



## **Declaration**

I, the undersigned, hereby declare that the work contained in this thesis is my own original work and has not previously in its entirety or in part been submitted at any university for a degree.

Signature:

Date:

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## **Abstract**

This thesis explores the themes of representation and identity in four post-9/11 novels: Khaled Hosseini's *The Kite Runner*, Mohsin Hamid's *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*, Frédéric Beigbeder's *Windows on the World* and Don DeLillo's *Falling Man*.

The novels of Hosseini and Hamid represent the experience of two Muslim protagonists from Afghanistan and Pakistan who immigrate to the US. The protagonists offer two contrasting understandings of fundamentalism, using this lens to understand the terrorist figure and American society respectively. The construction of power for both the American society and the terrorist is argued to be located in images which are linked to masculinity: money, sport, militancy, sex and religious devotion. The personal experiences of these protagonists reflect the political circumstances which they encounter, and both characters identify with national identities in ways which relate to their readings of representations of identity and news media.

Beigbeder and DeLillo's novels are discussed using the theme of trauma. The novels portray the experiences of American characters who are confronted with 9/11 and suffer from disorientation and loss. The negotiation of this loss takes place in relation to entanglements with the terrorist figure, who penetrates the physical and psychological spaces of these characters. Images of masculinity are evoked in order to signify this loss of power, where the destabilising of the paternal role is linked to the pervasive sense of vulnerability which the characters experience after the attacks. Memorials and rituals become ways of dealing with disorientation. The two novels unsettle the distinction between terrorist and terrorised in order to negotiate a new American identity after 9/11.

### **Key Words:**

9/11 terrorism identity representation fundamentalism trauma Hosseini Hamid

Beigbeder DeLillo

## Opsomming

Hierdie tesis ondersoek temas van representasie en identiteit in vier post-9/11 romans, naamlik Khaled Hosseini se *The Kite Runner*, Mohsin Hamid se *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*, Frédéric Beigbeder se *Windows on the World* en Don DeLillo se *Falling Man*.

Hosseini en Hamid se romans verbeeld die ervarings van twee Muslim-protagoniste, onderskeidelik afkomstig van Afghanistan en Pakistan wat na die VSA immigrer. Hierdie protagoniste verbeeld twee uiteenlopende beskouings van fundamentalisme wat gevolglik aangewend word om die terroris-figuur en die Amerikaanse gemeenskap te verstaan. Die konstruksie van mag vir die Amerikaanse gemeenskap en die terroris-figuur word getoon, is geleë in beelde wat verband hou met manlikheid, naamlik geld, sport, militarisme, seks en toegewydheid. Die persoonlike ervarings van hierdie protagoniste weerspieël die politieke omstandighede waarmee hulle kennis maak. Beide hierdie karakters vereenselwig hulself met nasionale identiteite op grond van hul begrip van representasie van identiteit en die media.

Beigbeder en DeLillo se romans word volgens die tema van trauma vergelyk. Hierdie romans beeld die ervarings van Amerikaanse karakters wat met 9/11 gekonfronteer word en met disoriëntasie en verlies worstel, uit. Die oorweging van hierdie verlies vind plaas in verhouding tot ontmoetings met die terroris-figuur wat die fisiese en psigiese ruimtes van hierdie karakters binnedring. Voorstellings van manlikheid word opgeroep om die verlies van mag ten toon te stel. Hierdie verlies van mag word gekenmerk deur die destabilisering van die vaderlike rol tesame met die diepgaande sin van weerloosheid wat die karakters na die aanval ervaar. Gedenktekens en rituele word vervolgens instellings om met die disoriëntasie om te gaan. Uiteindelik problematiseer die twee romans die onderskeid tussen terroris en geterroriseerde om sodoende 'n nuwe Amerikaanse identiteit ná 9/11 tot stand te bring.

### Sleutelwoorde:

9/11 terrorisme identiteit representasie fundamentalisme trauma Hosseini Hamid

Beigbeder DeLillo

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## Chapter 1

### Introduction: Conceptualising Terrorism, Identity and Representation

What was new was the symbolic force of the targets struck. The attackers not only physically demolished the tallest buildings in Manhattan; they also destroyed an icon in the collective store of images of the American nation. Only through the surge of patriotism which followed could one grasp the central importance that this striking silhouette on the Manhattan skyline, this powerful embodiment of economic strength and aspirations for the future, had acquired in the imagination of an entire people. (Habermas 7)

The September 11<sup>th</sup> 2001 attacks in the United States, commonly referred to as 9/11, resulted in the most casualties of any single documented terrorist attack in history (Enders & Sandler 260). Four commercial jet airliners were hijacked by members of the fundamentalist Islamic group known as al-Qaeda, and three of these were purposefully crashed into the Pentagon in Arlington, Virginia, and the Twin Towers of the World Trade Centre in New York City, with the fourth plane crashing in a field in rural Pennsylvania. The destruction of the Twin Towers has formed the most recognised image of the attacks, and resulted in the majority of the casualties (Hoffman 304). The attacks, although occurring in the US, have had transnational implications, as Enders and Sandler point out by explaining that “the incidents were planned abroad, the terrorists came from outside the United States, support came from abroad, victims were from more than eighty countries, and the incidents had economic and security implications worldwide” (261). The transnational nature created a complex response, including questions of conflict between Islam and the West (Munthe 2; Geaves 1), and a controversial US-led War on Terror which included many countries (Pilger 156; Geaves 5), a campaign which is reported to have had some effect against the threat of al-Qaeda (Enders & Sandler 262). The transnational threat of terrorism has also caused “[c]hanges in visa procedures [and] airport security” (262), creating a heightened sense of boundaries between those believed to be under greatest threat, namely “developed [...and] industrial countries” (261) mostly from Europe and North America,

and those associated with the image of terrorism in the post-9/11 world, namely “Muslims, Arabs, and people resembling Middle Easterners” (Said, *Roadmap* 114).

This thesis will discuss four novels which deal with the 9/11 attacks, and will focus on the concepts of identity and representation as they relate to the four texts under discussion. These two central concepts form useful lenses in the wake of the attacks, since post-9/11 discourses have largely focused on American identity (especially related to wealth, Capitalism and economic and cultural domination)<sup>1</sup>, representation of Islam and especially fundamentalist Islam, and representing the extreme violence of the attacks through various media, especially the response that the visuals of the attacks shown on news broadcasts created a link between “historic trauma and the cinema” (Rich 109) where witnesses commented that “it looked just like a movie” (109). The visual aspect also finds expression in how Neil Leach explains that “newsreel images of the destruction of a building [... could] serve as a mechanism of identification for an American sense of self” (77). These aspects of American and Muslim or Arab identity and many different dynamics of representing the events find expression in the four novels discussed in this analysis.

I will argue that the novels portray 9/11 as a site of engagement with both national and personal self-understandings, and that representation of the event and of various aspects of identity allow for the act of identity-negotiation to be undertaken both visually and narratively. I will demonstrate how these visual and narrative references point to an epistemological confusion surrounding the event and its aftermath, where the confluence of fiction and reality echoes both the difficulty of defining the event and of relating the self to the inhuman violence and scale which it symbolises, and ultimately reflecting the loss of a stable identity. I will also show how national or political identity is often located in discourses of masculinity and sexuality, both in terms of the “terrorist” figures who are represented in the novels and of American or Western identity, incorporating symbols such as money, paternity, sport, sex, militancy (or violence), religion (or devotion), and authorial power as representative of masculine power. Jasbir K. Puar

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<sup>1</sup> David Simpson notes how those who died in the towers were all incorporated into an American identity: “Many who died [in the towers] were indeed foreign nationals, who imaged a kind of global diversity, but they have mostly not been produced as representatives of a united world consciousness or universal human condition so much as made secondary characters in a distinctly American drama [...] They died as employees of global capital in a place *telling* of its dedication to trade and profit” (62).



and Amit S. Rai demonstrate how a paternal narrative of protecting women and children is used in the national and patriotic voice: “Infantilizing the population, [state officials and others] scream with what seems to be at times one voice: ‘The terrorist is a monster. This monster is the enemy. The enemy must be hunted down to protect you and all those women and children that you do not know, but we know’” (131). The masculine discourse around national identity is also highlighted when the authors claim that “the U.S. state, having experienced a castration and penetration of its capitalist masculinity, offers up narratives of emasculation as appropriate punishment for bin Laden, brown-skinned folks, and men in turbans” (126).<sup>2</sup>

All four novels examined in this thesis deal with the events of 9/11 in varying degrees and adopt various strategies for representing these events. Using 9/11 as a focus for discussion creates a space of identity construction around a “world-historical event”<sup>3</sup> and allows for an analysis of how various aspects of this event are represented in relation to it. By focusing on the references to fiction, narrative, cinema and imagery in this analysis, the unstable distinction between fiction and reality which characterises the attacks will be highlighted. Joseph S. Walker refers to this confusion by explaining: “There is in our time an uncontainable rupture of the boundaries between the fictional and the real that, for many, has come to seem the dominant characteristic of public culture” (336). He explains that a field which “increasingly licenses the open fictionalizing of the political [...] is terrorism. For both the politician and the terrorist, the goal is to recraft the collective experience of the world through the generation of a narrative that cannot be resisted” (336). He later expands this idea by referring to trauma and the importance of storytelling: “The very stories we tell of the disaster become the crucial basis of our survival and recovery” (337). Baudrillard echoes this by referring to the importance of the symbolic power of terrorism (21), pointing to a fissure between the symbolism and reality of the attacks. This argument will thus explore this confusion of reality and fiction within the framework of representation, and explore how identity is negotiated in this context.

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<sup>2</sup> “To the average uninterested American eye [...] a turban is just a turban. And it symbolizes the revived, erect, and violent patriarchy of the East, of Islam, and of the Taliban; the oppression of Afghan women; the castration and the penetration of white Western phallic power by bad [sic] brown dick and its turban” (Puar & Rai 137).

<sup>3</sup> Habermas characterises 9/11 as “the first world-historical event in a strict sense: the impact, the explosion, the slow collapse – all of which was unfortunately no longer Hollywood but a horrific reality – literally unfolded before the eyes of a global public” (7).

Chapter Two, entitled “The Outsider Within”, discusses two novels which deal with the concept of fundamentalism<sup>4</sup> in opposing ways. This concept has become a popular discourse in the post-9/11 world, and will form the basis of my analysis into how identity and representation are dealt with in the two novels. Fundamentalism is a socio-political way of life which deeply implicates personal identity. Foucault’s analysis of modern power structures serves to create an interesting link between the personal and political identities highlighted in terrorism, as he explains: “For millennia, man remained what he was for Aristotle: a living animal with the additional capacity for a political existence; modern man is an animal whose politics places his existence as a living being in question” (*Sexuality* 143). The link between the personal and political seems powerfully demonstrated in the field of fundamentalism as conceived in the two novels. Both forms of “fundamentalism” highlighted in Chapter Two seem to place the identity of the individual in question when he becomes a political “animal”, and I would argue that he loses his humanity and a stable sense of identity in this moment.

One of the novels dealt with in Chapter Two is Khaled Hosseini’s *The Kite Runner*, which presents the 9/11 attacks in a brief postscript to the main narrative of the novel, not showing how the identity of the Afghan protagonist Amir is affected in the wake of the attacks. However, the events of 9/11 have allowed for the novel to gain new relevance by popularising the terms “Taliban” and “fundamentalism” which are dealt with in Hosseini’s narrative, and propelling Afghanistan into the popular consciousness. 9/11 becomes a space of resolution in this novel, where difficulties of identity and representation for Amir and his own conflict with terrorism are cathartically highlighted through his adoptive home America’s newly formed War on Terror. The various identity-forming moments for Amir all lead him to a strong sense of alignment with American ideals, and the forming of a common enemy after the 9/11 attacks allows him to forge a stronger bond with America. Additionally, his own representation of America as a land of opportunity and his representation of fundamentalism in the Taliban seem to slot in meaningfully

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<sup>4</sup> Habermas offers a definition of the term “fundamentalism”, highlighting the ways in which it is often used for political reasons yet is broadly applicable: “‘Fundamentalism’ has a pejorative ring to it. We use this adjective to characterize a mindset that stubbornly insists on the political imposition of its own convictions and reasons, even when they are far from being generally acceptable. This holds especially for religious beliefs. [...] orthodoxy only becomes fundamentalist when the guardians and representatives of the true faith ignore the epistemic situation of a pluralistic society and insist – even to the point of violence – on the universal validity and political imposition of their doctrine” (Habermas 10).

with the redemptive events toward the end of the novel where 9/11 is mentioned. Thus, although it is only briefly referred to, 9/11 offers a defining moment in the novel by demonstrating the way in which Amir distances himself from negative representations of Afghanistan and of Islam by viewing post-9/11 American nationalism in a positive light and cementing his identity as an American.

The second novel dealt with in the first chapter is Mohsin Hamid's *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*, and the events of 9/11 form a tipping point in the novel for the Pakistani protagonist Changez. Changez offers a reversal of the concept of fundamentalism, using it to refer to the economic fundamentalism which he views as defining American culture. His position as an outsider becomes highlighted after 9/11, and he chooses to distance himself from his own American dream after watching the attacks represented on television and having a confusingly positive reaction to this representation. 9/11 catalyses the unravelling of many of his ideas about American life, and he is led to criticise the way in which he is represented as an outsider and how he believes that full inclusion into American life is impossible for him. By placing the events of 9/11 at the middle of Changez's narrative, the novel emphasises the role of the attacks in influencing his own distance from America and from his idea of American fundamentalism. The contrasting views of fundamentalism presented in the two novels expose how different self-definitions and world-views become possible for the two protagonists.

The third chapter, entitled "Confronting Unimaginable Violence", deals with two American protagonists who are victims of the 9/11 attacks. The chapter's central focus is trauma and its various effects on identity and representation. By focusing on the personal and intimate human reactions to the events, the concept of identity becomes central to this chapter since characters negotiate their understandings of the attacks within the same framework in which they negotiate understandings of themselves, namely a sense of vulnerability, loss and an overwhelming disorientation. Don DeLillo's *Falling Man* centres on the character of Keith, who was in the North Tower of the World Trade Centre during the attacks and manages to escape. Keith's trauma leads him to become a ghost-like figure to his family and he struggles with reaching stability in his life after the attacks. The novel also deals with representations of the attacks themselves, most powerfully through the eponymous character, the performance artist known as Falling Man, who suspends himself upside-down in public spaces while wearing a business suit

and recreates the deeply unsettling image of those who fell from the burning towers of the World Trade Centre.

The third chapter will also deal with Frederic Beigbeder's *Windows on the World*, which offers a striking look at trauma by intimately imagining the horror of those who died in the attacks, focusing on the restaurant on the 107<sup>th</sup> floor of the North Tower called Windows on the World and the doomed characters within. The novel primarily focalises Carthew, a wealthy realtor who renegotiates his relationship with his two sons while they are all trapped in the burning tower. Carthew constantly compares his own experience to films, and represents himself in various ways throughout the novel to reach an understanding about the attacks and his role as victim. He deals with the idea of terrorism and attempts to make sense of it by personalizing the inhuman violence and showing how it affects human lives in addition to its symbolic force.

The novels under discussion respond to the terrorist attacks of 9/11, yet they rarely use the word "terrorism" themselves, showing an awareness of the emotive, fraught, and contested nature of this concept. The term "terrorism" will be used in this thesis with a similar awareness of these concerns. Martha Crenshaw deals with the problem of defining terrorism: "The problem of defining terrorism has hindered analysis since the inception of studies of terrorism in the early 1970s. [...] The use of the term is often polemical and rhetorical. It can be a pejorative label, meant to condemn an opponent's cause as illegitimate rather than describe behavior" (Crenshaw 406). Leach demonstrates some of the tensions around this concept in the context of 9/11 and the War on Terror:

[W]e have the convenient slogan of the War on Terror, in which freedom fighters of different ideological persuasions can be construed only as 'terrorists.' Such a definition exposes its own fragility when the understandings of freedom and terrorism are culturally defined. For the United States, Muslim freedom fighters are 'terrorists,' and the United States is 'the land of the free,' while for Muslim extremists suicide bombers are volunteer 'martyrs,' while the United States is tainted for supporting the 'terrorist' State of Israel. (89)

The political nature of this concept and the impact which it has on the perceptions of characters in these novels will be highlighted to demonstrate that, in accordance with Crenshaw's analysis, it is not an uncontested or simplistic concept. The terms "terrorism" and "terrorist" will

however be used in this argument for simplicity to refer to the events and perpetrators of the 9/11 attacks, relying on Crenshaw's definition:

In principle, terrorism is deliberate and systematic violence performed by small numbers of people [...] The purpose of terrorism is to intimidate a watching popular audience by harming only a few [...] Terrorism is meant to hurt, not to destroy. Terrorism is preeminently political and symbolic [...] terrorism is a clandestine resistance to authority.<sup>5</sup> (406)

Two further concepts which require exploration for their use in this argument are "identity" and "representation". These concepts will be used within broad terms mostly based on their application in post-9/11 critical writing, and theoretical methods of linking these two concepts, such as Lacanian psychoanalysis, will be employed. My focus will be on how personal and national identities are constructed through representation and memory.

Leach points to the act of identification which causes the construction of this self-understanding, referring to the Lacanian "mirror-stage" (77) where the child recognises their own reflection in a mirror and "begins to formulate a coherent sense of self and to develop some coordination by identifying with its own reflected image" (77). This model of external visual identification with a sense of self is relevant to the post-9/11 world, where negotiation of the meaning of the attacks takes place in the visual realm. Leach explains: "The model presupposes a spatialized sense of a visual awareness grounded in the notion of image" (77) and thus "identification is always specular. It is always a question of recognizing – or misrecognizing – oneself in the other" (77). Identity is created in the interaction with the external event or the other, especially in the visual realm. Leach also continues to note that the objects of identification themselves, for this discussion the Twin Towers of the World Trade Centre and the memorial built in their place, "do not have any inherent meaning" (78) and are "essentially inert" (78), but only through identification do they become "sites of memory" (78). Thus the self is

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<sup>5</sup> Even though the concept will be used within this narrow framework in this analysis, many different definitions and applications of the term "terrorism" exist. For example, Chomsky charts out how official definitions would actually include the US as a "leading terrorist state" (38). He refers to definitions in the US Code and army manuals to support this point: "Terrorism is the use of coercive means aimed at civilian populations in an effort to achieve political, religious, or other aims. That's what the World Trade Center attack was, a particularly horrifying terrorist crime. Terrorism, according to the official definitions, is simply part of state action, official doctrine, and not just that of the US, of course. It is not, as is often claimed, 'the weapon of the weak' " (54).

always implicated, through identification and memory, with understandings of these sites and of external events.

The four novels also deal with exploration of identity in relation to the body, where identity is negotiated through physical embodiment in the face of 9/11 – through appearance, injury, vulnerability and trauma. Butler’s analysis of discourse and bodies serves to illuminate these ideas: “How is it that the apparently injurious effects of discourse become the painful resources by which a resignifying practice is wrought? Here it is not only a question of how discourse injures bodies, but how certain injuries establish certain bodies at the limits of available ontologies, available schemes of intelligibility” (224). The discourses around 9/11 become similar sites of intersection between identity and the body, where understanding the event and its effects are shown to have physical implications.<sup>6</sup> Sex, injury, ageing, physical appearance, and many other aspects of the body have direct implications for identity in the face of 9/11. The body, indeed, seems to be the powerful link between the personal and the political, especially in the case of suicide terrorism where the body is used as a political tool. Foucault holds that “[t]he individual, with his identity and characteristics, is the product of a relation of power exercised over bodies, multiplicities, movements, desires, forces” (*Power* 74), a conception which links the ideas of intimacy and the body to power and identity. The discourse of death as power which Baudrillard hints at (17) is also highlighted in Foucault’s conception of bio-power, the power over life and death, which Baudrillard suggests the terrorist disrupts through his own death and the symbolic death of the towers (17). Foucault links bio-power to identity through the realm of the body and sex: “We [...] are in a society of ‘sex,’ or rather a society ‘with a sexuality’: the mechanisms of power are addressed to the body, to life, to what causes it to proliferate” (*History* 147), and we live in a society which has newly conceived “[t]he ‘right’ to life, to one’s body, to health, to happiness, to the satisfaction of needs, and beyond all the oppressions and ‘alienations’, the ‘right’ to rediscover what one is and all that can be” (145). Of course, in Baudrillard’s view, this ‘right’ is compromised by the terrorist through the symbolism of mutual

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<sup>6</sup> Weiss holds that national identity is inscribed on the body: “Many ethnic groups aggressively inscribe their national ideologies onto the body. Wartime transforms individual bodies into social bodies – as evidenced by genocidal rapes or ethnic cleansing” (55). Weiss’s argument is presented within the framework of “bodyTalk – how the event [of terrorism] was described, explained and given meaning through what is primarily a rhetoric of the body” (42). She explains that “The national territory becomes equivalent to the personal body; the body politic and the citizen become one” (38).

death, and the novels use the body as a site of reflection on this loss.<sup>7</sup> The body thus is a way of inserting identity into the external event, a site where issues of understanding, memory and power can be negotiated for the characters involved.

Visual representation and the narrativisation of the body constitute two sites of identification in the novels for the construction of both personal and national identities. National identity is a product not only of geography and history, but also of the complex representations of these fields. Edward W. Said elaborates on this link by referring to national identity as constructed through representation, asserting that: “[j]ust as none of us is outside or beyond geography, none of us is completely free from the struggle over geography. That struggle is complex and interesting because it is not only about soldiers and cannons but also about ideas, about forms, about images and imaginings” (7). National identity is thus constructed around these “ideas” (7), or what will be referred to as narratives or myths which inform geographical and cultural identity, and conceptions such as Islam and the West will be viewed in this light.<sup>8</sup>

Representation of national myths, traumatic events, cultural others and of the body, aspects which have been shown to impact on personal and national identities, become important to this argument. Representation will be investigated in relation to reproductions of the attacks and of the image of the terrorist figure in media, and framing these aspects in relation to understandings of the self.<sup>9</sup> Representation in the wake of 9/11 becomes problematic, as Don DeLillo explains in his essay “In the Ruins of the Future: Reflections on terror and loss in the shadow of September”. Marco Abel outlines DeLillo’s ideas of the difficulties of representation:

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<sup>7</sup> The loss of the body and the body as a site of mourning are highlighted by Boss, who explains the concept of ambiguous loss in relation to the 9/11 attacks. Since many bodies were not recovered or able to be identified, Boss explains that “[w]ith no body to bury, the situation after 9/11 defied psychological closure” (552). The absence of the body in the face of death is a continuous source of trauma, since the expired body and burial of it become inscribed as symbols of loss.

<sup>8</sup> Said echoes the constructed nature of geographical and cultural identities with his criticism of universal conceptions of Islam and the West which theorists like Huntington, through his view of the clash of civilisations, and Bernard Lewis propose (Said, *Culture* 120). He refers to the “internal dynamics and plurality” (120) inherent in any such conception.

<sup>9</sup> One of the prominent ways in which representation has interacted with identity in the wake of 9/11 can be seen in the “I am an American” national advertising campaign in the US, where individuals of many different races were displayed reciting the words “I am an American” and thus “appropriating them into the logic of the same” (Hartnell 338). This example highlights the primacy of the image in constructions of identity.

What makes [DeLillo's] essay remarkable is not merely what it says about 9/11 but how, *in responding to* the event, it simultaneously puts the notion of response at stake. Resisting the demand to speak with moral clarity and declare what the event means, his essay instead shows that response is always a question of response-ability, or the ethical how [...] What DeLillo's response thus teaches us - its most significant intervention in the post-9/11 discourse - is that present-day attempts to image [sic] a (traumatic) event's sense cannot operate exclusively on the level of the event's content (the representational what) without attending to the rhetorical mode of presentation, the ethical how. Or, rather, what DeLillo shows [...] is that what an event means is always already shot through with how it appears. (Abel 1236)

Representation is not a simple reflection on a subject or event, but enshrined within discourse and subjectivity. Leach expands on these issues of representation by explaining that sites of memory such as the World Trade Center site “have to be inscribed within an allegorical narrative that gives them their meaning” (78). These “narratives” are the frames<sup>10</sup> within which the events are represented. Important for this discussion, the idea of narrative (as an extension of representation and authorial power) becomes linked to the discourse of terrorism, as the famous quote from DeLillo's novel *Mao II* highlights:

There's a curious knot that binds novelists and terrorists. In the West we become famous effigies as our books lose the power to shape and influence. Do you ask your writers how they feel about this? Years ago I used to think it was possible for a novelist to alter the inner life of the culture. Now bomb-makers and gunmen have taken that territory. They make raids on human consciousness. What writers used to do before we were all incorporated. (41)

Later in this novel the power of representation is highlighted again in the form of media: “So we turn to the news, which provides us with unremitting mood of catastrophe. This is where we find emotional experience not available elsewhere. We don't need the novel [...] We don't even need catastrophes, necessarily. We only need the reports and predictions and warnings” (72).

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<sup>10</sup> David Simpson holds that “to frame is to give a structure and a context to events that may otherwise be without discursive, memorable, or bearable meaning, incorporating them into a more lasting narrative than the mere moment itself affords” (Simpson 87).



This statement, reminiscent of Baudrillard's conception of the simulacrum<sup>11</sup>, prioritises the image and framing of the event as informing its impact on the self. DeLillo points to the primacy of the images or narratives about an event in shaping reactions and understandings. This is echoed by Walker's reflection that terrorists are "outside the system; because the spectacles they create are dependent upon media attention" (Walker 343), and Osteen explains that "control of the public mind [...] really belongs to the media corporations who authorize the images that terrorists produce" (Osteen 660). The event of terrorism is placed as secondary to the representation of this event. Baudrillard cements this idea when he notes that "[j]ournalists and advertisers are *mythic operators*: they present the object or the event as drama, as fiction. They 'offer it up reinterpreted' and might even, at a pinch, construct it deliberately" (*Consumer* 127).

What is important is that the media, and to a lesser degree the terrorist, are given narrative power, but the novelist is stripped of it. Indeed, the horror of the event and the image of the terrorist figure are variously claimed to be unrepresentable in narrative and personal accounts.<sup>12</sup> Yet the frequent prefiguring of the destruction of New York in pre-9/11 disaster films has ironically made the actual event of 9/11 seem fictional and filmic, distancing witnesses from the reality of the events. The stunting of representation has epistemological implications, since knowledge and understanding of the events rely on representation, or as Abel asserts, "9/11 can only be experienced through representation" (1239). Since the only framing that is given licence is that of terror through the narrative power of media and terrorists, the characters (and author, in the case of autobiographical sections in Beigbeder's work) seem to suffer through trying to frame their understandings and by extension their identities within the discourse of terror. I argue that these terror-based understandings are focused through the lenses of two concepts which are central to 9/11's discourse of terror, namely fundamentalism as dealt with in Chapter 2, and trauma as dealt with in Chapter 3. Most of the characters show a distinct awareness of their own

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<sup>11</sup> In Baudrillard's "simulacrum" (*Consumer* 35), the world is experienced as images which inform an experience of participation while maintaining personal distance and passivity through the maintenance of common values, again pointing to the primacy of the image as informing understandings of terror: "The TV image, like a window turned outside-in, opens initially on to a room and, in that room, the cruel exteriority of the world becomes something intimate and warm – warm with a perverse warmth [...] This tranquillity of the private sphere has to appear as a value *preserved only with great difficulty*, constantly under threat and beset by the dangers of a catastrophic destiny" (35). (Emphasis in original).

<sup>12</sup> See Chapter 3 for a fuller discussion of this theme.

lack of narrative power, and are unable to ground their identities as a result, especially in the presence of the pervasive discourses of terror which the theoretical background for this argument has demonstrated above.

