future war, remained through the Western minds from the 90s. After the September 11 attacks, lots of political analysts, journalists, economists, novelists and their likes, gave the most plausible explanation of the attack as, a result of Muslims' anti-Western resentment derived from Huntington's Clash of Civilisation thesis.

In the same vein, "DeLillo suggests that the attacks were motivated by resentment of the relentless worldwide extension of American values" (Mckinney 2018, 113). DeLillo has long been venerating the American value, its "systems" and the "networks". DeLillo takes great interest in the American system (Taylor 2016, 184). Three months after the attacks, DeLillo published an article *In the Ruins of the Future* where he asserts that the reason behind the attacks is one of a difference of culture – an attack on American lifestyle.

> It was the high gloss of our modernity. It was the thrust of our technology. It was our perceived godlessness. It was the blunt force of our foreign policy. It was the power of American culture to penetrate every wall, home, life and mind. (DeLillo 2001, 2)

DeLillo added that "[t]he terrorists of September 11 want to bring back the past". In that, the American freedom of expression and her "justice system's provisions for the rights of the accused" is offensive to the Muslims who failed to practice and appreciate such liberties. Thus, the Muslim enemy or Islam, in general, is decisively at par with America's civilisation, where prosperity and technology are the religion of America, "the only superpower on the planet", both impede Islam – "the old slow furies of cut-throat religion" (DeLillo 2001, 55). As such, the war was not motivated by global politics or American dominance in the global economy, but by the American advancement, godlessness and epitome of modernisation. By drawing on these issues of cultural and civilisational difference, DeLillo agrees with and succumbs to the Clash of Civilisations thesis which foresaw such attack (as wars) a few years before. Linda Kauffman sees DeLillo's article as a rebuke to the popular narrative surrounding 9/11 as "a part of a global clash of civilisations" (as quoted in Mckinney 2018, 113). However, his novel *Falling Man* reinforces just that thesis. In the novel, the terrorists vowed "to kill Americans" (p. 171). As discussed in an earlier section of this article, DeLillo vehemently reproduced the polar difference between the Muslim "other" and the American enemy "through architectures of enmity" (Alosman, Raihanah and Ruzy Suliza 2019, 24). Thus, the attacks were easily conceivable as Huntington's foretold Clash of Civilisations which automatically puts the Muslims at the enemy end. This all boils down

to Orientalism and its precepts (Said 2004). Gregory (2004) is of the opinion that, through the association of Islam and/or Muslims with antagonism, and of Americans with empathy and reason, DeLillo's subscription to Huntington's Clash of Civilisation hypothesis is vividly illustrated and exemplified in *Falling Man* (2007). He adds that Islamic antagonism is a major component in DeLillo's portrayal of the Muslim characters and a cornerstone in his architectures of enmity (p. 32). DeLillo illustrates this in a discussion about the possible rationale behind the attacks.

> "God is great", Nina said. But Martin retorts:
>
> Forget God. These are matters of history. This is politics and economics. All the things that shape lives, millions of people, dispossessed, their lives, their consciousness. 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. They use the language of religion, okay, but this is not what drives them. (p. 47)

DeLillo uses the conversation between Nina and Martin to underpin his associated thoughts on terrorism. "God is great" is the English translation of *Allahu akbar* which Muslims most often say to reiterate the greatness of Allah. It is as well misused by terrorists at the very moment of carrying out attacks to derive morale. Nina's exclamation here suggests the tie of fundamental Islam with terrorist acts. Martin's response, on the other hand, denotes the extreme manifestation of the Muslim "otherness". Though DeLillo dissociates terrorism with religion here, he relates the intertwined possibilities that boil down to global politics and economics. Thereby presenting the Clash of Civilisation thesis.

Conclusion

The study finds that DeLillo subscribes to earlier forms of Orientalism, which reduces Islam as a religion of terror and Muslims as blood-thirsty and violent adherents of the religion. He used dominant Western knowledge and understanding of Islamic terrorism to make up Muslim terrorist characters that appeal to the official description of nineteen hijackers' that attacked the buildings. Putting *Falling Man* (2007) to a contrapuntal test – to understand the author's motivation for such representation, it was found that DeLillo has been engaged in the artistic discourse of Islamic fundamentalism and terrorism decade before 9/11. Based on his experience of Islamic terrorism in the Middle East and beyond, he has reproduced the violent Muslim's discourse in his preceding works as well. Underscoring Islamophobia as the new strand of Orientalism, as discussed earlier, the findings

suggest that DeLillo's novel is tantamount to the propagating of Islamophobia. In that, he was upfront in the reproduction of the official narrative about Muslims orchestrating 9/11.

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