Finally, I will argue throughout that narrative power is linked to paternal or masculine power, and the loss of the prior is reflected in the difficulties with the latter. All four central protagonists in the novels are male, and the ideas of terrorism, patriotism and fundamentalism will be explored in relation to the constructions of gendered identities and symbols of masculinity within the novels. The idea of fatherhood becomes significant, since both Carthew and Keith are fathers (of sons) and Amir constantly refers to his struggles to have children of his own and eventually adopts a son at the end of the novel once he cements his identity as American. The father, in many ways, becomes a symbol of the nation and of national identity, and the attack on the nation is reflected through difficulties with fatherhood. In the shadow of 9/11, the destabilising of masculinity and fatherhood become symbolic of the loss of power to narrate and represent identity.

## Chapter 2

### **The Outsider Within: Fundamentalism and Power in *The Kite Runner* and *The Reluctant Fundamentalist***

#### **2.1 Outsider Identity**

“Do not be frightened of my beard. I am a lover of America” (Hamid 1).

These words are spoken by Changez, the Pakistani protagonist of Mohsin Hamid’s *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*, and highlight the tension which exists between representation and identity in the novel. For Changez, this tension is located in the way he is represented in the post-9/11 world based on his appearance, how he is constructed as a potential terrorist figure by American media due to his political activism, and how he frames his understanding of American society as exclusionary and fundamentalist. All of these factors impact on his self-understanding as he is torn between his loyalties to Pakistan and his life in the US.

Changez is a Princeton graduate who lives in New York, and earns a job at a prestigious valuation firm called Underwood Samson. He excels at his job, and begins an affair with a troubled fellow Princeton graduate named Erica. After the 9/11 attacks, his view of American life and his identification with the national myths of the US begin to rapidly unravel, as he becomes “increasingly marginalized within the post-9/11 milieu” (Hartnell 336). He positions the US as “fundamentalist” in relation to what he characterises as devotion to national myths of economic and political domination.<sup>13</sup> This perception of American fundamentalism leads him to become disillusioned with his own American dream, and his clash with these fundamentals causes him to develop “an envious distaste towards the world of wealth and power in which he now exists” (King 684). He criticises the War on Terror and what he views as America’s self-

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<sup>13</sup> Robert G. King and Richard Levine characterise the dominant 1950s and 1960s economic theory known as “capital fundamentalism” which corresponds with Changez’s ideas of American fundamentalism and his criticisms of American foreign involvement: “[C]apital fundamentalists viewed rapid capital accumulation as central to increasing the rate of economic growth. Capital fundamentalism provided a coherent foundation for giving advice on development problems: national and international policies designed to increase a nation’s physical capital stock were the best way to foster economic development” (259).

interested involvement in the conflict between India and his home country Pakistan. The story is narrated by Changez when he has left New York and is again living in Lahore, working as a University lecturer, and sharing his experiences with an American man who is hinted as being a counterterrorist agent. Changez appears to have been targeted by this man for hosting “anti-American” (Hamid 203) demonstrations with students at his University, and “[t]he reader is supposed throughout the novel to be suspended between the most benign and most sinister interpretations of the interaction between the two of them, something Hamid takes to mirror relations between the ‘East’ and ‘West’ ” (Khawaja 55).<sup>14</sup>

The title of the novel is ironic, since Changez’s fundamentalism is not religious, cultural or political, as his opening comments about his beard might suggest, and also does not refer to the so-called anti-American sentiments of which he is accused and for which he is seemingly targeted by the mysterious American man. Instead, he becomes enmeshed in what he views as the fundamentals of Underwood Samson<sup>15</sup> and of American society as a whole during his stay in New York, principles of economic domination which he abhors and criticises, but also embodies. Changez reflects on his distaste for American economic domination early in the novel when he and fellow Princeton classmates are on a holiday in Greece, wondering: “by what quirk of human history my companions – many of whom I would have regarded as upstarts in my own country, so devoid of refinement were they – were in a position to conduct themselves in the world as though they were its ruling class” (24). Changez’s initial distaste foreshadows his later heated rebellion against this economic domination.

At various points in the novel Changez is shown to be conflicted in his identity, on the verge of inclusion into American society but also constructed as an outsider to it, and he later actively and consciously resists full inclusion due to his criticisms of American fundamentals and foreign

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<sup>14</sup> This conflict is also highlighted in Changez’s name, the Urdu pronunciation of the first name of the often demonised Mongolian conqueror Ghengis Khan (Khawaja 65). The fact that Ghengis Khan is one of the most prominent symbols of Eastern conquering power also links to Changez’s act of reclaiming pride in his Pakistani identity through representing it as a once-powerful nation. It is also interesting to note that Ghengis Khan is demonised in *The Kite Runner* by the character Baba (15), a clear contrast between the representations present in the two novels.

<sup>15</sup> Ann Hartnell explains: “American state power is reflected in a firm named ‘Underwood Samson’, the initials of which visibly recall those of the nation” (337).

policy. The novel represents the US, especially after 9/11, by using the comparison of a fortified and militant castle, as Changez demonstrates: “Gazing up at the soaring towers of the city, I wondered what manner of host would sally forth from so grand a castle” (90); and when he enters Underwood Samson’s reception area he notes that it was “reminiscent of the gleaming façade of some exalted and exclusive temple” (180). The boundaries of this fortress-like American society are maintained in many ways: through gatekeepers such as immigrations officers, through ethnocultural ideas of what constitutes American identity, through national myths such as the myth of the American dream, and through physicality which is demonstrated in Changez’s desire and initial failure to have sex with Erica.

By constructing a view of America as an exclusive stronghold of power, Changez is able to associate with this power by identifying as an American. He also variously exposes how illusion and myth play a part in maintaining American identity, and constructs a narrative around the lost power of his home country, Pakistan, as he begins once again to identify with it. This concern with myth, story-telling and representation is echoed in the way in which Changez is regarded as a potential terrorist figure, a construction which highlights the conflict created between Pakistani and American identity. He says to the American man to whom he narrates his story: “[Y]ou should not imagine that we Pakistanis are all potential terrorists, just as we should not imagine that you Americans are all undercover assassins” (209). Of course, the reader becomes increasingly aware that the American man might indeed be an undercover assassin, as Anna Hartnell notes:

The suggestion that the American might himself be armed and hostile while the ostensibly peaceable narrator may have turned to jihadi violence informs an atmosphere of mutual suspicion and impending violence, an atmosphere that challenges and implicates the reader’s own processes of identification. (337)

The hostility between these two figures echoes the confusion in Changez’s identity. By portraying the American man as a symbol of American fundamentalism, Changez emphasises how he becomes a targeted outsider to this way of life, and the suggestion of mutual hostility also emphasises the resistance from the outsider towards America. This mutual hostility and the effects on Changez’s identity are highlighted when he and his Underwood Samson colleagues

take a business trip to Manila and he notices a Filipino man staring at him: “There was an undisguised hostility in his expression; I had no idea why [...] his dislike was so obvious, so *intimate*, that it got under my skin” (76). Changez identifies with this Filipino man, saying that they “shared a sort of Third World sensibility” (77), and through the hostility which this man shows him, he questions his own position in relation to his colleagues, reflecting on ethnocultural differences and the fundamentalism which he resists:

I looked at [my colleague] – at his fair hair and light eyes and, most of all, his oblivious immersion in the minutiae of our work – and thought, you are so *foreign*. I felt in that moment much closer to the Filipino [man] than to him; I felt I was play-acting when in reality I ought to be making my way home, like the people on the [Manila] street. (77) (Emphasis in original).

Important here is how he comments that what struck him “most of all” was his colleague’s “oblivious immersion in the minutiae of [their] work” (77). Changez demonstrates how this devotion to the details of capitalist systems – what he refers to as fundamentalism – is his main obstacle to inclusion within American society. Khawaja explains: “After a while he comes to the resentful realisation that life in America has made him a traitor to his identity, and made him a mercenary for American interests” (55), a position which is reflected through the hostility he experiences from the Filipino man with whom he shares the “Third World sensibility” (77). Changez as an outsider later begins to identify strongly with his once-resisted Pakistani nationality and Muslim identity, and distances himself from identifying as an American.

This chapter explores Changez as outsider and highlights his engagement with representation and identity in comparison with another prominent post-9/11 novel, *The Kite Runner* by Khaled Hosseini. *The Kite Runner* is narrated by Amir, the son of a wealthy Afghan businessman, who immigrates to America with his father after the Russian invasion of Afghanistan. In America, Amir becomes part of the Afghan subculture in California, meets his wife Soraya, and becomes a successful author. His past haunts him, as in childhood he had witnessed and failed to prevent the assault and rape of his servant and friend Hassan, who was left behind in Afghanistan when Amir and his father emigrated. Amir eventually returns to Afghanistan after he receives a letter from one of his father’s friends named Rahim Khan, and he discovers that Hassan had fathered a son, Sohrab, who was kidnapped by a member of the Taliban. Amir undertakes to rescue Sohrab

as an act of redemption for not preventing or speaking about the rape of Hassan when they were children.

Although Amir views America as a place of redemption, there are hints of a barrier to full inclusion into American society. These barriers are mostly shown in how Amir's father, simply referred to as Baba in the novel, is actively resistant to accepting his position as a disempowered immigrant. Additionally, the novel presents very few instances where Amir or Baba interact with American citizens who are not of Afghan origin. This lack of interaction is conspicuous in a novel where America seems to be idealised to such a great extent. Amir refers to one of these rare encounters in a visit to an official who assesses their eligibility for government support and offers Baba food stamps: "Baba dropped the stack of food stamps on her desk. 'Thank you but I don't want,' Baba said. 'I work always. In Afghanistan I work, in America I work. [...] I don't like it free money [sic]' " (114). Baba's refusal to accept financial assistance is one of the ways in which he resists an identity of dependence and powerlessness. Indeed, Baba becomes the embodiment of power through his association with what the novel constructs as masculine symbols of power while living in Afghanistan, symbols which are idealised in Amir's experience of America. However, despite his ability to enact these masculine ideals, Baba is not able to maintain his power in America. I argue that even though Baba maintains the national myth of the American dream and embodies the images of masculine power, his loss of power in the US is due to the ethnocultural boundary which encircles American identity as it is constructed in the novel. Baba does not identify as an American but maintains his identity as Afghan. Amir reflects on this identification in relation to the refusal of food stamps: "And that was how Baba ended those humiliating food stamp moments at the cash register and alleviated one of his greatest fears: that an Afghan would see him buying food with charity money. Baba walked out of the welfare office like a man cured of a tumor" (114). Ironically, his loss of power in America is symbolised through physical deterioration and ultimately through being diagnosed with cancer. At Amir's high school graduation in California – one of the symbols of Amir approaching his own American dream – he recounts: "Baba's beard was graying, his hair thinning at the temples, and hadn't he been taller in Kabul?" (114). This physical decline reflects his loss of power within America. Even while living in California, his main frame of reference in thinking about his

identity is still Afghanistan, and he is unable to integrate into American society with the same status he once held.

In contrast to Baba's difficulty with integration and his loss of power, Amir flourishes in his new life. Anis Shivani holds that "Hosseini is avoiding some of the harshest truths. Amir's transformation into an enviable writer in America seems too easily earned, since it comes with his marriage to an angelic wife, the daughter of an exiled Afghan general" (33).<sup>16</sup> The troubled relationship which Amir and Baba shared in Afghanistan during Amir's childhood also becomes one of mutual respect and closeness in America. I argue that the father and son can finally connect because there is a shift in the relationship of power between the two characters, where Amir's skills as a writer become valuable and where Baba no longer has the ability to use his family name to gain success. Since Baba is no longer the incarnation of the ideals of masculinity through money and influence, Amir no longer feels disempowered in Baba's once-overwhelming masculine presence. Amir is able to adopt this position in America since he subscribes to the requisites of integration into American society: he pursues studies in English at University when his father refuses to take lessons in the language, and he accepts the mores of American society where his father protests and tries to hold on to aspects of Afghan life. This can be seen in Baba's violent conflict with shop owners who demand an ID from him before allowing him to use a check as payment. Amir reflects:

I wanted to tell them that, in Kabul, we snapped a tree branch and used it as a credit card. Hassan and I would take the wooden stick to the bread maker. He'd carve notches on our stick with his knife, one notch for each loaf of *naan* he'd pull for us from the *tandoor*'s roaring flames. At the end of the month, my father paid him for the number of notches on the stick. That was it. No questions. No ID. (112)

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<sup>16</sup> Janette Edwards notes how the parallels between author and character seem to position Hosseini himself as an outsider to Afghan identity. Through interviews with Afghan-Americans, Edwards exposes the view of Hosseini as a "guy in America [...] whose voice [...] is inauthentic and whose motives are suspect" (5). Edwards explains that "Hosseini was a diplomat's child who had, in all likelihood, spent most of his life outside of Afghanistan before emigrating to the United States. His early separation from his homeland and the fact of his reckless devising of characters and situations that would certainly pit neighbor against neighbor back in Afghanistan [demonstrate that he did not] really know the fabric of the society [...] about which he wrote" (5). The contestation of authorial power based on the accusation of an inauthentic Afghan identity speaks to the broader tensions exposed in this argument. Edwards quotes Hosseini's response to criticisms of *The Kite Runner*: "I guess it's my Western sensibility, now that I've lived here for so long, that I feel like these are the things we should talk about" (qtd. in Edwards 8).



However, instead of telling the shop owners this, Amir simply apologises and offers to pay for the damages which his father has caused to their shop during his rage at the request for identification.

Baba's difficulty with adjusting to American life is echoed by Amir's father-in-law, General Taheri, who is another symbol of masculine power through his link to wealth and the military. Amir explains: "I learned that [General Taheri] had kept his family on welfare and had never held a job in the U.S., preferring to cash government-issued checks than degrading himself with work unsuitable for a man of his stature" (154). Both Baba and General Taheri base their lives in America on memories of their past power in Afghanistan, and are thus unable to adjust to their new positions. Amir explains: "The general believed that, sooner or later, Afghanistan would be freed, the monarchy restored, and his services would once again be called upon. So every day, he donned his gray suit, wound his pocket watch, and waited" (154).

One of the most striking differences between *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* and *The Kite Runner* is how the latter shows almost no consciousness of the way in which Afghanistan and the expatriate characters are viewed within the American society which they are surrounded by. For the characters in *The Kite Runner* and even for Amir, who associates strongly with America, the Afghan subculture becomes the main point of identification. Interactions with non-Afghan Americans are scarce throughout the novel, highlighting a sense of exclusion for this Afghan community from broader American society and constructing them as outsiders. Amir's identification as American is possible because he achieves his American dream and he appropriates the main symbol of power, economic success. He does not seem to experience or acknowledge ethnocultural boundaries to this identification primarily since he only represents the Afghan subculture. Indeed, by representing the poverty of this group and their identification solely based on their past in Afghanistan, Amir is able to strengthen his own identity as American by contrast, since he achieves wealth and feels no attachment to Afghanistan when he returns there. *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*, however, portrays Changez as constantly aware of his position as an outsider, even when he appropriates this same symbol of power and enacts what he views as American economic fundamentalism.

The contrast between the ways in which the two characters identify with America can be shown in their reactions to and experiences around the 9/11 attacks. Hartnell explains that “the weeks after September 11 saw a sharp rise in attacks not just on Arab Americans but on a range of ethnic groups who might be perceived as ‘Muslims’ by hostile Americans wanting to display their ostensible patriotism” (338). This rise in hostility is demonstrated when a man at a company which Changez assesses shouts at him: “Fucking Arab” (134), and Changez reflects: “I am not, of course, an Arab” (134). Changez is represented within the frame of the American enemy based on his appearance, and his position as outsider is highlighted. He experiences 9/11 as a final crumbling of his own American dream, and the greatest barrier to his inclusion into American society. By contrast, Amir sees it as a way for his Afghan identity to be more acknowledged within American society, referring to the aftermath of increased American nationalism and interest in Afghanistan in a seemingly positive light, highlighting the War on Terror as a campaign against the Taliban which becomes his personal enemy, and not referring to any hostility towards Arab Americans or Muslims after the attacks (316). The position of the attacks within each narrative also plays an important role in understanding how identity is constructed around the event. In the *Kite Runner* the attacks are mentioned near the end of the novel, as a postscript to the main narrative, once Amir’s identity as American and anti-terrorist is already solidified. In *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* the attacks occur nearly halfway through the novel, when Changez is on a trip to Manila, and act as a catalyst for the unravelling of his identification with America.

Changez’s reaction to images of the attacks surprises him, as he explains that he was initially pleased. He evokes the idea of fiction when describing the moment he first sees the news of the attacks on television: “I turned on the television and saw what at first I took to be a film. But as I continued to watch, I realized that it was not fiction but news. I stared as one – and then the other – of the twin towers of New York’s World Trade Center collapsed” (83). He continues this comparison with fiction in order to justify his initial reaction of apathy to the horror of the attacks:

But at that moment, my thoughts were not with the *victims* of the attack – death on television moves me most when it is fictitious and happens to characters with whom I have built up relationships over

multiple episodes – no, I was caught up in the *symbolism* of it all, the fact that someone had so visibly brought America to her knees. (83)

The element of fiction is significant here since Changez variously refers to the mythology which fortifies American identity, myths which become even more forceful after 9/11. He continues: “And then I *smiled*. Yes, despicable as it may sound, my initial reaction was to be remarkably pleased” (83). The source of his pleasure is the collapse of symbols of what he sees as causing his exclusion, the economic fundamentalism which he constantly refers to, as Leach holds, “[t]he attack on the World Trade Center can [...] be seen as an attack [...] on the symbols of capitalism” (90). Since America becomes even less permeable and accommodating for Changez after the attacks, it is clear that he has already begun to identify strongly with Pakistani identity and to distance himself from America. Given that he views these two aspects of his identity as conflicting, he sees the attack on America as an attack on an enemy and as the reclaiming of power in terms of his identification with a “Third World sensibility” (77).

He explains this smile to the American man whom he narrates his tale to by again referring to representations of violence, connecting pride in national identity to the destruction of the other: “[S]urely you cannot be completely innocent of such feelings yourself. Do you feel no joy at the video clips – so prevalent these days – of American munitions laying waste the structures of your enemies?” (84). Changez follows this by referring to the conflict in his identity, where he identifies as both an American and as an enemy to America: “But you are at war, you say? Yes, you have a point. I was not at war with America. Far from it: I was the product of an American university; I was earning a lucrative American salary; I was infatuated with an American woman” (84). Changez is conscious of himself as an outsider to a society he simultaneously is connected to, where he relishes the terrorist attacks while still considering his reaction to be “despicable” (83). Changez’s “war” with America which leads to his reaction of pleasure is an internal war. He struggles with the sense that he is a traitor to his Pakistani identity through enacting American fundamentalism as he defines it.

*The Kite Runner* offers a very different reaction to the 9/11 attacks. While Changez lives in the shadow of the attacks for most of his narrative, Amir refers to the events in passing and they do not seem to greatly affect his identity. The attacks take place after he has rescued Hassan’s

son Sohrab from Afghanistan where he was being held captive by Assef, the same person who as a child had raped Hassan and who had since become a member of the Taliban. Sohrab, afflicted with the trauma of his past in Afghanistan, refuses to speak once he is adopted by Amir and Soraya in America, and as they begin to form a family in America, the attacks occur:

While Sohrab was silent, the world was not. One Tuesday morning last September, the Twin Towers came crumbling down and, overnight, the world changed. The American flag suddenly appeared everywhere, on the antennae of yellow cabs weaving around traffic, on the lapels of pedestrians walking the sidewalks in a steady stream, even on the grimy caps of San Francisco's panhandlers sitting beneath the awnings of small art galleries and open-fronted shops. One day I passed Edith, the homeless woman who plays the accordion every day on the corner of Sutter and Stockton, and spotted an American flag sticking on the accordion case at her feet. (316)

The rise of American nationalism symbolised by the omnipresence of the national flag seems to have little effect on Amir's identity, and he does not mention any change in the way he, an Afghan-American man, is represented in post-9/11 America. Steven Salaita holds that "no single event shaped the destiny of Arab Americans more than 9/11" (151). For Amir, this shift does not form part of his narrative. In this way, at least in his own consciousness, Amir has completely become a part of American society, and he links his inclusion into America with the increased visibility of Afghanistan: "Soon after the attacks, America bombed Afghanistan, the Northern Alliance moved in, and the Taliban scurried like rats into the caves. Suddenly, people were standing in grocery store lines and talking about the cities of my childhood, Kandahar, Herat, Mazar-i-Sharif" (316). The 9/11 attacks and their aftermath also ironically allow Amir to embrace his Afghan identity, by helping to restore a hospital on the border of Afghanistan and Pakistan (317) and even adopting Islam (318), yet none of these factors impact his identification with America. After the attacks, General Taheri also returns to Afghanistan to assume the ministry position which Soraya had once mocked him for hoping to return to (317). These events all show a hopeful and positive reaction to the aftermath of the attacks, where Afghan identity seems to unproblematically flourish for the characters and they regain a sense of power. However, non-Afghan voices are excluded from this final section of the novel, and the novel seems to constitute a dialogue of identity and representation only between Afghanistan and a microcosmic Afghan-American subculture, instead of with broader American society such as in

*The Reluctant Fundamentalist*. This contrast in self-understanding between the two protagonists allows for different attitudes towards American society, the myths which constitute it, and the gatekeepers which enshrine it. Importantly it also greatly affects the way in which the figure of the terrorist is represented in each novel, and how each character identifies with this figure which is seen as the enemy of the place they inhabit.

## 2.2 Representing the Terrorist

The contrasting ways in which the two protagonists view their position in America allows for two very different ideas about terrorism to exist within their respective narratives. Leach explains that the construction of the outsider, in this case the terrorist, solidifies national identity: “that very being of a nation is defined by the threat to its Enjoyment.<sup>17</sup> If the other is a threat to the collective self, the potential threat to the Enjoyment of the collective is effectively that which articulates and constitutes the other – the way that the other organizes its own perverse Enjoyment” (88).<sup>18</sup> In this light, the way in which each character identifies with America is linked to the construction of the terrorist figure. Changez is represented as a terrorist by American media, and he criticises the American conception of terrorism inherent to the War on Terror by suggesting that America’s foreign involvement might also be seen as terrorism (202-3). These dynamics lead him to return to Lahore at the end of the novel, grow a beard, and embrace his Pakistani identity. By contrast, Amir identifies with America and distances himself from his native country Afghanistan. The terrorist figure in Amir’s narrative is concentrated in

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<sup>17</sup> Leach expounds on the Lacanian concept of Enjoyment which he refers to, exposing how it relates to the realms of devotion and national myth: “Lacanian psychoanalytic theory would hold that national identity is based on more than just symbolic identification. National identity is borne of a relationship to a Thing – toward an incarnation of Enjoyment, which is structured through fantasy. In common everyday terms this Thing might be understood as a ‘way of life,’ a somewhat mysterious practice that remains accessible only to a certain group, and consequently is always under threat from those that do not belong to that group, and who do not subscribe to the same ‘way of thinking.’ It may be circumscribed by the various rituals and practices that hold that community together. It emerges out of a common commitment to a way of life, and therefore shares certain properties with religion itself, in that its only real base is a belief in or commitment to certain shared values that are themselves no more than beliefs. Like religion, national identity amounts to a belief in a belief” (83).

<sup>18</sup> Turi Munthe echoes this by referring to identity creation in the face of an “evil” other, explaining that “to identify the terrorism problem as a problem with Islam is useful to western culture, allowing it to pitch ‘evil’ external enemies as the ‘other’ to define itself against” (Munthe 2).

Assef, who seems to be inherently evil. Assef is the leader of the Taliban group responsible for kidnapping Sohrab, and is the same person who assaults and rapes Sohrab's father Hassan as a child. He becomes an amalgamation of destructive and hateful behaviour in the novel: he is a paedophile, drug addict (241), fundamentalist, self-proclaimed admirer of Hitler (35), and member of the Taliban. Edward W. Said's notes that persistent "extremely negative images [of Arabs and Islam]: the stereotypes of lustful, vengeful, violent, irrational, fanatical people" (*Roadmap* 114) became prevalent after 9/11, a conception which applies to the hyperbolised terrorist figure of Assef. He becomes associated with Amir's dismal and seemingly unredeemable view of modern-day Afghanistan. Amir describes Assef as a child by saying:

His word was law, and if you needed a little legal education, then those brass knuckles were just the right teaching tool. I saw him use those knuckles once on a kid from the Karteh-Char district. I will never forget how Assef's blue eyes glinted with a light not entirely sane and how he grinned, how he *grinned*, as he pummeled that poor kid unconscious. [...] Years later, I learned an English word for the creature that Assef was, a word for which a good Farsi equivalent does not exist: "sociopath." (36) (Emphasis in original).

Assef also holds beliefs of Afghan racial purity, a notable contrast with Amir's perception of America as accommodating. As a child Assef refers to Hassan, who is of the minority Hazara ethnic group, as being racially impure: "Afghanistan is the land of Pashtuns. It always has been, always will be. We are the true Afghans, the pure Afghans, not this Flat-Nose here. His people pollute our homeland, our *watan*. They dirty our blood" (35). Assef's discrimination is however ironic since he himself is half-German and has blond hair and blue eyes (35). As a member of the Taliban, Assef wears a turban and dark sunglasses which serve to disguise these markers of his own difference, problematising the ethnocultural boundaries of Afghan identity which he tries to maintain. Amir's construction of the terrorist figure, embodied by Assef, allows him to position the barrier to his identification with Afghanistan through the racism, fundamentalism and violence of the Taliban.

Assef is shown to have power over national identity through the act of terrorism, referring to this as "[p]ublic justice" (242). He links the act of terrorism metaphorically to the creation of fiction, demonstrating a form of narrative power over identity: "Public justice is the greatest kind of show, my brother. Drama. Suspense. And, best of all, education en masse" (242). He later

demonstrates this narrative power when he repositions the massacre of Hazara people in Mazar-i-Sharif in positive terms, explaining to Amir: “You don’t know the meaning of the word ‘liberating’ until you’ve done that, stood in a roomful of targets, let the bullets fly, free of guilt and remorse, knowing you are virtuous, good, and decent. Knowing you’re doing God’s work. It’s breathtaking” (242). Amir retorts: “In the west, they have an expression for that [...] They call it ethnic cleansing” (249). Unaware of the negative connotations to the phrase, Assef adopts it positively: “Ethnic cleansing. I like it. I like the sound of it” (249). Assef is afforded an additional form of power, where he can reposition violence within positive labels. He also demonstrates a consciousness of the way in which the violence forms a narrative itself, a form of fiction which he uses to enforce his strictures onto the Afghan population as a “show” (242).

The terrorist figure’s own narrative power is secondary to the power of media in both novels. Media reports are demonstrated as powerful platforms for representing these figures, and the influence of terror is shown to be spread through media. Amir recounts his first encounter with the Taliban when he returns to Afghanistan in terms of previous exposure through the media. His immediate reaction is the surfacing of his preconceived terror: “That was the first time I saw the Taliban. I’d seen them on TV, on the Internet, on the cover of magazines, and in newspapers. But here I was now, less than fifty feet from them, telling myself that the sudden taste in my mouth wasn’t unadulterated, naked fear. Telling myself my flesh hadn’t suddenly shrunk against my bones and my heart wasn’t battering” (216). The media image of the terrorist prefigures the reality, and informs Amir’s reaction. Locating the terrorist as gaining power primarily through representation and image also places the figure outside of reality, increasing the sense of otherness and constructing the figure as either nonhuman or superhuman. The terrorist becomes either, as Noam Chomsky holds, “the symbol of ultimate evil” (34), or as Assef muses, a figure that is mystical and “doing God’s work” (242). This representation as nonhuman is echoed when Amir first encounters Assef at a public execution during a heavily regulated soccer game, and initially does not recognise his childhood nemesis:

Then a tall, broad-shouldered man stepped out of the pickup truck. The sight of him drew cheers from a few spectators. This time, [in contrast to an incident during the soccer match,] no one was struck with a whip for cheering too loudly. The tall man’s sparkling white garment glimmered in the afternoon sun. The hem of his loose shirt fluttered in the breeze, his arms spread like those of Jesus on

the cross. He greeted the crowd by turning slowly in a full circle. When he faced our section, I saw he was wearing dark round sunglasses like the ones John Lennon wore. (236)

The primacy of image is shown in how Assef is linked to a religious figure and a popular musical figure, and he is presented in a context which evokes many of the symbols of masculine power, namely sport, religion and violence. Even though the terrorist becomes dehumanised, he is presented as hypermasculine and as possessing the power to narrate his own understanding of violence. In a novel like *The Kite Runner*, where the terrorist figure represents the fissure between Amir and Afghanistan as well as the enemy of his new American home in the impending War on Terror, this essentialised and nonhuman view of the terrorist figure allows Amir to construct himself against a simplified other. In turn, he is able to find redemption when he can finally defeat this symbol of evil and assert his own masculine power through a battle with Assef. The terrorist figure thus represents a barrier to a stable national identity for Amir, a constant embodiment of his troubled past in Afghanistan. The significance of this role is demonstrated by the fact that Assef is the perpetrator of the act which leads to Amir's childhood shame: the rape of Hassan. By confronting Assef with violence, Amir is able to dispel the locus of this ambivalence, as well as forging his link with American identity.

The conflict between Assef and Amir is mediated by the paternal power which Baba embodies. Baba becomes a protective force from the evils of Assef, as Amir explains: "It [...] occurred to me how lucky I was to have Baba as my father, the sole reason, I believe, Assef had mostly refrained from harassing me too much" (36-7). Amir subtly suggests that the reason that Baba is able to protect him is due to his economic power, the ultimate symbol of masculinity in both novels. Only after Baba's death is Amir required to battle Assef in order to assert his own masculinity. Additionally, Amir, who struggles to conceive a child with his wife Soraya, is finally able to become a father figure by adopting Sohrab once he defeats Assef.

The hypermasculine figures of Baba and Assef are notably linked to power through the image of sport. This image is variously evoked to highlight the ways in which these characters enact power. Amir recounts when he witnesses Assef stone a man to death at the soccer match: "The Talib [Assef], looking absurdly like a baseball pitcher on the mound, hurled the stone at the blindfolded man in the hole" (237). As children, Assef invites Amir to a game of volleyball in



Baba's presence. When he refuses Assef's invitation, Amir notices Baba's reaction: "I saw the light wink out of Baba's eyes and an uncomfortable silence followed. 'Sorry, Assef jan,' Baba said, shrugging. That stung, his apologizing for me" (84). The image of sport is linked to the enactment of national identity, and has formed part of post-9/11 patriotic discourses, as Leach notes: "The recent chants of 'USA, USA' from the debris of Ground Zero in New York – only too reminiscent of the collective chants at a basketball game – reveal how the logic of nationalism follows closely the logic of sport. A team is forged around competition. A nation comes together under threat" (89). The demonstration of national identity through competition and sport becomes significant for Amir, who needs to appropriate sport in order to foster a bond to Baba and later to Sohrab. As fatherhood becomes representative of the nation, the engagement with sons through sport symbolises the internalisation of national identity. By engaging Sohrab in kite-fighting at the end of the novel (323), Amir is able to initiate him into American society and reweave an engagement with Afghan identity outside of Afghanistan through this traditional sport. Similarly, Amir is only able to gain Baba's approval once he succeeds at the sport of kite-fighting. Thus, although hyperbolised masculinity defines the terrorist in the novel, it also defines patriotism and power as demonstrated through Baba, who is the protector from the violence of the terrorist. These masculine images need to be appropriated by Amir before he can defeat Assef and protect Sohrab.

In addition to being both nonhuman and hypermasculine, the terrorist figure is also shown to have the power to suppress the humanity and masculinity of others, as Rahim Khan, one of Baba's friends who Amir visits in Pakistan, comments: "[The Taliban] don't let you be human" (173). Rahim Khan refers to freedom and safety in this regard, and positions the terrorist as a dehumanising power for limiting these aspects. The terrorist also demonstrates the power of emasculation, enacted through a discourse of sexuality. Amir recounts a comment which Assef makes to him as a child: "'Good morning, *kunis!*' Assef exclaimed, waving. 'Fag,' that was another of his favorite insults" (36). By using the accusation of homosexuality against Amir as an insult, Assef places Amir outside of the model of a "relationship between (hetero)sexuality, normality [and] the nation" (Puar & Rai 124), and uses the comment as a way of emphasising his own hyperbolised masculinity and disempowering Amir. This domination through sexual

discourses can also be seen in the rape of Hassan and eventually the sexual abuse of Sohrab.<sup>19</sup> Janette Edwards explains why the film version of *The Kite Runner* created tension around the depiction of Hassan's rape, where the point of discomfort "is not the celluloid rape of a male child. It is the vision, celluloid or otherwise, of sexual violence against a member of one ethnic group – in this case, the Hazara, who are mostly Shi'a Muslims – by his historical oppressor, namely, a Shunni Pahstun" (4). By performing sexual violence against Hassan, Assef also demonstrates his cultural domination.

These images of sport, violence and sexuality construct the terrorist figure as possessing masculine and narrative power. He is able to be held at bay by the paternal figure who reflects these same images of power, in the form of Baba and later America. Amir acts as an extension of these paternal figures when he rescues and adopts Sohrab and battles Assef, fulfilling his own masculinity and cementing his national identity. The dehumanisation of the terrorist figure allows this figure to seamlessly inhabit Chomsky's conception of the symbol of ultimate evil and act as a point of identification for Amir as an essentialised other.

By contrast, *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* presents a humanised character and indeed the narrating protagonist of the novel, Changez, as a terrorist figure from the perspective of America. Initially at least, Changez's "terrorism" is not associated with violence but with his public representation of American capitalist fundamentalism and through his protests against American foreign policy, although there are hints that Changez might have turned to violence by the end of the novel. He expands on some of his criticisms:

America was engaged only in posturing. As a society, you were unwilling to reflect upon the shared pain that united you with those who attacked you. You retreated into myths of your own difference, assumptions of your own superiority. And you acted out these beliefs on the stage of the world, so that the entire planet was rocked by the repercussions of your tantrums, not least my family, now facing war thousands of miles away. Such an America had to be stopped in the interest not only of the rest of humanity, but also in your own. I resolved to do so, as best I could. (190)

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<sup>19</sup> Puar and Rai note how these images of sexually deviant terrorist figures appeared frequently after 9/11, noting that "queerness as sexual deviancy is tied to the monstrous figure of the terrorist as a way to otherize [sic] and quarantine subjects classified as 'terrorists'" (126).

This resolution is what ultimately positions Changez within the frame of terrorism. Similar to his deconstruction of the concept of fundamentalism, Changez repositions concepts and unsettles the distinction between terrorism and counterterrorism in the US-led War on Terror. He explains:

A common strand appeared to unite these conflicts, and that was the advancement of a small coterie's concept of American interests in the guise of the fight against terrorism, which was defined to refer only to the organized and politically motivated killing of civilians by killers *not* wearing the uniforms of soldiers. I recognized that if this was to be the single most important priority of our species, then the lives of those of us who lived in lands in which such killers also lived had no meaning except as collateral damage. This, I reasoned, was why America felt justified in bringing so many deaths to Afghanistan and Iraq, and why America felt justified in risking so many more deaths by tacitly using India to pressure Pakistan. (202-3) (Emphasis in original).

By unsettling the boundaries of the definition of terrorism and by using the concept of fundamentalism against America, Changez demonstrates a retaliation against his own classification as a terrorist. It is clear that Changez represents a shift from the simplistic view of the terrorist figure. His engagement with American society and his eventual disillusionment with what he sees as American fundamentalism cause him to voice his disagreements with American society publically. When he eventually leaves New York and resettles in Lahore, Changez refers to an element of terrorism which is echoed in *The Kite Runner*, namely the ability of the media to represent and prefigure the reality of the terrorist. Changez's demonstrations are framed by the media to construct him as an enemy to America:

I had in the meanwhile gotten a job as a university lecturer, and I made it my mission on campus to advocate a disengagement from your country by mine [...] it was not difficult to persuade [students] of the merits of participating in demonstrations for greater independence in Pakistan's domestic and international affairs, demonstrations that the foreign press would later, when our gatherings grew to newsworthy size, come to label anti-American. (203)

He expands on the power of the media in framing terrorism when he explains: "When the international television news networks came to our campus, I stated to them [...] that no country inflicts death so readily upon the inhabitants of other countries, frightens so many people so far away, as America. I was perhaps more forceful on this topic than I intended" (207). It becomes

clear that Changez positions America as inhabiting the definition of terrorism. However, he becomes associated with terrorism himself through media:

[M]y brief interview appeared to resonate: it was replayed for days, and even now an excerpt of it can be seen in the occasional war-on-terror montage. Such was its impact that I was warned by my comrades that America might react to my admittedly intemperate remarks by sending an emissary to intimidate me or worse. (208)

This “emissary” (208) is suggested to be the very man to whom Changez narrates his story. The novel unsettles the simplistic definition of terrorism by presenting two different incarnations of “terrorism” in Changez and America.

The figure of the terrorist becomes an important point of identity construction around America in peri-9/11 discourse, and also has implications for how America is represented in the novels. The contrasting representations of American society in one novel as a fundamentalist terrorist force, and in the other as a place of salvation and a route to redemption through anti-terrorism, illuminates the different reactions to the power associated with America by these characters.

### **2.3 Myth and American Identity**

One of the most important constructions in these two novels about outsiders is the “inside” itself, in this case America. Schildkraut, in a discussion of American national identity, explains that “[c]itizenship, like any other group identity, entails distinguishing group members from non-members” (515), and says that this takes place at least in part through an ethnocultural lens, where “the idea that American identity is defined by white Protestantism rooted in Northern European heritage and ancestry [...] continues to play a powerful role in shaping what people think of as ‘American’ ” (514). She continues to explain how Middle Eastern descent could be a further barrier to inclusion into this ethnocultural view of national identity, since “[t]he added component of a horrific domestic attack carried out by people of Middle Eastern descent

introduces a pervasive sense of threat that buttresses this ethnocultural tendency even more” (Schildkraut 515).

Both novels represent American society as encircled by power and wealth and highlight its opposition to what it defines as terrorism, similar to Baudrillard’s conception of the consumer society which “sees itself as an encircled Jerusalem, rich and threatened. That is its ideology” (*Consumer Society* 36). This conception of American power, what Changez refers to in terms of a “castle” (90) or “temple” (180), is maintained in both novels through narrative. For Amir this narrative is shown through patriotism and a belief in the American dream, and for Changez it is represented as fundamentalism and myth. The novels differ in their attitudes towards how America is narrated, as in many respects Changez criticises these national myths and Amir seems to revere them. America is also much more permeable and accepting for Amir than for Changez, fulfilling a protective and redemptive function for the former and characterised as exclusionary and oppressive by the latter.

Amir is able to see America as a natural extension of his own identity and as accepting of difference, and I argue this is because Amir already lives the “American dream” in Afghanistan. He also sees money and power, represented by his businessman father, as factors which can protect him from the evil represented by Assef, a protective role which America later fills for him through the same associations with wealth and power. Baba’s insistence on and belief in hard work and his success at business in Afghanistan seem to place him at ease with American capitalism and class. Amir also recounts that “Baba loved the *idea* of America” (109) (emphasis in original), and Baba demonstrates this love through another reference to nationality, masculinity and dominance, saying to Amir: “ ‘There are only three real men in this world, Amir,’ [...] He’d count them off on his fingers: America the brash savior, Britain, and Israel. ‘The rest of them –’ he used to wave his hand and make a *phht* sound ‘–they’re like gossiping women’ ” (109). Baba’s account of Israel as one of the “real men” (109) also has many implications for the constructions of identity when he makes a rare reference to the Palestinian conflict in the novel. Amir explains that “[t]he bit about Israel used to draw the ire of Afghans in Fremont who accused him of being pro-Jewish and, de facto, anti-Islam” (109), and Baba responds to criticisms of Israeli dominance by saying: “Then do something about it! Take action. You’re Arabs, help the Palestinians, then!” (109). Salaita seems to account for the enraged

reactions of the Afghans in Fremont to Baba's comments by explaining that "[n]othing has been of more concern to Arab Americans since 1967 than the Israeli-Palestinian conflict [...] American support for Israel has long enraged Arab Americans (and others), thereby providing Arab Americans with a [...] political purpose" (150). By subverting this presumed alliance, Baba distances himself from an Arab identity and asserts his alignment with America and with power, a position which Amir seemingly emulates.

Baba's masculine ideals and alliance with America are eventually personified by Ronald Reagan. Amir recounts Baba's reaction to Reagan's politics:

What America and the world needed was a hard man. A man to be reckoned with, someone who took action instead of wringing his hands. That someone came in the form of Ronald Reagan. And when Reagan went on TV and called the *Shorawi* [Russians] 'the Evil Empire,' Baba went out and bought a picture of the grinning president giving a thumbs up. He framed the picture and hung it in our hallway. (110)

The extract evinces the simplistic representation of political enemies, calling Russia "the Evil Empire" (110), a tactic which is echoed in the essentialism employed in representing Assef. Through the shared enemy of Russia as the invader of his home, Afghanistan, the link between Baba and America is drawn, and violence against this enemy becomes a necessary prerequisite for fulfilling masculinity. Baba demonstrates this when he discovers that a doctor he visits is of Russian heritage, commenting: "I'll break his arm if he tries to touch me" (135). Later, America would also come to share the enemy of the Taliban, and when Amir battles Assef he enacts his American identity through violence against this mutual enemy.

Amir's association with America is evident even as a child in Afghanistan. Ruth Caillouet points out that he lives an American lifestyle as he "goes to movies, drinks Coca-Cola, rides in his father's Ford Mustang [...] His father drinks alcohol [...They watch movies starring] John Wayne and Clint Eastwood [...] and play games of American children, building snowmen and pretending to be cowboys" (31). Amir demonstrates his Americanised lifestyle when he reflects on a merchant who he encounters as a child: "His glance lingered admiringly on my leather coat and my jeans – *cowboy pants*, we used to call them. In Afghanistan, owning anything American, especially if it wasn't second-hand, was a sign of wealth" (61). Amir's early alignment with

America is also shown through a comment by a driver once he returns to Afghanistan to rescue Sohrab, where the reference to his home being “gated” (214) points to the fortress-like nature of his early life and the protective function of his wealth:

‘Let me imagine, Agha sahib. You probably lived in a big two- or three-story house, with a nice backyard that your gardener filled with flowers and fruit trees. All gated, of course. Your father drove an American car. You had servants, probably Hazaras. Your parents hired workers to decorate the house for the fancy *mehmanis* they threw, so their friends would come over to drink and boast about their travels to Europe or America. And I would bet my first son’s eyes that this is the first time you’ve ever worn a *pakol*.’ [...] [The driver] pointed to an old man dressed in ragged clothes trudging down a dirt path, a large burlap pack filled with scrub grass tied to his back. ‘That’s the real Afghanistan, Agha sahib. That’s the Afghanistan I know. You? You’ve *always* been a tourist here, you just didn’t know it’. (214-5) (Emphasis in original).

By associating the “real Afghanistan” with an image of poverty and positioning Amir as a “tourist” (215), Amir is positioned as an outsider to Afghanistan because of his wealth. By living in a version of the exclusive American fortress within Afghanistan, Amir is able to easily assimilate into America and represents American society with seemingly no gatekeepers and no ethnocultural discrimination. Amir later serves to propagate a positive representation of America to his Afghan driver Farid, as he explains:

I told him that in America you could step into a grocery store and buy any of fifteen or twenty different types of cereal. The lamb was always fresh and the milk always cold, the fruit plentiful and the water clear. Every home had a TV, and every TV a remote, and you could get a satellite dish if you wanted. Receive over five hundred channels. (232)

Amir’s idealised version of American life is clearly constructed as a counter to the impoverishment of Afghanistan. Even when he gives glimpses of the disempowered state of the immigrant outsider in American society, he does so fleetingly and without reflection on how these examples place his mythology of America at question, such as when he briefly recounts how an “[Afghan] surgeon [...] was now running a hot dog stand in Hayward” (319), and how Baba’s unremitting belief in the American dream and his reliance on hard work do not allow him to reach the economic power which he once held in Afghanistan.

In contrast to the embracing space which America becomes for Amir, Afghanistan becomes ever more distant and exclusionary, a place which Amir no longer sees as home. When he returns to Afghanistan to rescue Sohrab, he mentions that he needs to wear the traditional “garment and *pakol*” (202), and he explains: “[I]ronically, I’d never worn either when I’d actually lived in Afghanistan” (202), and he also needs to wear “perhaps the most important item: an artificial beard, black and chest length, *Shari’a*-friendly – or at least the Taliban version of *Shari’a*” (202). By disapprovingly referring to the artificial beard and clothing, Amir points to what he sees as the inauthentic nature of these displays of belonging, and how they are representations of a homogenous Afghan identity which he objects to. Indeed, his comments demonstrate reluctance towards these displays of belonging, and it becomes clear that his reluctance is linked to the fact that he no longer feels like he belongs in Afghanistan. He says to his driver Farid, “I feel like a tourist in my own country” (203). As with his discussion of the Taliban, he relegates Afghanistan to the realm of representation and removes it from reality: “I looked westward and marveled that, somewhere over those mountains, Kabul still existed. It really existed, not just an old memory, or as the heading of an AP story on page 15 of the *San Francisco Chronicle*” (211). Afghanistan, Amir implies, has become a narrative to him, relayed in American media.

Amir also links Afghanistan to the ethnocultural barrier which he earlier associated with the Taliban. He tells Farid of his plan to rescue Sohrab, to which Farid replies: “You came all the way from America for... a Shi’a?” (233). This reference to ethnic discrimination in the novel seems to highlight the exclusionary and divided nature of Amir’s version of Afghanistan as opposed to his idea of an inclusive and permeable America. He extends this comment from Farid as characterising the nature of Afghanistan: “[Farid’s comment] killed all the laughter in me [...] maybe what people said about Afghanistan was true. Maybe it *was* a hopeless place” (233) (Emphasis in original). Amir reinforces his dystopian image of Afghanistan in the light of this ethnic divide. Since he does not directly refer to ethnic tensions in America, this comment fuels his aversion for Afghanistan and his alignment with his new home.

However, Amir’s simplistic identification with America is complicated by the existence of the Afghan subculture in Fremont, California. The representation of the subculture unsettles Amir’s ease at existing within American society. Despite his ability to live the American dream, this subculture serves to illustrate that he is not easily integrated into the broader American



society, but needs to be part of a reproduced version of Afghanistan in order to feel a sense of belonging. The simplistic mythology of America as a place of freedom and plenty which Amir presents is also destabilised by the fact that most of the Afghan expatriates – including the masculine ideal personified through Baba – do not achieve this same American dream and need to sell goods at a flea market in Fremont. Amir describes the flea market as consisting of “[Afghan] mechanics and tailors selling hand-me-down wool coats and scraped bicycle helmets, alongside former ambassadors, out-of-work surgeons, and university professors” (120), demonstrating their disempowered position within American society. In this way the novel complicates Amir’s simplistic view of America. Even though the dominant narrative is still one of an inclusive and idealised America, this mythology is unsettled by the existence of this subculture.

Changez constructs a representation of American which is much less permeable, and he is critical of the mythology which encircles it. He encounters Pakistani Americans but does not limit his narrative to interactions with this subgroup. His critical stance towards America and the broader interactions with American society is due, I argue, to his desire for full integration while embracing his Pakistani heritage, which the novel presents as impossible for him to achieve especially in post-9/11 America. Hartnell explains that “while the novel everywhere points to an America that gestures back to old world colonialism and the global division that are its legacy, [Changez] apparently yearns for an ‘other’ America; one that, like Erica, occupies the ‘otherworldly’ space” (345). This “otherworldly” (345) space is the openness to engage with the outsider, a quality which Changez’s representation of America is shown to lack. This is demonstrated when Changez encounters one of the symbolic American gatekeepers, an immigration officer, when he returns to New York after a business trip to the Philippines:

When we arrived, I was separated from my team at immigration. They joined the queue for American citizens; I joined the one for foreigners. The officer who inspected my passport was a solidly built woman with a pistol at her hip and a mastery of English inferior to mine; I attempted to disarm her with a smile. ‘What is the purpose of your trip to the United States?’ she asked me. ‘I live here,’ I replied. ‘That is *not* what I asked you, sir,’ she said. ‘What is the purpose of your trip to the United States?’ (86). (Emphasis in original).

In the post-9/11 world, Changez becomes even more aware of his position as an outsider. Later, after a visit to his parents in Pakistan, Changez decides to grow a beard despite “the difficulties it could well present [...] at immigration” (147). He explains: “It was, perhaps, a form of protest on my part, a symbol of my identity, or perhaps I sought to remind myself of the reality I had just left behind; I do not now recall my precise motivations” (147-8).

Changez points to two important contrasts with *The Kite Runner* in this discussion. By using the word “reality” (148) to refer to Pakistan, Changez forges a distinction from the fiction he associates with America, whereas in Amir’s recounting, America is represented as the reality which possesses narrative power over a fictionalised Afghanistan. The symbol of the beard as leading to exclusion also contrasts with *The Kite Runner*, shown in Amir having to wear a fake beard to gain inclusion into Afghanistan (202), and when he first sees the Taliban he represents the beard as a symbol of sameness: “A handful of stern-faced young men sat on their haunches in the cab, Kalashnikovs slung on their shoulders. They all wore beards and black turbans” (216-7). By contrast, Changez sees his beard as a symbol of difference and individuality in relation to his co-workers at Underwood Samson: “I know only that I did not wish to blend in with the army of clean-shaven youngsters who were my co-workers” (148). The relationship of each character to this symbol demonstrates their association with national identity, for Changez as an assertion of his Pakistani “reality” (148), and for Amir as the “artificial” (202) expression of Afghan identity. Hartnell explains that the symbol of the beard in *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* highlights “a national culture determined to assimilate difference only as past, as history. If heritage is *not* converted to history and basically discarded, as is the case with Changez, who [...] insists on wearing a beard [...] then integration on any terms is no longer possible” (342). (Emphasis in original). America is fictional to Changez, since his sense of belonging is located in Pakistan.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Edward W. Said’s discussion of the fictional nature of geographical identities can serve to illuminate the classifications of America and Afghanistan as fictional, since it derives from narrative power to circumscribe the essentialised other: “[S]ome distinctive objects are made by the mind, and [...] these objects, while appearing to exist objectively, have only a fictional reality. A group of people living on a few acres of land will set up boundaries between their land and its immediate surroundings and the territory beyond, which they call ‘the land of the barbarians.’ In other words, this universal practice of designating in one’s mind a familiar space which is ‘ours’ and an unfamiliar space beyond ‘ours’ which is ‘theirs’ is a way of making geographical distinctions that can be entirely arbitrary. I use the word ‘arbitrary’ here because imaginative geography of the ‘our land-barbarian land’ variety does not require that the barbarians acknowledge the distinction. It is enough for ‘us’ to set up these boundaries in our own minds; ‘they’ become ‘they’ accordingly, and both their territory and their mentality are designated as different

Changez himself becomes linked to the realm of reality in contrast to the fictional nature of America when a nurse at the institution where Erica stays comments: “[Y]ou’re the one who upsets her the most. Because you’re the most real, and you make her lose balance” (133).

The artificiality which Changez associates with America is often referred to in terms of narrative and myth, and he counters these by creating myths of his own about Pakistani greatness. He comments on the nature of his own narrative to the American listener: “But surely it is the *gist* that matters; I am, after all, telling you a history, and in history, as I suspect you – an American – will agree, it is the thrust of one’s narrative that counts, not the accuracy of one’s details” (135). Early in the novel, Changez refers to the buildings at Princeton in comparison to those in his home city Lahore: “When I first arrived, I looked around me at the Gothic buildings – younger, I later learned, than many of the mosques of [Lahore], but made through acid treatments and ingenious stonemasonry to look older” (3). Later, while admiring the view from the Underwood Samson offices, he says: “supporting my feet were the achievements of the most technologically advanced civilization our species had ever known” (38), and reflects on this observation with disdain:

Often, during my stay in your country, such comparisons troubled me. In fact, they did more than trouble me: they made me resentful. Four thousand years ago, we, the people of the Indus River basin, had cities that were laid out on grids and boasted underground sewers, while the ancestors of those who would invade and colonize America were illiterate barbarians. Now our cities were largely unplanned, unsanitary affairs, and America had universities with individual endowments greater than our national budget for education. To be reminded of this vast disparity was, for me, to be ashamed. (38)

Changez is able to identify with his representation of the East as historically powerful and as inhabiting the realm of reality, and to distance himself from his representation of America as aggressive, exclusionary and fictionalised or artificial. His representation of Pakistan incorporates many of the symbols of masculine power which he also associates with America, a strategy of positively reinforcing his own identity through an association with power. He

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from ‘ours.’ [...] All kinds of suppositions, associations, and fictions appear to crowd the unfamiliar space outside one’s own” (*Orientalism* 55).

expands on the power of representation by reversing the positions of American and Pakistani power in his historical narrative:

[W]e were not always burdened by debt, dependent on foreign aid and handouts; in the stories we tell of ourselves we were not the crazed and destitute radicals you see on your television channels but rather saints and poets and – yes – conquering kings. *We* built the Royal Mosque and the Shalimar Gardens in this city, and *we* built the Lahore Fort with its mighty walls and wide ramp for our battle-elephants. And we did these things when your country was still a collection of thirteen small colonies, gnawing away at the edge of a continent. (116)

While he seems critical of the way in which America relies on myth, he acknowledges that national identity is constituted through narrative, and he seeks to challenge one representation of his identity which he sees as the American representation of “destitute radicals” which they “see on [their] television channels” (116), with a representation which allows him pride in his identity, one of “saints and poets and [...] conquering kings” (116). Changez’s distaste for the myths surrounding America is based on the fact that these myths rely on othering<sup>21</sup> an identity which he is connected with. Hartnell explains that the description of Lahore with “its decidedly bloody nature along with the ‘shadowy’ figures and places [...] underscore the fact that the novel deliberately filters the city through Orientalist stereotypes, demonstrating its status as a menace in the imagination of the western reader” (337). The various comments about the nervousness of the American listener underscores this assessment, and highlights the precariousness of Changez’s positive narrative in the face of America’s own conception of Changez in terms of terrorism and danger.

Amir and Changez contrast in their location of America within reality and fiction, and in the opposing functions of protection and exclusion which they respectively associate with it. These constructions allow for different processes of identification with the power which America embodies. The maintenance of the boundaries of America are significant, since the terrorist is meant to be excluded from these boundaries in order to fulfil both of the functions which Amir

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<sup>21</sup> Said expounds the usefulness of othering Oriental identities in the construction of hegemonic Western identities: “I myself believe that Orientalism is more particularly valuable as a sign of European-Atlantic power over the Orient than it is as a veridic [sic] discourse about the Orient” (*Orientalism* 6).

and Changez highlight. The boundaries of America are maintained through various gatekeepers and through physical limitations which the characters encounter.

## 2.4 Boundaries, Gatekeepers, Physicality and Cultural Symbols

Tolerance has been practiced for centuries in [a] paternalistic spirit. What renders it paternalistic is the one-sided nature of the declaration that a sovereign ruler or the majority culture is willing, at its own discretion, to ‘put up with’ the deviant practices of the minority. [...] This can give the impression that tolerance itself involves a kernel of intolerance, since one can only practice it within a boundary beyond which it ceases. (Habermas 22)

The boundaries of tolerance seem to exemplify Changez’s experience in America, where he experiences resistance when he grows a beard, when he encounters an immigration officer after 9/11 who questions his belonging in America (86), and when he is hatefully assaulted and referred to as an Arab (134). The post-9/11 world seems to be characterised by such boundaries<sup>22</sup> to Changez’s acceptance into American society. These boundaries present themselves in two forms, namely the outsider’s own sense of distance which is manifest in physicality and cultural symbols, and limits to entry manifest in factors which uphold American exclusivity and power, referred to in this argument as gatekeepers. The two factors are mutually influential – physicality and cultural symbols elicit stronger reactions from gatekeepers, and the reactions of gatekeepers elicit insecurity about physicality and discomfort around the symbols of culture which these outsiders embody. Baudrillard evokes the role of physicality within American society when he argues that “[t]he body is a *cultural* fact. [...] In a capitalist society, the general status of private property applies also to the body, to the way we operate socially with it and the mental representation we have of it” (*Consumer Society* 129) (Emphasis in original). Changez demonstrates the implications of identification through his body, as his failure to sexually

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<sup>22</sup> Anssi Paasi characterises the symbolic function of geographical boundaries and the socialisation of identity as defined by the understandings of those boundaries: “Boundaries penetrate the society in numerous practices and discourses through which the territory exists and achieves institutionalized meanings. Hence, it is political, economic, cultural, governmental and other practices, and the associated meanings, that make a territory and concomitantly territorialize everyday life. These elements become part of daily life through spatial socialization, the process by which people are socialized as members of territorial groups” (113).

connect with the gatekeeper Erica echoes a failure to connect with American society as a whole. Encountering these boundaries creates resentment for Changez as he realises that full integration is impossible for him.

Changez initially experiences life in America positively, and demonstrates his identification with pre-9/11 New York through the diversity of the city and the way in which he does not refer to any encounters with gatekeepers early in the novel, allowing for the fact that “moving to New York felt – so unexpectedly – like coming home” (36). He is able to identify with New York since he sees symbols of his own cultural identity embraced by the city:

[T]he fact that Urdu was spoken by taxicab drivers; the presence, only two blocks from my East Village apartment, of a samosa- and channa-serving establishment called the Pak-Punjab Deli; the coincidence of crossing Fifth Avenue during a parade and hearing, from loudspeakers mounted on the South Asian Gay and Lesbian Association float, a song to which I had danced at my cousin’s wedding. (36-7)

Changez initially sees New York as a place where he feels accepted and at home. He says: “I was, in four and a half years, never an American; I was *immediately* a New Yorker” (37) (Emphasis in original). He says of wearing a kurta on a train in New York: “It was a testament to the open-mindedness and – that overused word – *cosmopolitan* nature of New York in those days that I felt completely comfortable on the subway in this attire” (55). This early identification with New York and the city’s acceptance of the symbols of culture which Changez identifies with highlights the centrality of 9/11 in shaping American intolerance and boundaries in the novel, since his experience of the city changes dramatically after the attacks. For Changez, the boundary of tolerance seems to be uncovered in 9/11.

However, even this initial identification with the diversity of New York seems to conflict with the economic fundamentalism of Underwood Samson, and Changez realises that he begins to use different cultural symbols in order to gain acceptance into this embodiment of American power. He eventually tries to avoid the symbols of his Pakistani identity. He says of the group of new recruits at Underwood Samson which he is a part of: “I was the only non-American in our group, but I suspected my Pakistaniness was invisible, cloaked by my suit, by my expense account, and – most of all – by my companions” (82). These cultural symbols however do not

ultimately serve to conceal Changez's Pakistaniness, and his ideals of New York begin to unravel. He reflects on the crumbling of his American dream in direct relation to 9/11, the War on Terror and the possibility of war between India and Pakistan:

I wonder now, sir, whether I believed at all in the firmness of the foundations of the new life I was attempting to construct for myself in New York. Certainly I *wanted* to believe; at least I wanted not to disbelieve with such an intensity that I prevented myself as much as was possible from making the obvious connection between the crumbling of the world around me and the impending destruction of my personal American dream. (106)

His interaction with Erica is symbolic of this disillusionment. Hartnell links her name, as composed of the last three syllables of the word America, to her symbolic function of representing American nationalism in the novel (337). The progression of Changez's relationship with Erica follows the trajectory of his relationship with and representation of American society through their initial romance, their difficulty to sexually connect, and her eventual mental collapse and obsession with her deceased boyfriend. Initially, Changez feels that Erica is a link to the American dream for him, a passport to a world where he feels included and powerful, and a symbol of a liberal, inclusive and alternative view of America, shown by how she initially wears "a short T-shirt bearing an image of Chairman Mao" (19). Erica's attention seems to be a validation of Changez's place within American society, and Changez uses the symbols which are valued in his conception of American society— his Princeton degree and Underwood Samson business card – in order to prove that he deserves a place in America. Changez becomes temporarily established as an insider, and is Erica's "official escort at the events of New York society" (97), explaining:

This role pleased me indeed. I was presumptuous enough to think that this was how my life was *meant* to be, that it had in some way been inevitable that I should end up rubbing shoulders with the truly wealthy in such exalted settings. Erica vouched for my worthiness; my way of carrying myself – I flattered myself to believe – suggested the impeccability of my breeding; and for those who inquired further, my Princeton degree and Underwood Samson business card were invariably sufficient to earn me a respectful nod of approval. (97) (Emphasis in original).

Eventually, however, his relationship with Erica and his attitude towards America both sour. Changez explains the failure of his relationship with Erica by referring to a crisis of identity and a scattered sense of belonging:

It occurred to me that my attempts to communicate with her might have failed in part because I did not know where I stood on so many issues of consequence; I lacked a stable *core*. I was not certain where I belonged – in New York, in Lahore, in both, in neither – and for this reason, when she reached out to me for help, I had nothing of substance to give her (168). (Emphasis in original).

Erica's reluctance to fully accept Changez as a partner, represented physically through her sexual distance, seems to correspond with the boundaries which surround Changez's conception of America. Erica represents a gatekeeper reluctant to allow Changez full acceptance due to her reliance on myth, in this case her dreams of her deceased boyfriend Chris, which are infrequent and subdued initially but become overwhelming after 9/11. The shift in their relationship becomes a symbol of how the myth of the American dream cannot sustain itself for Changez after the 9/11 attacks. Changez explains that "[t]he attacks churned up old thoughts in [Erica's] head" (91), signifying how she inhabits a space of fiction and myth which Changez also associates with America. Changez becomes fixated on understanding these "old thoughts" (91), both in reference to post-9/11 America and in the character of Erica, since the attacks seem to expose how these already-present myths serve to maintain American national identity, and how the attacks cause the myths to become even more pronounced. Erica echoes this through her personal reaction to 9/11:

Like so many others in the city after the attacks, she appeared deeply anxious. Yet her anxieties seemed only indirectly related to the prospect of dying at the hands of terrorists. The destruction of the World Trade Center had, as she had said, churned up old thoughts that had settled in the manner of sediment to the bottom of a pond; now the waters of her mind were murky with what previously had been ignored. I did not know if the same was true of me. (94)

Changez's comment of his own recognition of what was previously ignored signals his disillusionment with the American dream as America becomes increasingly preoccupied with national identity in the face of terrorism. Changez explains that "[Erica] was disappearing into a powerful *nostalgia*, one from which only she could choose whether or not to return" (129)



(Emphasis in original). Hartnell suggests that Erica's "nostalgia" about her deceased boyfriend Chris links to an ethnocultural nationalism and an imagined link to Europe, as Chris's name "recalls not only Europe's Christian roots but also Christopher Columbus' encounter with the Americas" (343). In this way, Hartnell continues, "Erica seemingly represents a romantic strain in American nationalism that looks back to a European past, a past that only partially captures the nation's roots and the make-up of contemporary America" (343). Changez does not form a part of these "old thoughts". His enactment of American ideals in order to gain inclusion is most strikingly demonstrated when he eventually attempts to have sex with Erica and, when she resists, he tells her to imagine that he is Chris. Erica relents and they "[make] love with a physical intimacy that [they] had never [before] enjoyed" (120). Changez adopts the identity of Chris and relinquishes his own identity, explaining: "I cannot [...] claim that I was *possessed*, but at the same time I did not seem to be myself" (120) (Emphasis in original). Erica, as the gatekeeper, places a condition on entrance, namely the relinquishing of identity. This links to the way in which Changez also has to demonstrate the symbols of American economic fundamentalism in order to be accepted into Underwood Samson and, by extension, American society. Changez links this interaction with Erica to the realm of myth in a passage which can be read as characterising American ethnocultural identity and the imagined link to Europe which Hartnell discusses:

[I]t was clear Erica needed something that I – even by consenting to play the part of a man not myself – was unable to give her. In all likelihood she longed for her adolescence with Chris, for a time before his cancer made her aware of impermanence and mortality. Perhaps the reality of their time together was as wonderful as she had, on more than one occasion, described to me. Or perhaps theirs was a past all the more potent for its being imaginary. I did not know whether I believed in the truth of their love; it was, after all, a religion that would not accept me as a convert. But I knew that *she* believed in it, and I felt small for being able to offer her nothing of comparable splendor instead. (129) (Emphasis in original).

This act of playing the part of Chris is one which seems to deeply unsettle both Changez and Erica, and seems to be a catalyst for the intensification of her breakdown in a moment which seems to be symbolic of the 9/11 attacks, as Hartnell explains: "Changez's and Erica's love-making alludes to the violent penetration of American space as represented by the 9/11 attacks"

(344). This penetration can be seen more broadly as the way in which the boundaries of national identity are complicated by the presence of the outsider which Changez represents. The physical representation of this boundary through denied sexual access is linked to how the physical body of the outsider conflicts with ethnocultural barriers. In another evocative passage, Changez reflects on his simulation of Chris:

I felt something I have not felt before or since; I remember it well: I felt at once both *satiated* and *ashamed*. My satiation was understandable to me; my shame was more confusing. Perhaps, by taking on the persona of another, I had diminished myself in my own eyes; perhaps I was humiliated by the continuing dominance, in the strange romantic triangle of which I found myself a part, of my dead rival. (121) (Emphasis in original).

The triangle he finds himself a part of involves his American dream as represented by Erica and what he sees as the fundamentals of American society and the mythology which constitute it as represented by Chris, factors which take full force after the 9/11 attacks. Even when his idea of America – as personified in Erica – is ready to accept him, he needs to pretend to be a symbol of American mythology, Chris, in order to reach this momentary acceptance. Changez begins to see himself as an “intrusion on a conversation Erica was having with Chris – a conversation occurring on some plane that [he] could not reach or even properly see” (128). His distance from Erica and from America as a whole intensifies after this role-play, since he begins to see that even when he adopts the symbolism of what America expects from him, he still never reaches full inclusion into this “conversation” (128). Changez seems to represent a sense of newness in the face of “old thoughts” (91), and he eventually finds that his efforts to take part in this conversation will never succeed. Hartnell explains that “this is a story in which America is locked in a nostalgic embrace with Europe, an embrace that refuses to be transformed by the postcolonial moment that Changez potentially represents” (343), and these dynamics are intensified by 9/11 since it leads to the reinforcement of the boundaries around American national identity.

When Changez visits Erica after her mental breakdown he comments that “she glowed with something not unlike the fervor of the *devout*” (152) (Emphasis in original), and he continues: “I thought she looked like someone who was about to complete the month of fasting and had been too consumed by prayer and reading of the holy book to give sufficient thought to the nightly

meal, but I did not say so” (152). This emphasis on religion is used to evoke the earlier connection with mythology in relation to Chris, a “religion which would not accept [him] as a convert” (129), and clearly to draw parallels to the idea of religious fundamentalism which is often associated with the terrorist figure in order to complicate American identity. This mythology which Erica becomes consumed by, characterised as “nostalgia” (129) by Changez, also presents itself in post-9/11 American society:

Possibly this was due to my state of mind, but it seemed to me that America, too, was increasingly giving itself over to a dangerous nostalgia at that time. There was something undeniably retro about the flags and uniforms, about generals addressing cameras in war rooms and newspaper headlines featuring such words as *duty* and *honor*. I had always thought of America as a nation that looked forward; for the first time I was struck by its determination to look *back*. (131) (Emphasis in original).

When Changez symbolises what is new and different, Hartnell’s “postcolonial moment” (343), America’s desire to look back seems to exclude him from the American narrative. He explains: “they were scrambling to don the costumes of another era [...] I felt treacherous for wondering whether that era was fictitious, and whether – if it could indeed be animated – it contained a part written for someone like me” ( 131). Eventually Erica vanishes, presumed to have killed herself, at the same time that Changez becomes disillusioned with America and prepares to leave. His American dream dies along with Erica, as he realises that the country and the character had become consumed by a narrative which could not include him.

Erica represents the most prominent gatekeeper and symbol of Changez’s exclusion from America. Other gatekeepers include the man who interviews Changez for his job at Underwood Samson named Jim, his selection for Princeton which involved “sift[ing] not only by well-honed standardized tests but by painstakingly customized evaluations – interviews, essays, recommendations” (4), and the doorkeeper at Erica’s flat who gives Changez a “cold disapproving expression” (56) which he imagines “would not have been out of place on the face of the gatekeeper of one of Lahore’s larger mansions had I driven up in a small and rusted automobile” (56). These gatekeepers uphold Changez’s construction of American society as based on economic fundamentalism and ethnocultural exclusivity. Gatekeeping becomes more intensified after the 9/11 attacks, as Changez discovers before flying back to New York from Manila:

At the airport, I was escorted by armed guards into a room where I was made to strip down to my boxer shorts [...] I was, as a consequence, the last person to board our aircraft. My entrance elicited looks of concern from many of my fellow passengers. I flew to New York uncomfortable in my own face: I was aware of being under suspicion; I felt guilty. (85)

Changez's physical appearance causes him to clash with gatekeepers. Whereas he is sometimes able to symbolically relinquish his Pakistani identity through his business suit (82) and adopting the persona of Chris (120), these efforts are ultimately unsuccessful at allowing him full assimilation, especially after 9/11, and create a chasm in his identity (168).

In *The Kite Runner*, Amir does not represent these barriers to his assimilation into American society. Indeed, Amir reasserts his feelings of belonging in America throughout the novel, even after 9/11, and represents the presence of exclusionary forces within Afghanistan by highlighting the destruction and desolation of his native country and also pointing to his emotional divide: "Long before the *Roussi* army marched in to Afghanistan, long before villages were burned and schools destroyed, long before mines were planted like seeds of death and children buried in rock-piled graves, Kabul had become a city of ghosts for me. A city of harelipped ghosts" (119). The betrayal of Hassan, the "harelipped ghost" (119) he refers to, creates an emotional barrier with Afghanistan. He continues by recounting his connection with America: "America was different. America was a river, roaring along, unmindful of the past. I could wade into this river, let my sins drown to the bottom, let the waters carry me someplace far. Someplace with no ghosts, no memories, and no sins. If for nothing else, for that, I embraced America" (119). The idea of America being "unmindful of the past" (119) strongly contradicts Changez's assertion of America as absorbed within "old thoughts" (Hamid 91). When the outsider represents what Hartnell refers to as the "postcolonial moment" (343) and a sense of newness and difference, Amir's views allow him to align with the protective American fortress which is "roaring along, unmindful of the past" (119), and it can also offer him an escape from his guilt since it has "no ghosts, no memories, and no sins" (119).

Changez seems very mindful of the ghosts, memories and sins of America, even emulating one such ghost in order to appease the gatekeeper Erica. The characters also display very different attitudes towards cultural symbols such as beards, American flags and – perhaps the

most striking difference – the 9/11 attacks. Changez speaks of the rise of symbolism in enacting American identity shown by the omnipresence of the American flag, a symbol which accompanies the rise in hostility towards himself and other outsiders who become associated with terrorism simply through their appearance. New York becomes America after 9/11, no longer providing him with the sense of acceptance and diversity which he experienced before. He explains:

Your country's flag invaded New York after the attacks; it was everywhere. Small flags stuck on toothpicks featured in the shrines [for those who died in the attacks]; stickers of flags adorned windshields and windows; large flags fluttered from buildings. They all seemed to proclaim: *We are America* – not New York, which, in my opinion, means something quite different – *the mightiest civilization the world has ever known; you have slighted us; beware our wrath.* (90) (Emphasis in original).

Changez begins to hint at a militant America, one which seeks to proclaim a national identity through violence, and the displaying of the American flag symbolises this commitment to national identity.<sup>23</sup>

Cultural symbols such as these serve to maintain the boundaries of national identity. Whereas 9/11 might suggest a disturbance of American power, the omnipresence of these symbols demonstrates, in Changez's view, a flaunting of power in the face of terrorism. This power is enacted through images of masculinity, as Changez emphasizes the aspects of militancy and violence in relation to his reading of the national flags. 9/11 seems to highlight these images and present a simplistic version of power which both American society and the terrorist figure possess, complicating the boundaries between these two antagonistic forces.

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<sup>23</sup> Leach speaks of how symbols such as the flags can come to act as sites of identity construction: “[I]n order for any national identity to be perceived, it must take some form of material expression. National identity is therefore *cathected* onto objects. It must be embodied. Hence objects such as national flags come to embody that identity through a process of symbolic association” (Leach 84) (Emphasis in original).

## 2.5 Images of Power: Money, Sport, Militancy, Sex and Devotion

The representation of power in both novels is framed in masculinity and sex. The gendered nature of these post-9/11 discourses of power relies on a simplistic confluence of traditional images of masculinity as displays of power, as Puar and Rai note that “[post-9/11] patriotism has activated [...] the historical memory of a militarist, racist, and class-specific masculinity” (125).<sup>24</sup> In both novels, association with power can be enacted through the appropriation of these images, namely economic domination, militancy or violence, sex, religion or devotion, and sport as a symbol of competition.

Changez represents American power by referring to the post-9/11 aggression from America towards the East, saying: “America was gripped by a growing and self-righteous rage in those weeks of September and October [...] the mighty host I had expected of your country was duly raised and dispatched – but homeward, towards my family in Pakistan” (107). He recounts the growing hostility towards Islam in the place he had previously described as an embracing home, New York, while he still attempts to maintain his identity as an American:

I ignored as best I could the rumors I overheard at the Pak-Punjab Deli: Pakistani cabdrivers were being beaten to within an inch of their lives; the FBI was raiding mosques, shops, and even people’s houses; Muslim men were disappearing, perhaps into shadowy detention centers for questioning or worse. I reasoned that these stories were mostly untrue; the few with some basis in fact were almost certainly being exaggerated; and besides, those rare cases of abuse that regrettably did transpire were unlikely ever to affect me because such things invariably happened, in America as in all countries, to the hapless poor, not to Princeton graduates earning eighty thousand dollars a year. (108)

At this point Changez’s dedication to the American economic fundamentalism reaches its peak – he believes that he is above discrimination because he maintains wealth by “earning eighty thousand dollars a year” (108). Changez also describes the militancy of post-9/11 America by showing how Muslims were targeted, highlighting the ethnocultural discourses around 9/11.

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<sup>24</sup> Puar & Rai describe how these sexualised and masculine elements of power present themselves in post-9/11 discourse: “Posters that appeared in midtown Manhattan only days after the attacks show a turbaned caricature of bin Laden being anally penetrated by the Empire State Building [...] Or think of the Web site where, with a series of weapons at your disposal, you can torture Osama bin Laden to death, the last torture being sodomy” (126).

These markers of power are associated with the American man who Changez narrates his story to, saying that he had the look of a “seasoned army officer” (7) and continuously referring to the potential danger of this man by suggesting that he has a weapon (69). Hartnell comments that “Changez’s uninterrupted narration [demonstrates] a sign of weakness, one that recalls the frame narrator of *One Thousand and One Nights*, Sheherezade, who wards off the threat of her own impending death by telling stories” (337). By telling his story, Changez is given the power of representation himself, and is able to construct the American society as the essentialised other which he constructs his identity against. The ostensibly dialogic nature of the novel also creates an awareness of mutual narrative power, where Changez seems responsive to criticisms from his American listener (84; 135). The American man’s narrative power symbolises how Changez himself becomes framed in terrorism by media and is constructed as an outsider to America. Changez’s storytelling, in turn, becomes a way not only to delay the physical threat of his American listener, but also, by constructing a disempowered America which is enshrined in fundamentalism and located in fiction, Changez is able to disarm the American man narratively and construct him as a disempowered and essentialised other.

The discussions of violence and militancy are also linked to the image of sport to reflect power. One of the gatekeepers in the novel, the executive who interviews Changez for his position at Underwood Samson named Jim, is similarly conflated with images of power and is even compared to Changez’s American listener at some points (7; 9). Changez comments of Jim: “There was an almost ritualistic quality to his movements, like a batsman – or even, I would say, a knight – donning his gloves before striding onto a field of contest” (110). Changez also links this symbol of sport to the relative disempowered position of Pakistan, saying “we currently lack wealth, power, [and] even sporting glory – the occasional brilliance of our temperamental cricket team notwithstanding” (114). When Changez is targeted with a racist comment, he responds by invoking the image of sport as he contemplates violent retaliation: “I have, in the uniforms of the various teams for which I have played, had my share of fights” (134). The language of sport becomes linked to power and to powerful figures like Jim.

Changez’s reference to uniforms in this extract is also significant. He refers to the uniformity of identity in reference to sport uniforms (134), business suits (82) and to military uniforms: “It struck me then – no, I must be honest, it strikes me *now* – that shorn of hair and dressed in battle

fatigues, we would have been virtually indistinguishable” (108). Changez refers to the surrender of individuality in relation to physical sameness, ideas which relate to his desire to maintain an American identity as he is “clad in [his] armor of denial” (108). By referring to this relinquishing of individuality through using the images of masculinity, namely sport, wealth and militancy, Changez demonstrates how he can appropriate power by enacting these images. The images become conflated within the demonstration of masculine power. He powerfully reinforces how these images are linked to power by referring to media reports of the bombing in Afghanistan:

The bombing of Afghanistan had already been under way for a fortnight, and I had been avoiding the evening news, preferring not to watch the partisan and sports-event-like coverage given to the mismatch between the American bombers with their twenty-first-century weaponry and the ill-equipped and ill-fed Afghan tribesmen below. (113)

Power is also demonstrated through the devotion to fundamentalism which Changez demonstrates through the economic fundamentalism of Underwood Samson, which requires the disavowal of individuality. When Changez finally manages to disentangle himself from these fundamentals, he speaks critically of them, saying of his manager during a business trip to the Philippines:

I was beginning to resent him as well. I could not respect how he functioned so completely immersed in the structures of his professional micro-universe. Yes, I too had previously derived comfort from my firm’s exhortations to focus intensely on work, but now I saw that in this constant striving to realize a financial future, no thought was given to the critical personal and political issues that affect one’s emotional present. In other words, my blinders were coming off, and I was dazzled and rendered immobile by the sudden broadening of my arc of vision. (165)

While Changez speaks of these markers of American power with derision, they are predictably portrayed in a mostly positive light in *The Kite Runner*. The markers of power are revered by the character who personifies masculinity and paternity, Baba. While in Afghanistan, he asks of the young Assef: “Still playing soccer, Assef jan?” (86), a comment which creates tension in the non-sportive Amir. Baba uses the affectionate appendant “jan” in addressing Assef, at which Amir muses: “I wished Baba would stop calling him that. How often did he call me ‘Amir jan’?” (85). Amir links Baba’s attitude towards sport with masculinity, and contrasts it



with his own passion of writing poetry: “Real men didn’t read poetry – and God forbid they should ever write it! Real men – real boys – played soccer just as Baba had when he had been young” (19). Of course, Amir later discovers that writing, language and representation become tools to gain power in America, since he is able to assimilate into American society by learning English which Baba does not succeed at, and demonstrates his narrative power by becoming a successful author and being able to represent the terrorist through his own narrative. His distance from the masculine ideal of sport initially demonstrates the instability of his masculine power, a power which he would later claim through the symbol of money in America.

Amir eventually manages to create a temporary link with Baba through another sporting activity: kite fighting. The sport becomes an image of redemption and a connection with paternity in the novel, shown when Amir comments: “Baba and I lived in the same house, but in different spheres of existence. Kites were the one paper-thin slice of intersection between those spheres” (43). The sport is also linked to the image of militancy, as Amir explains:

Every Winter, districts in Kabul held a kite-fighting tournament. And if you were a boy living in Kabul, the day of the tournament was undeniably the highlight of the cold season. I never slept the night before the tournament [...] I felt like a soldier trying to sleep in the trenches the night before a major battle. And that wasn’t so far off. In Kabul, fighting kites *was* a little like going to war. (44) (Emphasis in original).

Amir speaks here of the performance of masculinity through the reiteration of images of power, and by appropriating the symbol which Baba associates with masculinity, namely sport, Amir is able to link himself to this masculine power. Before the kite-fighting tournament is held, Amir has a rare intimate moment with his father. Baba says: “I think maybe you’ll win the tournament this year. What do you think?” (49). Amir meditates on this question:

Was that what it would take? Had he just slipped me a key? I was a good kite fighter. Actually, a very good one. A few times, I’d even come close to winning the winter tournament – once, I’d made it to the final three. But coming close wasn’t the same as winning, was it? Baba hadn’t *come close*. He had won because winners won and everyone else just went home. Baba was used to winning, winning at everything he set his mind to. Didn’t he have a right to expect the same from his son? And just imagine. If I did win... (49) (Emphasis in original).



devotion to self-determination and the American dream when he refuses welfare checks in the US (114), a commitment which relates to his belief that theft is the only sin as it would undermine self-determination and signify a loss of material power.

The various images of power are linked to enacting masculinity. For Amir, these images are a route to demonstrating a link to the protective, paternal figure, and Amir's own financial and social success in America allows him to have a positive relationship with Baba and to solidify his identity as an American. For Changez, the images are tied to the dominating and fundamentalist American society which he constructs, and he initially enacts these images in order to form a part of this powerful nation.

Importantly, in both novels this masculine power is also linked to narrative power, where the control of representation is afforded to American society as well as to the figure of the terrorist. For Amir, the terrorist's masculine narrative power is shown in how Assef is able to construct his own understanding of violence, and for Changez it is demonstrated through the symbolism of the 9/11 attacks which immediately relegate America to the realm of the feminine, as the terrorists "brought America to her knees" (83).

When these images of power become used in relation to both American society and the terrorist figure, the boundaries between terrorist and terrorised are confused, as David Simpson notes when he explains that "[g]lobal capitalism [can be seen as] a mirror image and perhaps a near relative of the currently projected image of terror" (Simpson 10). The outsider further confuses this simplistic binary, since he is ethnoculturally linked to the physical image of terrorism yet enacts his association to America through capitalism. His personal identifications thus become impacted by the political consequences of 9/11 where this binary is powerfully asserted.

## **2.6 Mirroring the Personal and the Political**

In post-9/11 America, Changez begins to identify with Afghanistan, and refers to the country as a victim in the War on Terror. Bruce King explains: "A motif that runs through the novel is

the narrator's assumption that Afghanistan is the victim of an American invasion and that Afghanistan is somehow part of Pakistan. [...] Hamid sees the American presence as part of a long history of foreign invasion" (685). When viewing visuals of a "what was described as a daring raid on a Taliban command post" (Hamid 114) on the news, Changez comments: "Afghanistan was Pakistan's neighbor, our friend, and a fellow Muslim nation besides, and the sight of what I took to be the beginning of its invasion by your countrymen caused me to tremble with fury" (114). After seeing the news report, Changez arrives late to work for the first time (114), demonstrating how war causes the unravelling of his identification with American economic fundamentals. Changez describes this rupture as an awakening, and speaks of the link between political changes and changes in his self-understanding:

I was no longer capable of so thorough a self-deception. I did, however, tell myself that I had overreacted, that there was nothing I could do, and that all these world events were playing out on a stage of no relevance to my personal life. But I remained aware of the embers glowing within me, and that day I found it difficult to concentrate on the pursuit – at which I was normally so capable – of fundamentals. (114)

He starts to see the way in which ethnocultural barriers affect his commitment to fundamentals, and questions whether commitment to these fundamentals will be enough to maintain his inclusion in America: "I had heard tales of the discrimination Muslims were beginning to experience in the business world – stories of rescinded job offers and groundless dismissals – and I did not wish to have my position at Underwood Samson compromised" (137). Changez internalises the political situation of the post-9/11 world as "internal conflicts" (137), as he sees his position in American society as conflicting with his identification with the East.

These conflicts are exacerbated by his encounter with a man named Juan-Bautista, the head of a publishing company which Underwood Samson is assessing in Valparaiso. Juan-Bautista tells Changez about "janissaries" (171), who were "Christian boys [...] captured by the Ottomans and trained to be soldiers in a Muslim army, at that time the greatest army in the world. They were ferocious and utterly loyal: they had fought to erase their own civilizations, so they had nothing else to turn to" (172). While it becomes apparent that Juan-Bautista might only be planting doubt in Changez's mind in order to disrupt his work and save the publishing company, the discussion of the janissaries plagues Changez. He begins to draw parallels to his own position

within the US, linking his devotion to Underwood Samson to what he sees as American expansionism:

I was a modern-day janissary, a servant of the American empire at a time when it was invading a country with a kinship to mine and was perhaps even colluding to ensure that my own country faced the threat of war. Of course I was struggling! Of course I felt torn! I had thrown in my lot with the men of Underwood Samson, with the officers of the empire, when all along I was predisposed to feel compassion for those, like Juan-Bautista, whose lives the empire thought nothing of overturning for its own gain. (173)

Changez's shifting identification from American to Pakistani spans the length of the novel. His initial connection to the story of the janissaries can be seen in the way he enacts Americanness and represents Pakistan through an American gaze. On a business trip to Manila he explains that he "attempted to act and speak, as much as [his] dignity would permit, more like an *American*" (74) (Emphasis in original), explaining: "the Filipinos we worked with seemed to look up to my American colleagues, accepting them almost instinctively as members of the officer class of global business – and I wanted my share of that respect as well" (74). His own way of seeing changes as a result of his connection with America, and he begins to look at Pakistan with contempt when comparing it to life in America. He demonstrates this when he speaks of his return visit to Pakistan: "There are adjustments one must make if one comes [to Pakistan] from America; a different way of *observing* is required. I recall the Americanness of my own gaze when I returned to Lahore that winter when war was in the offing" (140) (Emphasis in original). This American gaze causes him to experience his home differently, and to feel the impact of his place of origin on his identity: "I was struck at first by how shabby our house appeared [...] I was saddened to find it in such a state – no, much more than saddened, I was shamed. *This* was where I came from, this was my provenance, and it smacked of lowliness" (140-141) (Emphasis in original). Changez later links the empire of America to finance, and thus emphasises his role as "janissary" since he is economically empowering America: "I knew from my experience as a Pakistani – of alternating periods of American aid and sanctions – that finance was a primary means by which the American empire exercised its power. It was right for me to refuse to participate any longer in facilitating this project of domination" (177). Changez's shifting identity and perspective seems to react to the political changes in the novel and

especially to 9/11. He is able to represent America by using the language of exploitation after the attacks, and clearly refers to ethnocultural barriers and gatekeepers once he solidifies his identity as Pakistani:

Seen in this fashion I was struck by how traditional your empire appeared. Armed sentries manned the check posts at which I sought entry; being of a suspect race I was quarantined and subjected to additional inspection; once admitted I hired a charioteer who belonged to a serf class lacking the requisite permissions to abide legally and forced therefore to accept work at lower pay; I myself was a form of indentured servant whose right to remain was dependent upon the continued benevolence of my employer. (178)

9/11, the War on Terror, and the treatment of Muslim people within the US impact on Changez's perspective, allowing him to narrate a much more critical view of America.

Amir, similarly, personalises political situations. Indeed, as Edwards notes, Hosseini uses the characters of his novel as analogous for ethnic tensions within Afghanistan, where Assef's rape of Hassan links to the disempowerment of the Hazara group to which Hassan belongs (Edwards 4). Amir reflects: "The curious thing was, I never thought of Hassan and me as friends [...] Because history isn't easy to overcome. Neither is religion. In the end, I was a Pashtun and he was a Hazara, I was Sunni and he was Shi'a, and nothing was ever going to change that" (24). Hassan is eventually killed by the Taliban once they take power of Afghanistan, and Amir is able to redeem himself through his battle with Assef and through adopting Hassan's son, Sohrab. Assef becomes emblematic of the Taliban and of oppression and violence, allowing Amir to become an embodiment of American antiterrorism through this battle and to adopt the protective and liberating role to Sohrab which America is described as adopting towards Afghanistan after 9/11 (316).

These parallels between the personal and political narratives allow for a space where representations of the nation can reflect understandings of the self. The nation of the other, which conflicts with the established identity of each character, is encircled in the language of fiction and myth: America for Changez and Afghanistan for Amir. This relegation to myth allows these characters to have narrative power over this othered identity, as well as allowing the home nation to gain a heightened sense of reality and authority. The fact that both novels are narrated by the

protagonists demonstrates this narrative power and how subjectivity and identity become important in the construction of these representations. Amir's positive narration of the American dream and Changez's ideas of the empire of America are informed by their personal identification with and views of America. Narrative becomes a way that the self can align with or move away from a particular national identity. By locating masculine symbols of power with both America and the figure of the terrorist, the novels seem to reflect a confusion of power in the moment of 9/11, and the characters seek to reclaim power for the nation which they identify with through narrative.

These identifications are also reflected through the body: for Changez through growing a beard and through his sexual barrier with Erica, and for Amir through the scars of kite-fighting which link him to masculinity, as well as through the physical danger and the injuries which he sustains when he battles Assef. The realm of the visual also becomes important, as representations of the 9/11 attacks and of the war in Afghanistan through media serve as powerful points of identity-formation for Changez. For Amir, his experience of the Taliban is prefigured through media representations, and he is able to essentialise this enemy to their role of causing terror. The personal identities of each character interact with these representations, and narrative becomes important for renegotiating power in the wake of 9/11.

## Chapter 3

### Confronting Unimaginable Violence: Engaging with Trauma in *Windows on the World* and *Falling Man*

#### 3.1 Physical and Metaphysical Loss

Frédéric Beigbeder's *Windows on the World* and Don DeLillo's *Falling Man* are novels which detail the trauma suffered by those affected in the 9/11 terrorist attacks and the destruction of the Twin Towers of the World Trade Center in New York City. The novels represent the effects of an act of violence which is described as incomprehensible for the characters and the authors, and Beigbeder contends: "Even if I go deep, deep into the horror, my book will always remain 1,350 feet below the truth" (124). Indeed, the novels exist in the impossible space of representing that which the texts themselves claim is unrepresentable, what Jean Baudrillard calls "an event that defies not just morality, but any form of interpretation" (13). This representational and epistemological difficulty lies in reproducing the extreme horror of the attacks, understanding the motivations for the attacks, and dealing with trauma and its effects on identity. Beigbeder asks: "Who are these men capable of such a thing? Who are Mohammed Atta, Abdulaziz al-Omari, Marwan al-Shehhi, and their buddies?" (268). His inclusion of the names of the terrorists and his narrative focus on the death of a family allows him to delve into the human experience of large-scale violence and deal with identity, both in the moment of the attacks and in the aftermath of it. Both *Windows on the World* and *Falling Man* represent entanglements with the terrorist figure, and both novels attempt to understand these men who stand as symbols of otherness and danger. Thus, the novels strive to capture the dynamics of human subjects inflicting violence on other human subjects on an inhuman scale. Beigbeder achieves the personalisation of violence in two ways: his novel deals with the death of a group of fictional characters in the restaurant on the 107<sup>th</sup> floor of the North Tower of the World Trade Center called "Windows on the World", and he also incorporates autobiographical elements to show how he has been personally affected by telling the story of these fictional victims of real



attacks.<sup>25</sup> The fictional sections describe the experience of a businessman from Texas, Carthew Yorston, and his two sons, David and Jerry, who are in Windows on the World having breakfast when the planes crash into the towers. The autobiographical elements detail stories from Beigbeder's own family and childhood, and also contain accounts of the process of writing the novel in a restaurant on the fifty-sixth floor of an iconic tower in Paris, Le Tour Montparnasse (28). In addition, he recounts a visit which he makes to New York, witnessing the effects of the attacks on the physical and emotional landscape of the city. The novel is concerned with representing physical and metaphysical forms of loss: the loss of human life, the symbolic loss suffered in the destruction of the World Trade Centre towers, and the loss of a stable sense of identity for those living in the aftermath of the attacks. By showing how he is personally affected by writing his novel and by describing his interactions with New Yorkers, Beigbeder creates a community around this sense of loss, a community which he centres on Western trauma, vulnerability and paranoia. Abel theorises this identity formation around paranoia by explaining that "paranoia is the most comforting narrative available in response to trauma, positing the self as persecuted by the outside, the other. The other serves as the explanation par excellence to reinforce the self as a self-contained entity that controls itself by suspecting everything else" (Abel 1239). Beigbeder subtly alludes to this community when he points to how the event has penetrated mass consciousness and become a pervasive and defining symbol of the last decade: "Everyone knows precisely where they were on September 11, 2001" (Beigbeder 86). This idea of community compels Beigbeder to point to links between Europe and America: "If you go back eight generations, all white Americans are Europeans. We are the same: even if we are not all Americans, our problems are theirs, and theirs ours" (302).<sup>26</sup> This problematic community, based on vulnerability, power, and apparently whiteness, informs much of what Beigbeder attempts with his novel. He constructs the community around an "ethnocultural" (Schildkraut

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<sup>25</sup> Alain-Philippe Durand refers to this trend of blending autobiography and fiction as autofiction, explaining that it is "a narration, usually in the first person, that mixes fiction and reality, not always in clearly distinct fashion [...It is a form of] literature fascinated by the narrative self" (110).

<sup>26</sup> Anna Hartnell explains how a similar problematic community is created in *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*: "Erica's fixation on Chris and the European past that he apparently symbolizes seemingly stands in for a fantasy of the West: as Changez suspects, there is something fictitious about both America's post-9/11 nostalgia and Erica's past life with her former lover. In this way, I suggest that *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* points to a non-identity between Europe and America, one that implies a bifurcation at the heart of what is so often portrayed as a unified 'West'" (Hartnell 344).

514) ideal of American identity “rooted in Northern European heritage and ancestry” (514), and this construction serves as a useful contrast to the “foreign” terrorist since even Beigbender, a Frenchman, can fall within the boundaries of this community and see himself as an insider. This community is something seemingly exclusive, something which is now being exposed because of interference from the outsider in the form of the terrorist.<sup>27</sup>

Both novels paint a New York of desolation and almost religious reverence<sup>28</sup> for the events of 9/11 in the period after the attacks, creating a sense of incomprehension, confusion and loss in the new dystopian surroundings. A pervasive sense of vulnerability is created through the characters, factual accounts, and autofiction which Beigbender and DeLillo represent, and identifying as an American becomes a central theme in both novels. As Leach notes, buildings can become symbols of national identity, and “[h]uman beings can equate themselves with buildings and identify with them. And once a sense of identity has been forged against a backdrop of a certain architectural environment, any damage to that environment will be read as damage to the self” (85). In this view, the destruction of the New York landscape caused damage to the national as well as personal identities. Leach continues: “The attack struck at the very heart of the American psyche, since it was an assault on one of the very iconic references around which an American way of life had been formulated. The attack on the building was equally an attack on American national identity” (85).

These novels, like those of Hosseini and Hamid, represent identity formation through symbols of masculinity and fatherhood. For Beigbender this is shown biographically through his reflection of his role as father and his troubled relationship with his own father, as well as

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<sup>27</sup> Versluys characterises the tumultuous nature of this renewed sense of Western community, and how novels seem to consolidate it: “The initial transatlantic solidarity in the wake of the terrorist attacks quickly faded when it became obvious that the armed response of the US would go beyond immediate retaliation against Al-Qaeda and its Taliban sponsors [...] En masse, European public opinion rejected the war against Iraq and saw it almost unanimously as proof of America’s tendency towards unbridled aggression. Against that background of mutual acrimony and incomprehension, the novels yet testify to the fact that, in spite of important policy differences, there is a continuing Western, transatlantic discursive community, sharing essential values and traditions” (70).

<sup>28</sup> The language of religion is echoed in the discourses of loss and commemoration around 9/11: “[In] Lower Manhattan in the days and weeks after 9/11 [...] tourists were strictly forbidden, curious onlookers sent packing, and even journalists and professional photographers pushed away by angry firemen and other workers with the declaration that they were trespassing on ‘sacred ground’ ” (Simpson 28). The comparison also echoes the discourse of a “holy war [which] threatens or seems to threaten the modern West with the collapse of the opposition between the theological and the political” (Morris 153).

fictionally through Carthew's meditations on masculinity and fatherhood while he is trapped in the doomed restaurant. Indeed, as in the previous chapter of this thesis, a simplistic form of masculinity becomes associated with both empowered national identity and with the terrorist figure, and in order for the victims of the attacks to regain their power, they need to adopt these images of power. By demonstrating trauma through the relationship of a father and his two sons, and reflecting on his own role as father throughout, Beigbeder points to the links between paternity and narration and between masculinity and power in the post-9/11 discourse.

DeLillo's novel similarly deals with intimate stories of human reactions to 9/11, focusing on a survivor of the attacks, Keith Neudecker, his estranged wife Lianne and their son Justin, who unsuccessfully try to rebuild their family after 9/11. DeLillo shows entanglements with the terrorist figure in sections of the novel where he focalises one of the perpetrators of the 9/11 attacks, Hammad. The novel also portrays moments when the pervasiveness of this figure and his imprint on the psyche of the American characters creates links between the terrorist and the terrorised, confusing the boundaries of identity in the novel.

The sense of Western community highlighted in reference to Beigbeder's novel also finds expression in *Falling Man* in the form of Martin, the mysterious German lover of Lianne's mother Nina who returns to America after the attacks. He was once a member of the subversive collective known as Kommune 1 and is hinted to have worked with the Red Brigades in Italy (Kauffman 361). Nina reflects on Martin as an insider in this regard, even though she identifies him as a terrorist due to his association with the subversive groups: "She could imagine his life, then and now, detect the slurred pulse of an earlier consciousness. Maybe he was a terrorist but he was one of ours, she thought, and the thought chilled her, shamed her – one of ours, which meant godless, Western, white" (195). Martin's inclusion into a sense of community with America after 9/11 again confuses the boundaries of terrorist and terrorised.

The magnitude and horror of the attacks, around which this community seems to be constructed, alters the perspective of the insiders. Martin comments on his return to the USA: "Nothing seems exaggerated anymore. Nothing amazes me" (41), and the conflation of personal stories of loss with national identity is highlighted in the reflection that: "These three years past, since that day in September, all life had become public" (182). The formation of this community ties into Leach's observation that loss is seen as an integral part of identity formation, explaining

that “loss [...] can serve to [...] reinforce an identity” (86), and that “identity is built upon a process of identification, but is consolidated as those identifications are severed or come under threat” (86). Thus the community of vulnerability allows for the consolidation of Western or American identities. The personal stories of loss and the difficulty of rebuilding families become allegorical of this community’s difficulty in understanding the world and themselves after the attacks, dynamics which are located in the experience of trauma.<sup>29</sup> The characters struggle to reach understanding of their role as individuals in the face of destruction and political violence of this magnitude. Keith points to this when he reflects on the experience of being inside the North Tower after it is hit: “The size of it, the sheer physical dimensions, and he saw himself in it, the mass and scale, and the way the thing swayed, the slow and ghostly lean” (244). In *Windows*, Carthew reflects: “Christian fundamentalists face down Muslim fundamentalists: I am going to die because of an incestuous quarrel between billionaire sects” (231). The novels are concerned with reconciling these tensions and regaining a sense of identity and understanding, indeed a sense of normalcy, after the horrors of the attacks. In both novels, the characters are shown to act in ritualistic ways in order to achieve this, trying to control their surroundings as best they can and reassert their power, and engaging in religious practices in the face of trauma.

By including his own perspective in his novel, Beigbeder also allows for analysis of the role of the author and authorial struggles with representation. Walker asserts that authors after 9/11, “[i]n their insistently visible blurring of (auto)biography, history, news and fiction [and] novels [...] highlight [...] the ‘image manipulation’ inherent not only to dominant consumer culture, but to any representation that claims the status of coherent truth – including those forged by terrorists, or politicians” (340). Not only do the characters represent the outsider and negotiate their post-9/11 identity, but the author becomes similarly entangled and conflicted in his representation, and the identification of readers with the novels is also implicated. Varvogli, when commenting on the structural complexity of Philip Roth’s novel *American Pastoral*, suggests that “the figure of the author is linked with that of the terrorist” (103). She argues that “there is a certain degree of identification between the narrator and the terrorist character” (103).

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<sup>29</sup> Thurschwell offers a definition of the way in which trauma involves a reliving or delay of the experience which is linked to a particular event, which many of the characters display: “Trauma occurs when the conscious *experience* of an event that befalls a subject fails to coincide with the event itself – typically, when that experience is delayed” (Thurschwell 278). (Emphasis in original).

Also, by representing a case of domestic terrorism, perpetrated by the daughter of “a family that seemingly embodies the American Dream” (103), Roth upsets the idea of the foreign and incomprehensible alien terrorist which is the subject of large amounts of post-9/11 literature. As Varvogli points out, “[b]efore the events of 11 September 2001, American public opinion was preoccupied with homegrown rather than imported terrorism” (104). Now that the terrorist figure is located as the outsider and the threat is seen as something foreign and often as a fundamental clash of cultures, how does the novelist who associates himself with the community of vulnerability relate to this outsider? And how does this author represent the terrorist in this new dynamic where foreign terrorism becomes a pervasive reality? Beigbeder variously comments on his physical and psychic remove as an author, and on the dynamics of representation. His novel is retelling the story which he claims he cannot authentically tell, and the usefulness of which he questions: “I would like to be able to change things, to scream at Carthew to get the fuck out of there, fast [...] Powerlessness, a writer’s vanity. A useless book, like all books. The writer is like the cavalry, always arriving too late” (27). Beigbeder’s meditations on the precariousness of his novel also lead him to question genre as well, leading to a metanarrative which allows for the suggestion of another level of loss which occurs in the retelling of this trauma: the loss of authorial power, and the deconstruction of the hierarchical relation of author and narrative. The very nature of the attacks, which is seen by characters and author as defying description and comprehension, leads to the collapse of authorial power.<sup>30</sup> Ruby Rich highlights this problem by referring to Adorno’s assertion that it is impossible to write poetry after Auschwitz (110), and she traces the impossibility of representation to “9/11’s throw-down to narrative coherence and theoretical certainty” (110), linking the extreme violence to a break from creativity since it leads to “numbness, confusion, panic and anger” (110). Beigbeder explains his own loss of authorial power in relation to the attacks:

[N]one of the 1,344 people trapped on the nineteen floors above [floors 94 and 98 of One World Trade Centre, where the plane crashed] survived. [...] Obviously, this piece of information removes any element of suspense from this book. So much the better: this isn’t a thriller; it is simply an attempt – doomed, perhaps – to describe the indescribable. (57)

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<sup>30</sup> In DeLillo’s essay “In the Ruins of the Future”, he comments: “In its desertion of every basis for comparison, the event asserts its singularity. There is something empty in the sky. The writer tries to give memory, tenderness, and meaning to all that howling space” (39).

Beigbeder later highlights this authorial remove when he comments on the futile attempts by the characters to escape the burning tower:

What they don't know but I now know (which doesn't make me any superior, it's simply hindsight) is that the Boeing has destroyed all the exits: the stairwells are blocked, the elevators melted; Carthew and his two sons are utterly trapped in a furnace. Signed: Mr Know-it-all (in French, Monsieur Je-sais-tout). (69)

Beigbeder emphasises his authorial role with the inclusion of his signature. Repeating the signature in French emphasises his distance, both geographical and temporal, but especially in terms of perspective. Beigbeder does not know the human experience of fear, trauma, and physical anguish experienced by the people left inside the burning tower, thus his use of the signature "Mr Know-it-all" is ironic, and highlights his unstable authorial position.

What then is the project of these novels which deal with something so incomprehensible, where author and characters feel at once removed and yet powerfully affected by the subject matter? DeLillo's narrative seems to address entanglements and the problematic strategies of rebuilding identity in the post-9/11 world. He points to the lingering effects of trauma and the links between the personal and political, not only by showing how political attacks affect individuals, but also how those individuals understand themselves within the framework of the political tensions which they understand as surrounding the attacks. Kristiaan Versluys holds that "[a]fter the shock of a violent and unexpected event, narration is instrumental in reconstituting the shattered self" (67), and continues: "[O]ne can see literature as a field of force in which collective trauma is negotiated" (68). Beigbeder's project takes on similar aspects, and also seems to deal with issues of public memory and the legacy of the attacks. He points to the physical loss suffered in the attacks, and the need for narrative as a substitute for physical reminders: "[W]hen buildings vanish, only books can remember them [...] books are more permanent than buildings" (137). In addition to his novel's value for public memory, he also points to a symbiotic effect which the attacks have had for his novel: "I am also obliged to concede that in leaning on the first great hyperterrorist attack, my prose takes on a power which it would not otherwise have. This novel uses tragedy like a literary crutch" (301). Beigbeder points to the relationship between narrative and event, and demonstrates the author's role in telling stories which are impossible to tell and of how the novel benefits from the event itself.

The narrative and the event are mutually affecting, which Beigbender demonstrates through the futility of the narrative in changing the event, but also its power in representing the extreme human suffering, trauma and violence. Thus the link between author and terrorist which Vargoli points to above seems to have shifted. Whereas once the author's role was to disrupt power in the same way that the terrorist does, once the terrorist from outside has done this in such an affecting way, the novel's role becomes to make sense of the disruption. These novels have new restrictions and yet they also have new power, reaching into the depths of what defies understanding and engaging with the intrusion of the other.

This disruption affects the sense of reality and normality for the characters in all-encompassing ways. When Keith sees a woman on horseback in the middle of the street after the attacks, he muses: "It was something that belonged to another landscape, something inserted, a conjuring that resembled for the briefest second some half-seen image only half believed in the seeing, when the witness wonders what has happened to the meaning of things, to tree, street, stone, wind, simple words lost in the falling ash" (103). The effect on perspective is shown in how something disruptive, a woman on a horse, calls into question fundamental understandings of the world and the "meaning of things" (103) for Keith, and linking these to "falling ash" (103) centres his disorientation on 9/11. Keith also reflects during a walk through the park: "The ordinariness, so normally unnoticeable, fell upon him oddly, with almost dreamlike effect" (51). What has been lost in Keith is a sense of orientation in the world, and a sense that anything can be ordinary anymore. His life seems to become tied to the fictional and become "dreamlike" (51). Baudrillard refers to the image of dreams in his argument that "no one can avoid dreaming of the destruction of any power that has become hegemonic to [the degree the US has]" (5). The fact that this dream has now become a reality creates the confusion demonstrated in Keith, where reality seems fictional, a motif which is variously demonstrated in both novels with reference to dreams and to the dream-like nature of the American dream. This fictionalisation of reality is also related more generally to the pervasive references to fiction and film.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> Baudrillard explains the link between film and the dream of American destruction, where the images depicted in cinema act as a cathartic link to this destructive fantasy: "The countless disaster movies bear witness to this fantasy, which they clearly attempt to exorcise with images, drowning out the whole thing with special effects" (Baudrillard 7).

Carthew's most notable fictionalisation is when he tries to convince his children that they are taking part in a theme park ride when the plane crashes into their tower: "Breathe through the cloth. It's a test: they do this kind of thing in New York – they call it a fire drill. There's nothing to worry about, darlings, actually it's pretty fun, isn't it?" (60). Carthew refers to this as his "Benigni-style playacting" (60), referring to the director of the popular film *Life is Beautiful* in which a Jewish father tries to convince his son that their time in a concentration camp in Nazi-occupied France is simply a game.<sup>32</sup> Yet Carthew's constant reference to his own incomprehension and the stories he creates about the attacks suggests his understanding becomes grounded in fiction. He constantly thinks of the experience in terms of popular films, creating his own fiction of the events. Later, Beigbeder comments that even political reasons for the attacks are a sort of fiction which minimise the horror of the human tragedy:

We point the finger at those who are indirectly guilty, anonymous, impersonal pension funds, dummy organizations. But at the end of the day, those who scream, who plead, who bleed, are real. At the end of the world, satire becomes reality, metaphor becomes truth, even political cartoonists feel embarrassed. (64)

Baudrillard engages with this confusion of fiction and reality when he explains that "[i]t is the tactic of the terrorist model to bring about an excess of reality, and have the system collapse beneath that excess of reality" (18). He links this idea of hyperreality to power (18), and says that both the limits of reality and of power collapse in the face of terrorism and the symbolism which it embodies. He contends that reality "has absorbed fiction's energy, and has itself become fiction. We might almost say that the reality is jealous of fiction, that the real is jealous of the image" (28).

Within the framework of this blend of fiction and reality, where the real feels fictional and where narrative is used to make sense of a reality beyond comprehension, the loss of authorial power finds expression for Beigbeder in the form of contradiction and humour. One of the most striking contradictions in representing the attacks is when Beigbeder describes an exhibition by the artist Paul Virilio which he views in Paris, where the images of the destruction of the Twin

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<sup>32</sup> Durand notes how Beigbeder's novel makes many references to the Holocaust such as this link to concentration camps, referring to another historical moment of extreme violence which, according to Adorno, defies representation (Durand 114).



Towers is placed alongside a video of a fireworks display over Shanghai. Beigbender says: “[Virilio] dares to establish a link between unadulterated horror and esthetic [sic] beauty. [...] Can the destruction of the Twin Towers really be presented side by side with a fireworks display, be it the most grandiose in the world? Oh, the beautiful flames, oh, the beautiful blue, oh, the beautiful burning bodies?” (130). The question of category again becomes important, similar to the way in which Beigbender tries to situate his novel in terms of genre. Again, the categories are uncomfortable, and the destruction is placed within a framework of art in a disquieting way.

Beigbender’s novel itself presents a similarly disquieting representation of the attacks, and seeping his novel in contradiction, humour and reference to action films shows his difficulty in locating his project, and indeed the event which it deals with, within particular categories. He most poignantly highlights the impossibility of representation when he merely omits the most graphic violence in his narrative by using ellipses:

From here, we can penetrate the unspeakable, the inexpressible. Please excuse our misuse of ellipses. I have cut out the awful descriptions. I have not done so out of propriety, nor out of respect for the victims because I believe that describing their slow agonies, their ordeal, is also a mark of respect. I cut them because, in my opinion, it is more appalling still to allow you to imagine what became of them. (276)

Representation through silence and omission is Beigbender’s most poignant contradiction, but it points to many more contradictions throughout the novel. These contradictions allude to the collapse of reality and understanding, where contradiction becomes the most effective form of representing the unrepresentable. Carthew points to one of these contradictions, where clear weather and a family breakfast are tied to impending horror: “The weather had been so beautiful: through the telescope, Jerry could count the rivets on the fuselage. He turned to me, all excited. ‘Look, Dad! See the plane?’ ” (55). Later, Carthew also refers to the attacks as reminiscent of a celebration when he looks out of the windows and sees floating paper: “These thousands of fluttering pieces of paper reminded me of the showers of paper so dear to New Yorkers during Broadway tickertape parades. What are we celebrating today?” (85). Beigbender also ironically links the burning towers to a symbol of American identity, the statue of liberty, when he says: “That morning, three torches burned in New Amsterdam: the torch atop the Statue of Liberty, that of the North Tower, that of the South Tower” (123).

Another striking contradiction is Beigbeder's use of humour to represent the tragedy. The title of one section of the novel is "Concerto for coughs, sneezes, throat-clearing and asphyxia" (90), again showing the unsettling link between terror and art which the novel draws. Beigbeder also jokes about other possible names for the World Trade Center restaurant: "Windows on the Planes / Windows on the Crash / Windows on the Smoke / Broken Windows" (62). He justifies this by saying: "Sorry for that bout of black humor: a momentary defense against the atrocity" (62). Later, Beigbeder reflects:

[W]hat verb should one use for parking a plane in a building? Not 'to land,' since there is no longer any question of reaching land. I propose 'to skyscrape.' Example: 'Ladies and gentlemen, this is your captain speaking. We are now approaching our destination and will soon be skyscraping in Paris. [...] We hope you've enjoyed your flight with Air France and regret that we will not have the pleasure of seeing you on our airlines, or indeed anywhere else, again'. (94)

The inclusion of black humour grates at sensitivities about the events<sup>33</sup>, and relocates the attacks within uncomfortable positions, highlighting the difficulties of understanding and categorising the events. His use of contradiction, black humour, and disquieting images of violence allows him to enter into new dimensions of representation and reach new ways of understanding 9/11.

His project is to imagine and to validate the experiences of those who died in the towers, and his irreverence to sensitivities, his omissions, and the use of humour in the narrative demonstrate all of the barriers to representation. Using the voice of Carthew is an attempt to fill in some of these gaps, especially in those most horrific moments when Beigbeder reminds us that human beings were at the centre of this tragedy. An extended passage from Carthew's perspective highlights Beigbeder's commitment to the intimacy of his project as he imagines the moment of the plane's impact:

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<sup>33</sup> In light of these sensitivities, Durand exposes how the American and English versions of Beigbeder's original French novel were edited. Durand quotes a letter from Beigbeder: "Indeed, several passages were deleted from the English and American versions. The Anglo-Saxon publishers (Miramax) asked my opinion on some excerpts that could shock English and American readers. I rejected several of their demands but gave in to others, such as the comparison between the Windows on the World and Auschwitz which, according to them, could result in a pointless scandal. Same thing for the reduced fist-fucking scene [between two stock-brokers] in the towers" (qtd. in Duran 114).

When a [sic] American Airlines Boeing 767 slams into a building below your feet, there are two immediate consequences. Firstly, the skyscraper becomes a metronome and I can assure you that when One World Trade Center starts to think it's the Leaning Tower of Pisa, it feels pretty strange. This is what experts refer to as the shock wave; it makes you feel like you're in a boat in a roaring storm or, to use a metaphor my kids would understand, like being in a blender for three or four seconds. Glasses of juice shatter on the floor, lights come away from the walls and dangle from wires; wooden ceilings collapse and the sound of breaking crockery comes from the kitchens. In the bar, bottles roll and explode. Bouquets of sunflowers topple and vases shatter into a thousand pieces. Champagne buckets spill onto the carpet. Dessert trolleys skate down the aisles. Faces tremble as much as the walls. Secondly, your ears burn as the fireball passes the window, then everything is swathed in thick smoke; it seeps from the floor, the walls, the elevator shafts, the air vents; tracking down an incredible number of openings designed to let in fresh air and now doing the reverse: the ventilation system becomes a fumigation system. Immediately, people start to cough and cover their mouths with napkins. (59-60)

Passages like these highlight the corporeal experience of violence and trauma, and Beigbender variously offers disturbingly graphic descriptions of physical distress and destruction. The physical devastation, loss of understanding and reality, and the loss of narrative or authorial power can all be viewed as linked to an overarching loss: the collapse of a sense of boundaries, and in turn the loss of safety and of identity which were previously defined by the existence of these boundaries. These boundaries encompass an understanding of power, the outsider and national identity which has been disrupted by the attacks. These boundaries are unsettled by the transnational nature of the attacks, leading to entanglements with the other.

DeLillo's *Falling Man* presents many similar expressions of the difficulty surrounding representation and of the different dimensions of loss. The irreverent representation of the attacks manifests in the unsettling image of the performance artist known as Falling Man, who re-enacts the image of those who jumped from the towers by hanging upside down from a harness in public spaces. The physicality of loss is shown through Keith's injuries suffered in the attacks, and how he continues to practice recuperative wrist exercises even when his wrist has healed. Lianne also seems to suffer from a form of "ambiguous loss" (Boss 553) towards Keith, firstly through a confusion of whether or not Keith is alive immediately after the attacks, and later through the physical presence of Keith when he has become a ghost-like figure in her life, where

as Pauline Boss explains, “persons are emotionally and/or cognitively missing to the people who care about them” (554).

These forms of loss seem to relate to a constant state of vulnerability for the characters. Keith reflects on his memories of the attacks: “These were the days after and now the years, a thousand having dreams, the trapped man, the fixed limbs, the dream of paralysis, the gasping man, the dream of asphyxiation, the dream of helplessness” (230). Keith is greatly affected by the trauma suffered in the attacks, and he tries to counter this loss by recreating aspects of his life before 9/11 in the form of recreating the poker game which he shared with friends by becoming a professional poker player in Las Vegas.

This loss is also represented through difficulties with fatherhood and the loss of innocence in children. Keith’s son Justin has to make sense of a world where he feels vulnerable to attack and tries to understand the terrorists within his own framework. In *Windows on the World*, Jerry and David need to come to terms with realising that they cannot be saved from the burning tower, and need to abandon their child-like understanding of the attacks as a game and of their father as a superhero who will save them. Keith’s role as father and husband is affected since his family firstly believe that he has died in the attacks, and when he returns alive he leaves his family again to pursue life as a poker player in Las Vegas. Beigbender demonstrates the unsettling of fatherhood through the death of Carthew, his inability to save his children, as well as Beigbender’s discussions of his personal disappointments as a father. It is important to note that even before 9/11, these paternal roles were disrupted by absent fathers in both novels, and the attacks seem to require a renewed paternal role from these fathers, but ultimately one that they cannot sustain. The sons, Jerry, David and Justin, realise that their fathers cannot protect them from terrorism, and seem to have lost childhood innocence when they need to make sense of the attacks for themselves.

Beigbender reflects on many of these themes in a passage where he describes his visit to New York, touching on the loss of innocence, the blending of reality and fiction, the effects on relationships with the other, and how terror continues after the attacks: “[A flight to New York offers] a sense of being in a B movie, paranoia, saccharine pity, a nonchalant air masking your absurd terror, an obsessive interest in every passerby – especially anyone with a beard or a mustache [sic] (162). In his description of post-9/11 New York, Beigbender speaks about the

community of vulnerability again, a community which he feels a part of, constructing American identity around the symbols of money, media, militancy and especially fear:

The stock market is plummeting. The Dow will soon be 7,000, 6,500, lower? Unemployment is rising. New York City is bankrupt (it has \$3.6 billion deficit) – quick, start a war, get the economy moving. Every TV channel talks about bombing raids in Iraq. In return, every New Yorker waits for a nuclear terrorist attack. In the schools, children are given leaflets explaining how to seal doors with insulating tape in case of a chemical attack. Many families have equipped themselves with survival kits: torches and spare batteries, rope, water, Iosat pills (medically developed to protect against radiation sickness). The yellow alert has been raised to an orange alert. And me, I'm wandering the streets of a threatened city looking for my navel. (170)

This search for a “navel” could allude to Beigbeder’s constructed link to the Western community of vulnerability, trying to form his own identity in a world he sees as terror-based. He could also be referring to his role as author looking for a link to the novel that he writes, seeking to represent the effects of an attack which has created the fear and loss which he witnesses and fictionalises. Beigbeder refers to another impact on identity which he witnesses on his trip: “New Yorkers have become unbelievably considerate, helpful, thoughtful, polite [...] apocalyptic politeness. The end of the world makes people kind [...] September 11 has had two diametrically opposed consequences: kindness at home, cruelty abroad” (195).

Within the framework of the community of vulnerability which Beigbeder sees himself as a part of, this other is the threat outside, the terrorist. Ultimately both novels seem to question what it means to be an American after the attacks, what remains of the American dream, and how self-understanding is reached in relation to the other who has made their presence so forcefully felt in America. These questions are addressed by deconstructing the American dream, breaking apart the nuclear family and speaking of money, consumerism and individuality in irreverent terms to show how these concepts are affected by the attacks and how the characters understand themselves within this framework. The terrorist figures who have carried out these attacks are seen to represent the unsettling force for post-9/11 identity, but also act as a point against which a new and very problematic identity based on fear and vulnerability can be created. Both novels address these terrorist figures in ways which give insight into how characters make sense of the attacks and of their own identities.

### 3.2 The Intrusive Terrorist: Entanglements with the Other

Where there are suicide bombings [...] In those places where it happens, the survivors, the people nearby who are injured, sometimes, months later, they develop bumps, for lack of a better term, and it turns out this is caused by small fragments, tiny fragments of the suicide bomber's body. The bomber is blown to bits, literally bits and pieces, and fragments of flesh and bone come flying outward with such force and velocity that they get wedged, they get trapped in the body of anyone who's in striking range. Do you believe it? A student is sitting in a café. She survives the attack. Then, months later, they find these little, like, pellets of flesh, human flesh that got driven into the skin. They call this organic shrapnel. (DeLillo, *Falling Man* 16)

The description of organic shrapnel in *Falling Man* suggests a deep connection between terrorist and terrorised. The characters bear the psychological effects long after the attacks, where the terrorist penetrates their consciousness and affects the way they see and react to their world. The image of physically carrying fragments of the terrorist strikingly evokes the theme of entanglement which DeLillo's novel portrays, and which he has discussed in his essay "In the ruins of the future: Reflections on terror and loss in the shadow of September".<sup>34</sup> The first instance in *Falling Man* where the psychological connection is suggested, is when Lianne finds a postcard from a friend which was sent to her home before the attacks but arrives three days after. Lianne is left in a daze after the attacks, but the postcard "snap[s] her back" (8), making her conscious of the way the perpetrators of the attacks have penetrated her life when she becomes affected by an uncanny coincidence. The face of the postcard depicts "a reproduction of the cover of Shelly's poem in twelve cantos, first edition, called Revolt of Islam" (8). Lianne reflects 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" (8). The postcard causes her to emerge from the dream-like state which both novels characterise after the attacks, highlighting the theme of an altered sense of reality. The moment of discovering the postcard is preceded by her

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<sup>34</sup> DeLillo's essay exposes many of the themes which his novel deals with, and highlights the idea of entanglements, as he explains: "Today, again, the world narrative belongs to terrorists. But the primary target of the men who attacked the Pentagon and the World Trade Center was not the global economy. It is America that drew their fury. It is the high gloss of our modernity. It is the thrust of our technology. It is our perceived godlessness. It is the blunt force of our foreign policy. It is the power of American culture to penetrate every wall, home, life, and mind. Terror's response is a narrative that has been developing over years, only now becoming inescapable. It is *our* lives and minds that are occupied now. The catastrophic event changes the way we think and act [...] Our world, parts of our world, have crumbled into theirs, which means we are living in a place of danger and rage" (33).

noticing a shadow on a wall: “she was looking past the lamp into the wall, where they seemed to be projected, the man and woman, bodies incomplete but bright and real” (8). This image foreshadows the quest of Lianne and Keith to project a new understanding of reality by trying to rebuild their marriage, but the projection of this image by artificial light, the fact that the bodies are “incomplete” (8), and the disruption of her reverie by the postcard shows how the construction of this new reality in the face of 9/11 will be unsuccessful. The fact that these bodies seem “bright and real” (8) to Lianne, but that she later characterises them as a dream from which she is “snapped [...] back” (8) points to the fact that even though she tries to reach back to understanding and stability by recreating something which she identifies with before the attacks, namely her marriage to Keith, the attacks now cause her to question the reality of this as well. What she now identifies as existing on a higher level of reality is the presence of terror, and the effects of the attacks on her surroundings and on her identity. This reality is, paradoxically, mediated through representation, firstly through the postcard but also through many references to news media. These examples demonstrate the link between representation and identity in the novel, as the characters begin to define their reality as mediated through images in the media and through representations of terrorism or of Islam, two ideas which become conflated after 9/11.

The hyperreality afforded these representations is due to the forcefulness and violence which is attached to the event which they represent. The penetration of the terrorist figure into consciousness seems to be linked to violence and vulnerability, as shown by Keith’s almost religious reverence for his wrist exercises, even when he is healed from the injuries suffered in the attacks. The representations also become personified in how Osama bin Laden is represented in *Windows* as synonymous with terrorism, as Leach explains that “the immediate American response to single out and ‘demonize’ bin Laden speaks of a parallel urge to symbolize and ‘envision’ the enemy” (90). Lianne seems to be the character most perceptive towards these representations in *Falling Man*, and tries to make sense of them: “She saw the face in the newspaper, the man from Flight 11. Only one of the nineteen seemed to have a face at this point, staring out of the photo, taut, with hard eyes that seemed too knowing to belong to a face on a driver’s license” (19). The images of terrorism permeate her consciousness, creating a defining image but one which is still resisted: “Every time she saw a videotape of the planes she moved a finger toward the power button on the remote. Then she kept on watching” (134). She seems to be powerless to resist the infiltration of terror, demonstrated by the way in which the images of

terror affect her: “The second plane coming out of that ice blue sky, this was the footage that entered the body, that seemed to run beneath her skin, the fleeting sprint that carried lives and histories, theirs and hers, everyone’s, into some other distance, out beyond the towers” (134). When these “lives and histories” are carried “out beyond the towers”, they are able to transcend the particular event and influence the consciousness and identities of those affected long after the attacks.

The act of representation and its effects on memory, history and in turn identity are highlighted in sections of the novel which detail Lianne’s work with a writing group for people with Alzheimer’s disease. One of the members of this group, Anna, speaks of death, agency, and blame in her attempts to make sense of terrorism, giving a hypothetical reflection:

[I]f he has a heart attack, we blame him. Eats, overeats, no exercise, no common sense [...] Or he dies of cancer. Smoked and couldn’t stop. That was Mike. If it’s cancer, then it’s lung cancer and we blame him. But this, what happened, it’s way too big, it’s outside someplace, on the other side of the world. You can’t get to these people or even see them in their pictures in the paper. You can see their faces but what does it mean? Means nothing to call them names. I’m a name-caller from before I was born. Do I know what to call these people? (64)

The reflection points to the fact that the perpetrators of this intimate violence are only accessible through representations, yet these representations are insufficient to provide full understanding. The inadequacy of representation points again to the metanarrative predicament of the author, who as Beigbender asserts can never truly reflect the horror of the attacks or the way it has affected individuals. It also links to the difficulty of reconciling representations of terrorists with the human agents they reflect, especially when their motivations are alien to the characters and when they are seen as outsiders. Anna continues her reflection by wondering about retribution and blame when the terrorists are “a million miles outside [her] life. Which, besides, they’re dead” (64). She highlights the precariousness of the hyperreal terrorist who is removed through representation and through death, yet still permeates the lives of these characters.

The terrorists have intruded into physical and psychological spaces, causing injury, death and trauma. This figure who was once peripheral now becomes something powerful and central,



and something which causes a shift in perspective, yet they still remain what Irfan Khawaja calls “a series of unidentifiable and seemingly incomprehensible enemies” (Khawaja 54).

Beigbeder does not represent the terrorist figure in his novel, seeming to echo the predicament of representation which Anna refers to. Even though the actions of the terrorists affect the characters and Beigbeder himself so greatly, he seems to be unable to “get to these people” (DeLillo, *Falling Man* 64). The absence of the terrorist figure in Beigbeder’s novel is powerful in that it highlights the difficulty of understanding and representation, an omission which might link to the deliberate omission of the most graphic horrors in his novel. Beigbeder portrays his characters as reflecting on politically or religiously motivated terrorists, but does not represent the subjectivities of terrorists, relying instead on their symbolic function. Leach explains that “definitions of the other must be founded inevitably on [...] an understanding of what constitutes the self inscribed within its own ideological position” (89), and in this way the terrorist for Beigbeder embodies the symbolic enemy of American power.

DeLillo, however, offers extended sections detailing the subjectivity of one of the perpetrators of the attacks, Hammad. These sections fictionalise the thoughts and experiences of Hammad as he prepares for the attacks. Linda S. Kauffman notes that Hammad “secretly harbors doubts about jihad. He wants marriage and children. He has an overwhelming desire simply to be ‘normal’ – which he knows he must resist” (354). In the sections of *Falling Man* detailing the experiences of Hammad and his accomplices, political and religious motivations are conflated during the discussions of the group while they train for the attacks. The mood often escalates to hysteria and the descriptions of the conversations in many cases are erratic and convoluted: “The talk was fire and light, the emotion contagious. They were in this country to pursue technical educations but in these rooms they spoke about the struggle. Everything here was twisted, hypocrite, the West corrupt of mind and body, determined to shiver Islam down to bread crumbs for birds” (79). DeLillo’s descriptions of these conversations seem to paint these figures as embodying dedication to their mission. The group mentality seems to centre on anger and hatred towards the West, giving a stereotypical description of almost inhuman terrorist figures. This is most clearly portrayed through the leader of the group, better known as Mohamed Atta (80), but who is called by the nickname Amir in the novel. Amir seems to locate his

understanding of Islam within the framework of action and of struggle against what he describes as Western enemies:

The man who led discussions, this was Amir and he was intense, a small thin wiry man who spoke to Hammad in his face. He was very genius, others said, and he told them that a man can stay forever in a room, doing blueprints, eating and sleeping, even praying, even plotting, but at a certain point he has to get out. Even if the room is a place of prayer, he can't stay there all his life. Islam is the world outside the prayer room as well as the *sūrah*s in the Koran. Islam is the struggle against the enemy, near enemy and far, Jews first, for all things unjust and hateful, and then the Americans. (80)

Amir conflates Islam with violence, and Kauffman holds that “Atta is the true believer who eliminates all contradictions. With his superior powers of abstraction and rhetoric, Atta breaks down Hammad’s resistance” (355). Islam is also contrasted with Jewish and American enemies who are described as “unjust and hateful” (80) by Amir, and the fact that they “looked at videos of jihad in other countries” (80) and their isolation points to the conditioning which takes place in order to negate individual identity in the name of dedication to the violent version of Islam which is espoused by these characters. Although Hammad initially seems to question this sacrifice of the personal for the political by acting as a voice of compassion for the death of boys who sought to defend Islam, the group “stared him down [and] talked him down” (80), and he is made to see the individual deaths as being in the service of something greater, where, as Amir holds, “each man becomes the other, and the other still another, and then there is no separation” (80).

The identity of these characters seems to rest on their commitment to a distorted version of Islam as based on violence against “enemies”, a sense of othering which allows them to define their cause. Kauffman explains that “[a]s [Hammad] reluctantly surrenders his individuality, he imagines his life gaining mystery, status, and structure. He acquires a meaning and purpose larger than himself” (356). While the loss of individual identity is self-imposed, their conversations suggest that their identity is also oppressed by the defining symbol of their enemies, capitalism: “There was the feeling of lost history. They were too long in isolation. This is what they talked about, being crowded out by other cultures, other futures, the all-enfolding will of capital markets and foreign policies” (80). The “feeling of lost history” and the fact that they “were too long in isolation” (80) could emphasise the fact that the characters seek to assert

themselves and claim a place in history,<sup>35</sup> granting the terrorist figures narrative power. They are afforded narrative scope in DeLillo's novel, and are able to impose their "plot" (174) on their enemies.

These terrorist characters thus initially seem to be symbols of violence and of devotion instead of developed subjectivities. During his training in Germany, Hammad demonstrates his own devotion to this plot when he enacts violence on a man on instruction (81-2), and later dedicates himself to violence: "They 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" (171). The group also form their identity around paranoia and a distinct awareness of being outsiders while in America: "Nobody knocked down their door in the middle of the night and nobody stopped them in the street to turn their pockets inside out and grope their bodies for weapons. But they knew that Islam was under attack" (82-3).

Hammad, however, complicates this simplistic understanding by exhibiting levels of characterisation not afforded to the rest of his group. He is often shown in opposition to the rigid and fundamentalist requirements proposed by the rest of his group and especially Amir, notably in the way he questions the death of young boys in pursuit of what is described as jihad (80). Hammad, while ultimately fulfilling his pledge, displays a complex relationship with the requirements placed on him by his group and with the apparent single-mindedness which they display. This is portrayed through the contrast of sex and religion which Hammad portrays when "[I]ate one night, he had to step over the prone form of a brother in prayer as he made his way to the toilet to jerk off" (80). The body is again used as a site of identification, where the religious zealotry of his companions is unsettled by Hammad's sexual act. Beigbender emphasises the opposition of sex and religion which both novels portray when he places sexual liberalism in opposition to fundamentalist religion and terrorism (Beigbender 189). Hammad also has a sexual relationship with a woman and does not dedicate himself to his religious precepts, something which Amir reprimands him for, since his actions seemingly blur the lines between their group identity and outsiders:

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<sup>35</sup> This can be contrasted to Francis Fukuyama's assertion that the end of history has been reached insofar as "market democracy is the best form [of] government that trumps alternative visions of political economy" (Kampmark 33).

Amir looked at him, seeing right down to his base self. Hammad knew what he would say. Eating all the time, pushing food in your face, slow to approach your prayers. There was more. Being with a shameless woman, dragging your body over hers. What is the difference between you and all the others, outside our space? [...] Hammad in a certain way thought this was unfair. But the closer he examined himself, the truer the words. He had to fight against the need to be normal. He had to struggle against himself, first, and then against the injustice that haunted their lives. (83)

When Hammad needs to “struggle against himself” (83), he is demonstrating the loss of individual identity, the loss of what he identifies as “normal” (83). Placing Hammad’s assertion that Amir’s restrictions were “unfair” so close to his need to “struggle against [...] the injustice that haunted their lives” (83) again highlights the irony of defining Amir’s injustice against that of the enemies and enacting the same lifestyle which they struggle against. Beigbeder refers to this irony in *Windows* when he says:

The air pirates lived comfortably in Florida in small sea-side resorts with beaches and shopping malls. I need someone to explain this to me. One day, someone will have to explain to me how fifteen young, Westernized Saudi graduates in suits, whose families lived in Germany and later in America; guys who drank wine, watched TV, drove cars and flight simulators, ate at Pizza Hut, occasionally visited prostitutes, sex shops; how men like this could slit the throat of the stewardess with a craft knife (you have to hold the girl with one hand, a stewardess wriggles a lot, shrieks, loud piercing screams, you have to press the blade hard against the carotid and the trachea, pierce the skin, cutting the nerves, blood spurts everywhere, she struggles, kicking her heels into your shins, digging her elbow into your solar plexus)... no, it’s not an easy thing to do, how these guys could take control of four Boeings only to destroy them by flying them into buildings in the name of Allah. I’m quite prepared to accept that Allah is great, but even so. (267)

Beigbeder’s incomprehension stems from the confluence of religion and violence, and he demonstrates this through his difficulty to enter the psychological space of the terrorist. Their devotion seems to stem from political reasons as a reaction to “the injustice that haunted their lives” (*Falling Man* 83), yet these ideas become conflated with religious devotion in DeLillo’s novel and seem to require a loss of identity.

Hammad’s loss of individual identity is gradual, beginning with the conditioning in isolation with his group in a room in Germany. Later, in a passage highlighting the contradiction of Hammad’s loss of identity, he is placed in a hub of consumerism, a supermarket, and distances

himself from his surroundings: “Hammad pushed a cart through the supermarket. He was invisible to these people and they were becoming invisible to him” (171). Hammad could be alluding to the way he feels excluded from history and to the political injustices which he bases his violence on, however he starts to dehumanise the people around him as well, essentialising them as enemies. Abel explains this invisibility by referring to a similar scene in DeLillo’s essay “In the Ruins of the Future”: “Incomprehensible to most of ‘us’ [Americans], the terrorist does not see the woman [in the supermarket] and is thus not touched by the image – because he exists in a narrative ‘format’ and mood that differ from ours” (Abel 1242). This narrative distance, Abel explains, has to do with Hollywood conceptions of the importance of plot, whereas “the terrorist pursues the ‘apocalypse’ [...] a narrative where logic and understanding, or knowledge, have no purchase on the event” (1242). Since Hammad has become consumed by this alternative ‘plot’ of the ‘apocalypse’, he falls into the realm of the incomprehensible which Abel alludes to, and thus the two narratives become invisible to each other. Hammad echoes the mutual invisibility when watching people in an American park: “These people jogging in the park, world domination. These old men who sit in beach chairs, veined white bodies and baseball caps, they control our world. He wonders if they think of this, ever. He wonders if they see him standing there, clean-shaven, in tennis sneakers” (173). Invisibility becomes a metaphor for political powerlessness, and religion is used as a lens to understand this, where the loss of identity is understood as furthering his devotion to religion and to his cause. By embracing ideas about his own invisibility and by making those who he sees as powerful become invisible to him, he gains a feeling of power at the same time as a distance from humanity, both his own humanity and that of those he has defined as enemies. This ultimately leads to inhuman violence, the removal of subjectivities, when his understanding is no longer of killing people but rather of fulfilling a religious obligation, or, in accordance with Abel’s narrative analysis, he becomes devoted to his plot of apocalypse. Additionally, in the same way that Hammad is unable to humanise the Americans he encounters, relegating them to political images, the reader will not be able to humanise the terrorist. Abel explains: “[T]he other does not even acknowledge – is not capable of acknowledging – our self. The other bypasses us. The terrorist’s self is already other to our concept of the self; the terrorist’s self is non-self-identical: the I of the self is always already another” (1242).

Hammad is, however, still shown to have an understanding of the human element in his violence when he asks Amir: “Never mind the man who takes his own life in this situation. What about the lives of the others he takes with him?” (176). Nevertheless, Amir seeks to convince him again that the human element is irrelevant: “Amir said simply there are no others. The others exist only to the degree that they fill the role we have designed for them. This is their function as others. Those who will die have no claim to their lives outside the useful fact of their dying” (176). Hammad later powerfully links his relegation to a force of violence within the discourse of masculinity: “He wore a bomb vest and knew he was a man now, finally, ready to close the distance to God” (171).

Hammad begins to understand himself within the symbolic realm, and demonstrates this by again pointing to representation: “He watched TV in a bar near the flight school and liked to imagine himself appearing on the screen, a videotaped figure walking through the gate-like detector on his way to the plane” (173). Even though his thoughts and actions are fraught with moments where he identifies with the lifestyle he is set to fight against, the act of turning himself into a symbol demonstrates his loss of individual identity to his goals. Seeing himself as something separate to his own subjectivity creates the distance which enables his extreme violence. This metanarrative awareness is again demonstrated in the use of the word “plot” (173), hinting at narrative while referring to the planning process or “plotting” which causes the loss of identity: “They felt the claim of danger and isolation. They felt the magnetic effect of plot. Plot drew them together more tightly than ever. Plot closed the world to the slenderest line of sight, where everything converges to a point” (174). This idea of plot is further complicated by Abel in the context of terrorism, and he explains how the loss of narrative power is linked to the danger of plot: “Plots reduce the world because plotting constitutes the virtual seed of destruction: al-Qaeda’s plotting ended in the planes’ perfectly staged and executed double impact on the Twin Towers” (1143). This idea that plots “reduce the world” also leads to Beigbeder’s problem with representation, where his own power to affect plot is taken away, and this narrative power is instead located in the actions of the terrorists.

Once he becomes a symbol, Hammad begins to look at himself within the framework of American understanding, prefiguring the lasting impact his actions will have. Abel explains: “The other has already become other to itself: it now percolates in ‘us’ and our technology,

effecting transformations in ‘us’ that cannot help altering the possibility of eradicating ‘them’ ” (1242). This deference to the understanding of the other is shown through Hammad’s conversion to American measurements: “He converted liters [sic] to gallons, grams to ounces” (175); “He converted meters to feet, multiplying by 3.28” (172); “He’d lost twenty-two kilos and converted this to pounds, multiplying by 2.2046” (171). By looking at his body and his weight loss, a symbol of his devotion, in terms of American measurements, he demonstrates both the loss of identity which in many ways is located through the body<sup>36</sup>, and his function of inflicting terror on Americans and entering the psychological space of these enemies through his symbolic actions. When Hammad is on the plane preparing for the crash, he reinforces this separation from humanity and how he transcends into the realm of ideas and of plot: “Forget the world. Be unmindful of the thing called the world. All of life’s lost time is over now. This is your long wish, to die with your brothers” (238). The novel presents the instant of the plane’s contact with the North Tower through the perspective of Hammad, but the point of view seamlessly moves from Hammad to Keith, again demonstrating the entanglements where the terrorised become haunted by images of the terrorist and the humanity of each is influenced by the event which both play a role in. The shift from Hammad’s point of view starts with his observations in the plane:

A bottle fell off the counter in the galley, on the other side of the aisle, and he watched it roll this way and that, a water bottle, empty, making an arc one way and rolling back the other, and he watched it spin more quickly and then skitter across the floor an instant before the aircraft struck the tower, heat, then fuel, then fire, and a blast wave passed through the structure that sent Keith Neudecker out of his chair and into a wall. He found himself walking into a wall. He didn’t drop the telephone until he hit the wall. The floor began to slide beneath him and he lost his balance and eased along the wall to the floor (239).

By linking Hammad and Keith in this intimate way, DeLillo points to the entanglements which would haunt Keith after the attacks. He becomes intertwined with the terrorist, and even when reconstructing his life, he cannot remove the influence of these men. Abel elaborates on the confusion of perspective in reference to DeLillo’s “In the Ruins of the Future” by saying: “Instead of providing readers with a stable viewpoint – and thus the possibility of identification –

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<sup>36</sup> See Chapters 1 and 2 for a fuller discussion of this.

the confused narrative perspective calls attention to the impossibility of (identifying with) [sic] a clear view of the events” (Abel 1244). For Lianne this entanglement affects her outlook on the world, where she begins to notice and be affected by things which otherwise would not affect her, notably representations of the events, cultural symbols she associates with the other, Falling Man’s performance art, watching the footage of the attacks on television, the reflections of her support group for people with Alzheimer’s disease, and the postcard depicting the cover of Shelly’s poem “Revolt of Islam”. She begins to reinterpret representations and how they affect her. Justin is affected through fear, representing this through the ominous protestations that the towers have not really fallen and that the terrorists will strike again. The effects of these entanglements on Keith’s identity are perhaps most widely elaborated on in the novel. His identity, in a similar fashion to Carthew in *Windows on the World*, is tied up with a pervasive discourse of masculinity, sex and fatherhood. Carthew personalises the entanglement with the other, who was once only experienced through representation, but has now affected the realm of fatherhood and thus the realm of power:

And so it happened: all those things I didn’t understand, that I didn’t want to understand; the foreign news stories I preferred to switch off, to keep out of my mind when they weren’t on the TV; all these tragedies were suddenly relevant to me; these wars came to hurt me that morning; me, not someone else; my children, not someone else’s; these things I knew nothing about, these events so geographically remote suddenly became the most important things in my life. I didn’t want the right to interfere in the domestic affairs of foreign states, but events in the outside world had just exercised their right to interfere in mine; I didn’t give a shit about wops and their homeless, drugged, raped kids with disgusting dung flies all over them, but they’d just forced their way into my house, they’d killed my fucking kids, MINE. (112)

This concern with masculinity and paternity, also noted in the two novels discussed in Chapter 2 of this thesis, is framed by national identity. In these four novels which deal at least in some way with reactions to the 9/11 attacks, masculinity becomes a theme which seems implicit in the 9/11 discourse.



### 3.3 Fatherlessness and Emasculation After 9/11

The focus on masculinity demonstrated in these novels highlights how 9/11 is situated within a discourse of power in theoretical and fictional responses to the event. Masculine power in these novels is linked to protection and control, especially in the novels of Beigbeder and DeLillo which deal with the themes of fear and vulnerability in the face of terrorism. David Holloway holds that many post-9/11 novels “sublimate contemporary anxieties about state activity, and about the state’s jeopardising of the safety of its citizens, in stories about the failures of family members to protect one another” (108), and particularly in this case, through stories about fathers who fail to protect their families and themselves from terror. The reason masculinity and sex become carriers for these concerns is that they easily slot into the symbolism of the attacks – the destruction of two “phallic and masculinist” (Simpson 59) towers which had once demonstrated economic power and domination, and the penetration of a seemingly invulnerable nation – and the traditional understandings of masculinity allows for the symbol of disempowered fathers to have new resonance.<sup>37</sup> In addition, approximately 3,051 children lost a parent in the attacks, and more men were lost than women (Boss 552), highlighting the reality of fatherlessness after the attacks as a major form of loss. The link between fathers and children is also threatened by the attacks, as Carthew poignantly reflects on his own attempts to overcome death through his children: “I used to think that having kids was the best way of triumphing over death. Even that’s not true. It is possible to die with them, and it is as though we had never existed” (223). The fathers are faced with a situation which they cannot control and cannot protect their families from, and in this way they feel that their masculinity is threatened as well. Carthew reflects extensively on the feelings of tension between himself and his sons while trapped inside the North Tower. His reflections are centred on the fact that he is a distant and inadequate father, and that he fears the judgement of his sons in this regard. He speaks about fatherhood as a role which

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<sup>37</sup> In light of the masculine comparison, David Simpson holds that the towers looked “like a sword in the raised hand of a militant nation-state” (Simpson 58), and quotes the architect of the towers, Minoru Yamasaki, as saying “[t]he World Trade Centre is a living symbol of man’s dedication to world peace... a representation of man’s belief in humanity, his need for individual dignity, his beliefs in the cooperation of men, and through cooperation, his ability to find greatness” (qtd. in Simpson 58). Puar and Rai locate post-9/11 America by using the language of sex, masculinity and reproduction, analysing “the initial emasculation of the white male state (signaled by the castration of the trade towers on September 11) and the ongoing remasculinization through the war on terrorism” (Puar & Rai 138).

has lost its position of power over children, where he depends on his son Jerry and feels like a disappointment to him:

Honest, sincere, brave: Jerry is the man I should have been. Sometimes I think he despises me. I think I disappoint him. Oh well: it's a father's destiny to disappoint his son. Look at Luke Skywalker, his father is Darth Vader! [...] I need you, Jerry. In the old days, kids depended on their parents to guide them. Now it's the opposite. (66-7)

Later, Beigbender clarifies why the father has now lost power to the son by contextualising this relationship within a discussion of staying young. Speaking of his son David, Carthew says: "I'm forty-three and recently I've started to imitate [David]. As I said before: these days, parents imitate their kids. Do you know a better way of staying young?" (67-8). The discussion emphasizes Carthew's various fears of mortality and ageing, which are physical manifestations of his fear of losing freedom which he associates with youth. This freedom which Carthew hopes to reclaim is demonstrated mostly through sex. However, this quest for sexual freedom creates the tension between father and son, since the father begins to resent his own deviation from the ideals of fatherhood and from his ideals of masculinity, where he becomes a "bastard" (106) and where his sons are more like the "man [he] should have been" (66). Carthew reflects on his infidelity by referring to his distance from his own father and to the model of repressed sexuality and suburban melancholy embodied by the protagonist of the film *American Beauty*, Lester Burnham:

How did I get to be a bastard? Was Mary suddenly less of a turn-on than the secretaries at Austin Maxi? When exactly did I go off the rails? When Jerry was born, when David was born? I think it happened the day I looked in the mirror in my walk-in closet and realized I'd started dressing like my father. It had all happened so fast – job, marriage, kids. I didn't want this life anymore. I didn't want to be like my father. [...] Paterfamilias is a full-time job; the problem is, I know fewer and fewer men who are prepared to take it on. We've been shown too many images of men who are free, poetic and attractive, exhausted with pleasure; rock'n'roll types running from their responsibilities straight into the arms of girls in dental-floss bikinis. How could anyone want to be like Lester Burnham when society idolizes Jim Morrison? (106)

Carthew defines his social context as one which has moved away from "middle-class ideas of the perfect family: that a man shouldn't leave the mother of his children even if he's in love with

another woman, that if he does, he's a bastard, an asshole with no sense of responsibilities" (201). He claims that these social restrictions have become unappealing and that men seek the "free, poetic" (106) life which he describes in sexual terms. Keith similarly reflects on his role as father and husband with reference to ageing and restriction:

In one hundred days or so, he would be forty years old. This was his father's age. His father was forty, his uncles. They would always be forty, looking aslant at him. How is it possible that he was about to become someone of clear and distinct definition, husband and father, finally, occupying a room in three dimensions in the manner of his parents? (157)

These fathers are represented in the novels as something toxic to the traditional family structure, disrupting it through their resistance to responsibility and through this quest to stay young, and their families are constructed as stifling their freedom. Both Carthew and Keith are unfaithful to their wives, and eventually leave their families, symbolising this friction between traditional paternal power and the power of sexual freedom which seems to be favoured. Carthew reflects on his own absence as a father by saying: "There are worse things in life than having an absent father: having a present father. Someday you'll thank me for not smothering you. You'll realize I was helping you find your wings, pampering you from afar" (25). The father's absence is equated with the independence of the son, and Carthew, perhaps as a means of vindication, sees it as preparing his son for manhood.

This tension between father and son creates guilt in the father for his own inadequacy, and in the context of 9/11, Carthew feels guilt that he is unable to protect his children or provide them with understanding of the events which befall them. In this sense the children of both novels become symbols of innocence and victimhood, and highlight the sense of incomprehension which the attacks cause for the characters. David asks Carthew: "But why are the planes flying into the towers? Are they crazy or what?" (113). David and Jerry's reliance on Carthew for protection and orientation is demonstrated in the belief that Carthew has superpowers: "Dad has to use his secret superpowers, the ones that only kick in when there's megadanger. He'll probably mutate in a couple of nanoseconds: it's like Clark Kent, you have to give him time" (133).

In this quest for freedom and youth which the father seeks, he exists within the narrative of his children who possess these qualities. The children are given narrative power here, shown in

Carthew's imitation of his son David, and the fathers demonstrate failed narratives of protection such as Carthew's failed attempt to convince his sons that the attacks are part of a theme-park ride. Whereas the fathers are unable to reconcile their understandings of the attacks, the sons are able to form child-like myths which comfort them.

These themes of innocence and incomprehension, as well as the reversal of the roles of parent and child present themselves in *Falling Man* through a myth created by Justin and his two friends. The children create their own understanding of the attacks, one which their parents try to restrain. Isabel, the mother of the Justin's friends, explains to Lianne:

I can hear them talking when I walk by and I know [they're standing at the window]. They're at the window talking in this sort of code [...] it's getting a little strange, frankly, all the time they spend, first, sort of huddled together, and then, I don't know, like endlessly whispering things in this semi-gibberish [...] It has something to do with this man [...] the name they sort of mumble back and forth. (17)

The ritualistic and secretive discussions which the children engage in echo the passages of the terrorists "huddled together" (17) in a room. Slowly the parents begin to piece together the mythology which their children have constructed about the events of 9/11, and eventually discover that it centres on a character called Bill Lawton, which is "the name they [...] mumble back and forth" (17). Their ritual of staring out of the window involves using binoculars (37) to stare at the destroyed towers. Lianne explains to Keith:

The name [Bill Lawton] originates with Robert [Justin's friend]. This much I know. The rest I mostly surmise. Robert thought, from television or school or somewhere, that he was hearing a certain name. Maybe he heard the name once, or misheard it, then imposed this version on future occasions. In other words he never adjusted his original sense of what he was hearing [...] He was hearing Bill Lawton. They were saying bin Laden. (73)

Keith expands on the mythology with the pieces he is able to gather from the children: "Bill Lawton has a long beard. He wears a long robe [...] He flies jet planes and speaks thirteen languages but not English except to his wives. What else? He has the power to poison what we eat but only certain foods. [The children are] working on a list" (74). Later, Justin claims that Bill Lawton has communicated with the children as well: "he says things about the planes. We know they're coming because he says they are. But that's all I'm allowed to say. He says this

time the towers will fall [...] this time coming, he says, they'll really come down" (102). Lianne is unsettled by this myth which the children invent, and tries to dispel it. Justin and his friends position the attacks within their own frame of reference, transforming the name bin Laden to Bill Lawton, and transferring numerous attributes which they have presumably heard through media onto this single figure. Keith and Lianne attempt to challenge the narrative of Justin even though they seem to lack understanding of the attacks themselves and work through their own forms of representation to reach understanding:

They talked to him. They tried to make gentle sense. She couldn't locate the menace she felt, listening to him. His repositioning of events frightened her in an unaccountable way. He was making something better than it really was, the towers still standing, but the time reversal, the darkness of the final thrust, how better becomes worse, these were the elements of a failed fairy tale, eerie enough but without coherence. It was the fairy tale children tell, not the one they listen to, devised by adults. (102)

These myths seem to demonstrate a link between the children and the terrorists, both in the children's ability to communicate with Bill Lawton and in their isolated and secretive discussions which are reminiscent of the sections detailing Hammad's indoctrination. The reference to the towers still standing is an ominous one, creating a sense of something unfinished and of impending danger. By attempting to curb the myth, distance is created between the parents and children. Eventually the children no longer allow the parents into discussions about Bill Lawton, and Lianne becomes detached from this myth as she struggles to remember Bill Lawton's name while walking on a rainy day with Justin: "She tried to remember the name but could not do it. The kid would not walk beneath the spread umbrella, staying four paces back" (153). What these stories portray is the different ways in which children and adults in the novels attempt to deal with the feelings of incomprehension following the attacks, and how they attempt to regain power through representation. The representations create power for children who feel powerless in the context of the events they are faced with, and who are already distanced from their fathers whose feelings of inadequacy and guilt are heightened by the attacks. By affording narrative power to children and to the terrorists, and removing this power from fathers who are already distanced from their paternal roles, the novels demonstrate the destabilising of power in relation to terror, how the role of protection located in the father has failed when terror penetrates this paternal protection and reaches to the sons, and again how incomprehension, fear, victimhood and vulnerability displayed in the narratives of children become the most pervasive

narratives after 9/11. The children and the terrorists are both involved in narrating fear and in displaying the inadequacy of the protector-father, creating the link between these two narrators.

The fathers, losing their paternal power through their vulnerability in the attacks, seem to however find new power in sex, as Keith starts an affair with another 9/11 survivor, Florence, and Carthew finds sexual excitement in watching two people trapped in the tower with him while many people are dying around them: “The two traders [...] clambered onto the [...] conference table. He dropped his pants and she took off her blouse. Their bodies are salon-tanned; despite the stench of death and the unbearable heat, it’s really hot to watch them” (286). The men seem to suggest that sex is an answer to death, for Keith and Florence a way of demonstrating their own defiance of death since they both survived the attacks and start an affair “with its point of origin in smoke and fire” (161), and for Carthew sexual freedom is a way of staying young. The novels present the overshadowing presence of death for the characters<sup>38</sup>, and sex seems to act as a testimony to life. Keith and Lianne experience a heightened sexual awareness when he returns to live with her immediately after the attacks, and even mundane activities are defined as sexual since they become an affirmation of Keith’s survival: “It wasn’t just those days and nights in bed. Sex was everywhere at first, in words, phrases, half gestures, the simplest intimation of altered space. She’d put down a book or magazine and a small pause settled around them. This was sex” (7). Beigbeder demonstrates this contrast between sex and death when he details a discussion which he has with a dancer at a strip-club in New York. The dancer says to him:

When the club opened again a week after the attack, the girls couldn’t believe it: it was full of blue-collar workers dead on their feet who snapped up the free drinks, and us, too! They wanted to talk. There were ambulances and fire trucks screaming all the time outside the door. Everything was burning, These guys needed something to take their minds off things. I remember when I’d bend down to pick up my clothes, they were caked in white dust. (176)

The memory of the attacks is physically present even in the attempts to be distracted from it by sex, in the form of the “white dust” (176) which finds its way onto the dancer’s clothes, and for Keith, in the form of Florence herself. What sex is able to do is create a contrast between

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<sup>38</sup> Kauffman notes of *Falling Man*: “Death is everywhere in the novel – in the air, the clothes, the smells of the city in the weeks and months following the attacks. It haunts all the characters’ consciousness. They are obsessed with disintegration: psychic, spatial, temporal, national, and marital. The novel is a sustained meditation on time, chance, loss, and mutability” (367).

these ever-present memories of the attacks and a testament to life, freedom and renewal through the realm of the physical. Sex offers a form of power especially to the disempowered fathers presented in the novel. Beigbeder muses on the power of sex and how it can be seen as a means of thwarting the fear and restrictions which terrorism has imposed:

Does pleasure replace fear? Fanatics are hitting the fan. Their terrorization has produced precisely the reverse of what they had hoped. Hedonism is at its peak. Babylon lives again! Women aren't veiling their faces; on the contrary, they're stripping off in restaurants, playing blindman's bluff, making out with coworkers and kissing strange boys at 'speed-dating' evenings. A new jazz age gets under way in an excess of debauchery while we bomb foreign countries. People teasingly make out, and terrorism falls to pieces. Terrorism terrorizes no one: it shores up freedom. Sex dances with death. There are no winners, only losers like me. (189)

The contrast of sex with terrorism links with Carthew's ideas of the father who stays young through sexual freedom, pointing to sex as a remedy for loss of power. This reliance on sex however creates tension in the fathers who seek to return to more traditional masculine roles within the nuclear family after the attacks, when they try to act as a protector for their children and as a lover for their spouses. Carthew begins to regret leaving his wife and considers himself a "bastard" (106) for it. Keith similarly moves back in with Lianne and Justin after the attacks.

When the attacks seem to offer the opportunity for these men to become active and present fathers again, it seems to be only momentary. For Keith, Florence, as a link to the attacks, seems to take priority in his life, in the same way that he becomes obsessed with his wrist exercises even after his injury has healed. He becomes consumed with memories of the attacks, and his life with Lianne is unable to counter this. He finds consolation in sex with Florence and freedom in the form of moving to Las Vegas and becoming a professional poker player. Lianne reflects on Keith's leaving as a sort of return to normality, seeing Keith's return as a disruption: "She was ready to be alone, in reliable calm, she and the kid, the way they were before the planes appeared that day" (236). In the confusion of power following terror, the men seek to adopt a paternal role in order to externalise a form of power which they had not even exhibited before the attacks.

The loss of masculine power for Beigbeder is ironically located in the sexual freedom of women. He alludes to the sexual power of women, yet still focuses this through the power of men to seduce women and the fear which men have of these new powerful women, not allowing

the novel to afford these women clearly defined power themselves. Watching women in New York, Beigbeder comments:

Bin Laden wishes these girls harm. I wish them well, with their nipples hard in their tight crop tops. And it's at this point that I have an epiphany. Today's INTERNATIONAL PLAYBOY is a woman. It's Bridget Jones or Carrie Bradshaw (the heroine of *Sex and the City*). These are the people the fanatical Muslims are scared of, and I can understand why. They scare me shitless too, with their heavy artillery: mascara, lip gloss, oriental perfumes, silk lingerie. They've declared war on me. They terrify me because something tells me that I'll never be able to seduce them all. (189)

The sexual freedom of women is no longer contrasted with terrorism, but rather confusingly aligned with it, since the women "terrify" (189) Beigbeder as well as the "fanatical Muslims" (189) he refers to. The sexual power of women seems to be a threat to the sexual power of men, causing Beigbeder to both revere and be frightened of it. In this way Beigbeder focuses his novel again on the ideal of masculine domination, and tries to relocate the powerful and independent women within the framework of male desire, where it can stand in clear contrast to terrorism: "If they crashed a charter plane onto the city every day, they still wouldn't succeed in eradicating the bevy of dangerous beauties; the sexual imperialism of these sumptuous sluts" (189). In this way Beigbeder's novel seems to idealise the sexual freedom of men and the independence and control of the father figure, a figure who seems unsuccessful to negotiate the return to traditional roles which he is propelled into by the attacks, and who is unable to negotiate the authorial power of narrating the events. The children, as symbols of innocence and victimhood, seem to gain power in the novels when they gain independent narratives, and the conflict between fathers and sons demonstrated in the novels seems to stem from the father's struggle to understand his role in the face of terrorism. Masculinity seems to be threatened by the loss of the power to protect and a tension between sexual freedom and the obligation to the traditional family structure. The ghost-like father-figure in the novel becomes a symbol of lost identity and lost power, and the novels go on to present many strategies which the characters undertake to regain a stable sense of identity.



### 3.4 Confronting Memory and Engaging in Ritual

When power becomes disrupted, both DeLillo and Beigbeder's novels present ritual and engagement with sites of memory as processes of regaining a sense of identity. Leach uses a Lacanian lens to demonstrate the link between ritual and memory, explaining that "mirroring occurs not only in the engagement between the self and the environment but also between that engagement and memories of previous engagements" (80). He links this process to identity by explaining that "[t]here is an originary experience that is replicated in all subsequent enactments. And in that process of replication there is a reinforcement of the original moment of identification. In this sense habit [...] consolidates the process of identification" (80). By focusing extensively on the ways in which ritual and devotion are employed by Hammad and the other terrorists in the time leading up to the attacks, and showing how Keith, Lianne, Justin and Nina engage in rituals as well in order to negotiate their own identities, DeLillo's novel destabilises the distinction between terrorist and terrorised and shows how ritual becomes a way of fusing the personal and political. Sites of memory allow for the re-enactment of trauma in ways which are simultaneously unsettling and cathartic for the characters, as these sites offer the opportunity for renarrating the attacks in ways which afford new forms of power or new avenues of understanding.

Falling Man's performance art creates one of these sites of memory and identification for his audience. His method is provocative and uncomfortable for many people, bringing up a "collective dread" (33). Lianne describes her first encounter with Falling Man:

A man was dangling there, above the street, upside down. He wore a business suit, one leg bent up, arms at his sides. A safety harness was barely visible, emerging from his trousers at the straightened leg and fastened to the decorative rail of the viaduct. She'd heard of him, a performance artist known as Falling Man. He'd appeared several times in the last week, unannounced, in various parts of the city, suspended from one or another structure, always upside down, wearing a suit, a tie and dress shoes. He brought it back, of course, those stark moments in the burning towers when people fell or were forced to jump. He'd been seen dangling from a balcony in a hotel atrium and police had escorted him out of a concert hall and two or three apartment buildings with terraces or accessible rooftops. (33)

Falling Man seems to force engagement with memory through his performance art, and experiences resistance from his audience. The use of the body as a site of memory emphasises the intimacy and immediacy of images of violence, also demonstrated by the fact that Falling Man “had been beaten by a group of men outside a bar in Queens” (220) in reaction to his performances. This site of memory is also variously highlighted as being at a remove from the actual event, demonstrated when Lianne discovers that the performance was believed to be based on a photograph of one of the people who fell from the towers (221), presumably the eponymous photograph of Richard Drew (Brauner 74), and distance is also created through the mediation of his performance by onlookers who tell others of what they witness: “There was one thing for them to say, essentially, Someone falling. Falling man. She wondered if this was his intention, to spread the word this way, by cell phone, intimately, as in the towers and in the hijacked planes” (DeLillo, *Falling Man* 165). This link underscores the power of representations in reaching back to the event, and of gaining even more intimacy than the reality which they point to. Lianne discovers an image of one of those who fell from the towers in an internet search and demonstrates the intimacy of these representations: “Headlong, free fall, she thought, and this picture burned a hole in her mind and heart, dear God, he was a falling angel and his beauty was horrific” (222).

Falling Man’s performances offer Lianne an uncomfortable glimpse of “something [she had] not seen” (33), reworking the horrific image of those who fell from the towers into the uncomfortable space of art and offering new dimensions of understanding. Falling Man is a reminder of uncomfortable memories, of disempowerment, trauma and death, and thus he causes outrage from spectators. His performances are resisted as a site of identification, since it would mean engaging with an image of powerlessness for the spectators. By adopting a stance reminiscent of death and demonstrating the memories of the attacks through his body, Falling Man points to the tensions in the novel where representation grates at sensitivities and where death and vulnerability become omnipresent. His performance becomes an uncomfortable site of memory which resists simplistic identification.

A similarly contested site of memory is presented in *Windows on the World* through the World Trade Centre Site, the concrete monument in the place of the destroyed Twin Towers. The towers themselves take on symbolic meaning in the novels. When these novels represent the loss

of power and identity as demonstrated through the disruption of masculinity and paternity, the Twin Towers become symbols for this loss. Beigbeder explains how the towers served as sites of identification: “Art Spiegelman said it best: he said New Yorkers turned toward the World Trade Center as though toward Mecca. Did the towers fulfil some spiritual emptiness? They were the legs which supported the American dream” (238). In *Falling Man*, Martin echoes this symbolic understanding of the Twin Towers, explaining:

Weren't the towers built as fantasies of wealth and power that would one day become fantasies of destruction? You build a thing like that so you can see it come down. The provocation is obvious. What other reason would there be to go so high and then double it, do it twice? It's a fantasy, so why not do it twice? You are saying, Here it is, bring it down. (116)

The symbolism of the towers seems to be located in the masculine images of religion and money, and again evokes the idea of fantasy and national myth in the form of the American dream. The towers are symbols of national identity, leading Martin to reflect once they are destroyed that there is “an empty space where America used to be” (193). Beigbeder likens the towers to religion again, this time through a comparison to the Tower of Babel:

[T]he Tower of Babel? I wonder if that's where I am now. [...] [M]an learns to make tools and decides to build a tower to reach the heavens. They want to 'make a name for themselves lest they be scattered abroad upon the face of the whole earth.' God does not approve of their decision: man must not be prideful, man must not take himself for God. [...] The word Babel represents Babylon, but brings language to mind (hence the verb 'to babble'). [...] God decides to create chaos in language on earth. [...] for presuming to build this tower, men will cease to understand one another. [...] The Tower of Babel was the first attempt at globalization. If, as millions of Americans do, we take Genesis absolutely literally, then God is opposed to globalization [...] God has set his face against New York. (120-1)

Beigbeder's discussion of the symbolism of the towers delves into the fields of language, culture, religion and interconnection, and alludes to the loss of narrative power and to the cultural conflicts in the wake of 9/11.

However, the relegation of the destruction of the Twin Towers to symbolism is also resisted in the novels. Carthew explains: “Terrorism does not destroy symbols, it hacks people of flesh and

blood to pieces” (172). This resistance to symbolism seems to point to the human focus of the novels, focusing on the identity located in the body.

When these towers are destroyed, identification is refocused into the memorial at the World Trade Centre Site. Leach argues that “the destruction of these towers has had a radical impact on the American psyche, and that it is against the backdrop of the now absent Twin Towers that a new sense of American national identity seems to have been forged” (76). The description of this space is given by the deceased Carthew, indicating how mourning and trauma are located in the site and the ways in which this site is used cathartically:

I was right when I told Jerry and David that we were on an imaginary theme-park ride: now, there are guided tours of Ground Zero. It has become a tourist attraction, like the Statue of Liberty which we will never get to visit. Tickets for the WTC site are available from the Sea Port; they’re free. There is a long line to climb a wooden podium which overlooks the desolate esplanade. The guide hurries the voyeurs. But there’s nothing to see except an immense expanse of concrete, a parking lot with no cars, the biggest tombstone in the world. The night blushes with embarrassment at times to think of it; the surrounding buildings refuse to twinkle. (303)

The monumentalising of this site demonstrates “the potential of buildings and monuments – through either their presence or their absence – to symbolize a set of common values and define a collective sense of identities” (Leach 76). The site offers a space of identification around the attacks and a memorial to those who died in 9/11. Beigbeder explains how this site is placed within a positive frame: “The first thing I do when I arrive: tell the taxi driver to take me to Ground Zero. ‘You mean the World Trade Center site?’ New Yorkers don’t like to say ‘Ground Zero’ ” (174). He later continues to expose this positive identification by explaining: “New York is a wire fence hung with photos of the missing, candles, wilting bouquets. A black plaque enumerates the names of the ‘heroes’ (the victims). The more exact term would be: the martyrs. In fact, a cross has been planted at the memorial, even though not all the dead were Christians” (174). Beigbeder’s description points to the discomfort of these sites which are reminders of vulnerability but also offer interest for “voyeurs” (303), referring to it as a “theme-park ride” and a “tourist attraction”, yet also as a “tombstone” and a source of “embarrassment” (303). While this site might offer a space to negotiate what Leach calls a new American identity, it is also a reminder of the horror of the attacks, and again defies simplistic understanding as Versluys

holds: “Ground Zero has become a non-place, a terrible void, a beacon New Yorkers went by and that has been erased from their view by an act of unprecedented ferocity and violence” (67).

In addition to memorials and monuments, the novels also refer to many different forms of ritual which serve as points of identification, as Keith demonstrates through his wrist exercises. Initially these exercises are a form of rehabilitation for an injury he sustains in the attacks, but he continues to practice the exercises once the injury heals: “His injury was slight but it wasn’t the torn cartilage that was the subject of this effort. It was the chaos, the levitation of ceilings and floors, the voices choking in smoke” (40). His memories haunt him, and he imagines the exercises can offer a form of healing for this psychic disquiet. He directly links this ritual to religion:

[Keith] was a hovering presence now [...] He was not quite returned to his body yet. Even the program of exercises he did for his postsurgical wrist seemed a little detached, four times a day, an odd set of extensions and flexions that resembled prayer in some remote northern province, among a repressed people, with periodic applications of ice. (59)

Keith’s engagement with ritual here is shown to allude to entanglements with terror and with his image of the figure of the terrorist instead of allowing him to form a stable sense of identity after 9/11. Later in the novel, when he is living in Las Vegas, he again refers to the wrist exercises as an answer to a psychic disquiet, and more clearly shows how the violation and trauma have become a new religion for him as he engages in what resembles prayer, reciting phrases from the instruction sheet detailing his wrist exercises: “There was no problem with the wrist. The wrist was fine. But he sat in his hotel room, facing the window, hand curled into a gentle fist, thumb in certain setups. He recalled phrases from the instruction sheet and recited them quietly, working on the hand shapes” (235).

In *Windows on the World*, the attacks themselves cause a religious response in the characters. Carthew explains: “In those moments of terror, prayer comes to us unbidden. Religion is reborn in us. In the minutes ahead, the World Trade Center, a temple to atheism and to international lucre, will gradually become a makeshift church” (127). The religious tone in the towers is echoed when Lourdes, the waitress who is trapped with Carthew and his family, “goes through her pockets and takes out a pack of chewing gum which she passes round in silence” (201). Carthew explains that those who she gives the gum to “put them in [their] mouths as though they

were communion hosts” (201). The religious reaction caused by terror in the towers is also shown through Carthew’s own prayer where he speaks of a desire to return to religion (167). The sense of communal identity based on vulnerability is highlighted in these reactions, since many of the characters are of different religions or are not religious, but find common ground in religious rituals in the face of terror. Beigbeder later directly refers to this religion of fear, terror and violation, saying:

It is time to found a new religion whose symbol would be two towers ablaze. Let us build churches of parallel parallelepipeds in which, at the moment of communion, two remote-controlled scale models of planes would be crashed. At the moment when the planes pierce the towers, the congregation would be asked to kneel. (280)

Memory takes on religious significance, and seems to involve an attachment to communal identity and an abandonment of individuality. David Simpson holds that “[r]ituals of memorialisation exist to assimilate these intense and particular griefs into received vocabularies and higher, broader realms than the merely personal” (Simpson 2). When certain sections of DeLillo’s novel focus on the religious fundamentalism and hysteria of the Islamic perpetrators of the attacks, the subversion of this othering technique takes place in how the characters become enraptured in the same kind of religious hysteria, such as Justin ritualistically staring out of the window and waiting for Bill Lawton to strike again. Lianne echoes this irony when she refers to Islam in a simplistic manner, focusing on religiosity: “They’re the ones who think alike, talk alike, eat the same food at the same time. She knew this wasn’t true. Say the same prayers, word for word, in the same prayer stance, day and night, following the arc of sun and moon” (68). Later, the same expression is used to show the ritualistic nature of Lianne’s life and the irony in her simplification of the other: “Time, finally, to go to sleep, following the arc of sun and moon” (70).

Keith demonstrates this ritualistic engagement with memory through his card game. After two of the members of his weekly poker game die in the attacks, Keith tries to recreate the sense of community by becoming a professional poker player in Las Vegas. Kauffman explains that “[g]ambling is a performance [...] of masculinity [...] What matters to [Keith] are the codes, protocols, rituals of the game [...] He is the falling man who has lost his moorings” (369). When

describing the initial weekly card game before the attacks, the ritualistic aspect and self-imposed limitations are highlighted (98). Keith places these rituals within the frame of death:

Keith told them a story he'd heard about a cemetery in Germany, in Cologne, where four good friends, card-players in a game that had lasted four or five decades, were buried in the configuration in which they'd been seated, invariably, at the card table, with two of the gravestones facing the other two, each player in his time-honored place. They loved this story. It was a beautiful story about friendship and the transcendent effects of unremarkable habit. It made them reverent and thoughtful. (99)

The game seems to symbolise a stable understanding of communal identity for those involved, a way to transcend death, and a sense of normalcy which Keith longs for after the attacks. He eventually recreates his poker game by moving to Las Vegas to become a professional poker player. By recreating this poker game, Keith regains the sense of control which his weekly poker game had once given him, and he manages to gain a new sense of immersion into group identity shown when he later begins to engage in the same discourse of invisibility which Hammad engages in by "seeing essentially no one" (198). However, his new poker game does not remove his memories and the trauma of 9/11:

He walked through crowded hotel lobbies under hand-painted Sistine ceilings and into the high glare of this or that casino, not looking at people, seeing essentially no one, but every time he boarded a flight he glanced at faces on both sides of the aisle, trying to spot the man or men who might be a danger to them all. (198)

Identity, memory and representation also find expression in the reflections of Lianne's writing group of people with Alzheimer's disease. Kauffman explains the narrative function of this writing group as reflecting the loss of narrative power: "In contrast to the fanatical certitude of terrorists like Atta, who is convinced that his narrative is the only true one, the Alzheimer patients are losing the storylines of their own existence" (367). Identity and memory conflict in the character of Omar H, one of the members of the writing group: "There was one subject the members wanted to write about, insistently, all of them but Omar H. It made Omar nervous but he agreed in the end. They wanted to write about the planes" (DeLillo, *Falling Man* 31). Omar H struggles with confronting 9/11 since he feels implicated in the events due to being Muslim himself. He says that he "was afraid to go out on the street in the days after. They were looking at him, he thought" (61). His identity is uncomfortably linked to the attacks, making him feel like

an outsider, and causing him to resist representation of the attacks. Lianne, however, explains that representation and memory are not easy for any of the members of the group: “No one wrote a word about the terrorists. And in the exchanges that followed the readings, no one spoke about the terrorists. She prompted them. There has to be something you want to say, some feeling to express, nineteen men come here to kill us” (64). Lianne’s expectation that the representations of the events would focus on understandings of the terrorists is shown to be false, and instead the group reflect on how the attacks have impacted their own identities and understandings (64). Confronting memory thus seems to serve as a means of negotiating personal identity for these characters, and through rituals and representations the characters are able to reflect on their loss of power and their own vulnerability.<sup>39</sup>

This engagement with repetition, ritual and memory is also demonstrated in how the characters engage with media depicting the events of 9/11, from news reports to pictures to performance art. Leach holds that the repetition serves to control trauma:

The curious repetitive nature of the coverage of September 11 within the US media, where recorded shots of the impact of the aircraft on the Twin Towers and the subsequent collapse of those towers were repeated over and over again, can be understood within the logic of psychoanalytic theory, in which the compulsion to repeat remains a fundamental, if problematic concern. One interpretation of this compulsion posits repetition as a means of miming and thereby controlling trauma. (Leach 85)

He continues, saying “repetition of certain visual traumas can amount to a kind of overcoming of those traumas. Repetition can lead to a normalization and consequent familiarization” (86). In this light, Keith’s wrist exercises and his recreation of the poker game, and Lianne’s writing group and her interest in *Falling Man*, all seem to be ways of controlling trauma. For Carthew and the others trapped inside the damaged North Tower, ritual and religion serves to create a sense of community in the height of fear, and his discussion of the World Trade Centre site demonstrates the way in which sites of trauma are visited in conflicting ways which both consolidate identity and revisit trauma.

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<sup>39</sup> Kauffman elaborates on the discourse of memory and representation which is present in the Alzheimer’s group: “Alzheimer’s is a metaphor for the post-9/11 condition. That condition is progressing exponentially: history is receding more and more rapidly from us – along with our will, imagination, and power to anchor it in anything approaching the familiar” (368).



### 3.5 The Remains of the American Dream

In the atmosphere of disorientation and loss of power after 9/11, renegotiating American identity in the novels involves a link between personal lives and political situations. Jason Dittmer explains that “collective identity formation involves [...] the full continuum from the individual/body to the global/universal” (626), thus the personal reflections, the intimate body-narratives, and the conflicts between characters highlight the unsettling and reworking of national identity after 9/11.

In Beigbender’s novel, the restaurant at the top of the North Tower initially becomes a hub of power and a reflection of American identity. The image of wealth becomes the most important signifier of power, and different nationalities are able to be incorporated into this image of power due to their association with wealth (31). Carthew describes some of the clientele: “There’s the adulterous stockbrokers. There are American tourists like me, nouveau riche rednecks and proud of it. WASPs wearing suspenders, yuppies with brilliant-white teeth. Boys in striped shirts. Women with ultra blow-dried hair, their pretty hands sporting long manicured nails” (31). This hub of American identity is linked to wealth, indulgence and artificiality, factors which Beigbender ultimately links to the American dream (215).

Carthew, however, begins to question this construction of American identity by blending the personal and political. He equates his personal life with a sense of national guilt in the wake of the attacks (291), and questions the motivations for the attacks by meditating on his own feelings of connection with global inequality:

Okay, so I’m not innocent but I’m not a criminal either. I didn’t deserve to be executed. I don’t know whether I am the embodiment of Good, but I never wished Evil on anyone. I’ve sinned, cheated on Mary, divorced, abandoned Jerry and David; okay, so I’m far from perfect, but since when do they burn people alive for that? What could I do if Guatemalan kids were working fifteen hours a day for slave wages to do the job for me? And I wasn’t even born when Hiroshima and Nagasaki happened, for God’s sake! (292)

He reflects on a national history of violence and exploitation, and draws links to his own failings in life, beginning to question the innocence of both identities in a discourse of “Good” and “Evil” (292). Carthew’s identity, initially grounded in pride in his business accomplishments and

nationality, becomes confused by the unsettling of power which accompanies the intrusion of the outsider, and he experiences guilt when he reflects on the moral ambiguity surrounding global exploitation and violence.

When he nears death in the novel, however, Carthew is able to liberate himself from money as the ultimate signifier of his identity and seems to experience a cathartic release of this symbol: “Laughing, I tossed bundles of money out the window. Nothing but hundred-dollar bills. Must have been around five or six thousand bucks, whipped away by the wind” (271). He signals a move to a new American identity beyond economic domination, where indeed this identification becomes impossible since a sense of power and centrality is undermined. After 9/11, national identity seems to be relocated within the problematic community of vulnerability and loss which permeates both novels.

The link between the personal and the political is shown in *Falling Man* in how renegotiating American identity impacts on the characters in physical terms, most powerfully demonstrated through Nina whose physical frailty and eventual death are linked to a loss of American identity. Nina’s increasing sense of disorientation after the attacks is presented with constant reference to her physical deterioration. Martin echoes the link when he speaks of the loss of American identity at Nina’s wake: “For all the careless power of this country, let me say this, for all the danger it makes in the world, America is going to become irrelevant [...] It is losing the center” (191).

Martin is challenged on his assertion by an American man who attends the wake, referring to America as a cultural centre: “If we occupy the center, it’s because you put us there [...] Despite everything, we’re still America, you’re still Europe. You go to our movies, read our books, listen to our music, speak our language. How can you stop thinking about us? [...] Ask yourself. What comes after America?” (192). America is located as occupying a global centre due to popular culture such as films, novels and music.<sup>40</sup> Beigbender echoes the idea that “American culture dominates the planet” (17) in a discussion which refers to his favourite writers, musicians and

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<sup>40</sup> Sharp links popular culture to Gramsci’s idea of hegemony, where identity is negotiated around these cultural artefacts: “[H]egemony is constructed not only through political ideologies but also, more immediately, through detailed scripting of some of the most ordinary and mundane aspects of everyday life. Gramsci’s concept of hegemony posits a significant place for popular culture in any attempt to understand the workings of society because of the very everydayness and apparently nonconflictual nature of such productions” (Sharp 31).

film directors being Americans (17). America is constructed as maintaining its power and centrality through popular culture, a situation which clearly becomes unsettled by 9/11 when representation becomes destabilised and the production of art and cultural artefacts is challenged by terrorism (Rich 110). America is located in the realm of fiction, and in the face of the hyperreality ascribed to the terrorist, Martin's assertion that "America is going to become irrelevant" (DeLillo, *Falling Man* 191) is powerfully evoked.

Beigbeder demonstrates how America is located within a dream or fantasy around the discourse of sex:

People who don't understand lap dancing will never understand America. Here, you pay to get it up without getting it on. You're not buying a girl, but a dream. Eye candy. The United States is the only country where a man is prepared to blow his savings for a whiff of virtuality, to enter an imaginary world [...] They're turned on by the unobtainable [...] it's optimistic, ambitious, cerebral: unlike a Frenchman, an American doesn't want to fuck straight off, he prefers the idea of pleasure to pleasure itself, fantasy to reality. (215)

American identity is linked to wealth and global centrality, as well as the realm of fiction or fantasy. Beigbeder links both concepts to the American dream, a national myth of self-aggrandisement which seems to be unsuccessful in maintaining national identity after the attacks. He invokes the name of the restaurant as symbolising American identity and links the destruction of the restaurant as a hub of power to the loss of the American dream: "The windows on the world are dark, their eyes gouged out. [...] Now the streets are cold, the people hurrying. They are running because they are afraid to stop. They can no longer remember why they are so determined to be rich" (276). He evokes the idea that the Twin Towers were "the legs which supported the American dream" (238), and the American identity based on this cultural myth is lost in the moment of 9/11.

When this form of identification is lost through an intersection with narratives of the other, the self becomes objectified within these alternative narratives in order to reach understanding. The characters begin to see themselves as reflected through the perspectives of the other as they attempt to grapple with the motivations for the attacks, and Beigbeder again refers to moral ambiguity and representation when engaging with the perspective of the other:

We live in strange times; war has shifted. The battlefield is the media: in this new war Good and Evil are difficult to tell apart. Difficult to know who the good guys and the bad guys are: they change sides when we change channels. Television makes the world jealous. In the past, the poor, the colonized, didn't spend their nights in shantytowns staring at wealth on a screen. They didn't realize that some countries had everything while they slogged their guts out for nothing [...] Nowadays, all over the world, filthy countries hover between awe and contempt, fascination and disgust for the clean countries whose lifestyles they watch on satellite with hacked decoders, using sieves for satellite dishes. It is a recent phenomenon: we call it globalization, but its real name is television. (114-5)

Beigbeder begins to see Western identity as reflected to a global audience through television. When the self becomes interpreted through the language of fiction and representation, and when the myth of the American dream becomes inadequate at informing identity, the perspective of the other is adopted in an attempt to reach toward understanding. This trend is most powerfully demonstrated through the sections of subjectivity for the terrorist figures given in *Falling Man*, where Hammad reflects on his criticisms of American culture, but it also has more subtle manifestations in DeLillo's novel. Lianne demonstrates this trend when she reflects on a march which she joined in Cairo:

Those nearby saw her, smiled, some of them, and spoke to her, one or two, and she was forced to see herself in the reflecting surface of the crowd. She became whatever they sent back to her. She became her face and features, her skin color, a white person, white her fundamental meaning, her state of being. This is who she was, not really but at the same time yes, exactly, why not. She was privileged, detached, self-involved, white. It was there in her face, educated, unknowing, scared. (184-5)

The characters themselves become objectified in the perspective of the other as they begin to critically reflect on their identities in the face of terrorism and the entanglements with the other which it entails. In the loss of a stable sense of identity, alternative narratives are adopted in order to renegotiate self-understandings.

This positioning of the self as a representation is captured in the performance art of *Falling Man*, who essentialises American identity through wearing a business suit and recreates trauma through his performance. The image represents the transition from an identity based on power and wealth to one based on loss and vulnerability. *Falling Man* visually evokes the destruction of the economic American dream, and his own death towards the end of the novel seems to

reinforce the inadequacy of representation in consolidating meaning and self-understanding after this loss.

The power of this image is echoed in *Windows on the World* when Carthew jumps from the North Tower and becomes what Falling Man represents. In his final thoughts Carthew deconstructs the positions of the terrorist and terrorised when he and his sons also undertake “self-sacrifice” (296):

C'mon, c'mon kids, let's get out of here, let's do what we should have done long ago, beat it, hit the road again, adios, amigos, hasta la vista, baby [...] you never saw *Apocalypse Now*, you were so young, how cold those murderers [...] Space Mountain will be like nothing compared to this [...] We know what self-sacrifice is too. (295-6)

The image of bodies falling from the burning towers becomes the ultimate symbol of unsettled power in the novels. For Carthew, reproducing this image is a way of reclaiming power which he had been robbed of, turning the act of jumping into a sign of freedom. He engages with discussions of representation by invoking references to popular culture, and reflects on entanglements with the other in this moment, reflecting the various forms of identity-negotiation which he undertakes in the novel. For DeLillo's *Falling Man*, representing this symbol is a way of disrupting simplistic memorial and representing the loss of power. He grates at sensitivities about the attacks and reflects the contested nature of representing 9/11. In both cases, the personal body becomes a tool for engaging with and representing national loss and vulnerability. The image points to the horrific suffering and human tragedy of the politicised events. Melanie Kaye/ Kantrowitz demonstrates the symbolic power of this image and the way in which the personal space becomes affected by political discourses in her poem “Love after 9/11” (13):

### **Love after 9/11**

1.

The worst photos were not beaming wedding birthday graduation taped  
to lampposts subway billboards any walls at all

not even the ones you start to recognize yeah that's  
Angela Brendan Carmen Teresa last seen wearing  
Mohammed, yes, Mohammed

The worst clips were not the plane striking the tower  
and then the second plane the first then the second.  
Again. Again.

Not the hordes of people running through streets covered in ash  
not the pet rescuers  
not the weeping firefighters  
not the vast twisted steel  
not the mountains of contamination  
not even the people insisting their loved one was not dead just  
missing after 7 days 10 days 15 days

No, to me the worst were the ones they stopped showing after the first day so  
maybe the papers agreed, photos of tiny  
bodies hurling themselves from windows 90 100 floors up  
so hot they jumped

caught by the worst photos in the vertical flow of traffic  
just jumped midfall almost to ground zero not yet named

Are we that small?  
A bad question but not the worst  
No, to me the worst question is were they that frightened that desperate that hot

2.  
Yesterday we made love for the first time since 9/11-  
too tired, too raw, too in motion. I had to say  
let's do it: later, after we walk the dog,  
after Key Food, after the delivery of 12 bottles of seltzer and a giant  
laundry detergent, after 5 lbs of potatoes  
arrive, finally. You make one more call. I  
check emails mostly about 9/11 and the impending  
war and how to stop it when we are  
that small, falling from a great height

Finally, by 6, 6:30 we had cleared away a small  
space in which we might touch, sink into each other's  
bodies, and sleep a deep restful sleep  
even for half an hour. And so we touched  
the wordless comfort of skin. You  
came first, loud and raucous, that deep place of  
release. Then me: and as I came I saw  
bodies falling from a great height  
each a tiny streak of light slashing the darkness and coming I  
sobbed for all the bodies  
and all the bodies who loved them, sobbed  
in my own body  
coming fully alive

## Chapter 4

### Conclusion

On August 24, 2010, Ahmed H. Sharif, a practicing Muslim man who works as a taxi driver in New York, was allegedly stabbed in the throat, arms and hand by 21-year-old Michael Enright after Sharif answered questions about his religion (Kessler and Solomon). The attack arises in an atmosphere of heated animosity towards Muslims in New York after the proposal of constructing a mosque and an Islamic cultural centre two blocks from the World Trade Centre Site (Ghosh 14). The proposal, known as Park51, has sparked protests where signs were displayed reading “All I Need to Know About Islam, I Learned on 9/11” (14) and “Don’t glorify murders of 3,000; no 9/11 victory mosque” (Gibbs 48). Almost nine years after the 9/11 attacks, the atmosphere of Islamophobia and the view of the World Trade Centre Site as “sacred” (Ghosh 14) still endure.

Leach holds that “human beings project their own readings [onto buildings]. In the hermeneutic moment one tends to read that projection as though it were a property of the object” (Leach 80). He links these projections to identity-formation through “grafting symbolic meaning onto an object and then reading oneself into that object, and seeing one’s values reflected in it” (77). When buildings and monuments become sites of identification, the destruction or unsettling of these sites can be seen as an attack on the values which they encompass and the identities which they signify. The current discourses around the World Trade Centre Site demonstrate how identity still frames a connection with this site. The site becomes a tombstone for the idea of an impenetrable and innocent (Perrin 173) American identity, and is seen as a space of mourning for those who died in the attacks. Recognising the “sacred” nature of this site for many Americans seems to require an anti-Islamic stance, as Islam becomes inextricably connected with the terrorist attacks of 9/11.

The tumultuous legacy of 9/11 has led to a quest for meaning among critics and novelists, an effort to understand the complex social implications of this horrific event. DeLillo advocates the importance of narratives about the event: “We need them, even the common tools of the

terrorists, to set against the massive spectacle that continues to seem unmanageable, too powerful a thing to set into our frame of practiced response” (“Ruins” 34). The multitude of responses to the event over the past nine years has demonstrated many perspectives on the attacks, including those of the American citizens who attempt to negotiate meaning and their own identities in the post-9/11 world, the outsider who is associated with Muslim or Arab heritage, and even, in DeLillo’s novel, the terrorist himself. Representation seems to become a tool for engaging with trauma and negotiating understanding.

These representations are, however, problematic. Abel notes that “[s]peaking for others too often serves as a disguise for speaking one’s own point of view, thus eradicating that which is other” (1241). Thus, DeLillo’s description of Hammad, which ostensibly offers one of the alternative narratives of the attacks, still seems to present a one-dimensional account of a brainwashed terrorist figure instead of a rounded subjectivity, and Hosseini’s description of contemporary Afghanistan is regarded as inauthentic since he has lived outside of Afghanistan for much of his life and inaccurately describes the social realities of Afghan life (Edwards 8). Representing the other seems to become a way of engaging with the counternarratives of 9/11, ways of imagining the unfamiliar space of the terrorist and the outsider. However, these representations could reduce and essentialise the reality of the other.

The problems of representation are also highlighted around media depictions of the attacks. Baudrillard conceives of these media images as a complex interplay of entertainment, perverse fascination, terror, and the fulfillment of destructive desires: “And in this singular event, in this Manhattan disaster movie, the twentieth century’s two elements of mass fascination are combined: the white magic of the cinema and the black magic of terrorism; the white light of the image and the black light of terrorism” (Baudrillard 30). The confluence of these factors in the repeated television screenings of the attacks serves to construct 9/11 as an uncomfortable spectator event, where identification with image is experienced through complex reactions. Said explains: “The national television reporting has of course brought the horror of those dreadful winged juggernauts into every household, unremittingly, insistently, not always edifyingly” (*Roadmap* 107). The engagement with media seems to become a point where terror is reinforced, and where confusion about the events is aggravated.



9/11 becomes an event widely experienced through representation, both initially through live media and on an ongoing basis through memorials, novels and critical writing about the effects of the attacks, and the understanding of 9/11 has been shown to have implications for personal and national identities. These representations are however often shown to be problematic and to resist simplistic identification, creating tumultuous reactions. In this way, the identity-confusion of the characters in the four novels explored in this thesis can be seen as expressions of their own difficulties with narrating the circumstances surrounding this event, as well as their difficulties with responding to representations of their own identity which arise in the 9/11 discourse.

The novels deal with intimate reactions to terrorism, presenting it as an all-encompassing experience which presents both a physical and ideological threat. The link between the personal and political realms is forged when self-identification is impacted on by terrorism, and in this way the body can become a carrier for national identity. The injuries of the physical body have an impact on national identity, and physical appearance becomes a marker of exclusion. Gayatri Spivak demonstrates how the body also becomes a tool of narrative power for the terrorist figure: “Suicidal resistance is a message inscribed in the body where no other means will get through. It is both execution and mourning, for both self and other” (96). The intimacy of this violent encounter is demonstrated in trauma, disorientation, and interpersonal conflict in the wake of the attacks, where identity-formation is complicated by the disruption of power which is inherent in the nature of the attacks.

The novels demonstrate these intimate effects in how personal interactions relate to political tensions. For Changez, his failed romance with Erica comes to represent his difficulty with assimilating into American society. Amir’s heroic counterterrorist tale allows him to enact Americanness through his battle with Assef. Keith’s wrist exercises and his escape to gambling signify his disorientation after the attacks, and Lianne’s protest to music “located in the Islamic tradition” (67) demonstrates the unease at the presence of symbols of the other. Carthew’s death with his two children demonstrates a lasting image of trauma and the loss of power.

The different positions of the 9/11 attacks within each narrative also point to the ways in which 9/11 impacts on the identities of the characters, and highlight the link between the personal and political narratives around this event. The attacks occur at the beginning of *Falling*

*Man*, leading to the meditations on loss and entanglements with the other which permeate the novel. The narrative of *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* is divided in half by the attacks, which ultimately serves to unhinge Changez's American dream as constructed in the first half of the novel. The attacks are briefly referred to at the end of *The Kite Runner* once Amir has already established his identity as an American, and seem to have little effect on this identification. Finally, the narrative of *Windows on the World* is fully constructed around the attacks, and the effects of raw trauma on Carthew's identity and understanding of terrorism are immediate and extreme.

9/11, as Abel asserts, "can only be experienced through representation" (1239). The permeations of this event are still visible almost a decade later, as seen in the contested nature of these representations, the sanctification of the World Trade Centre Site, the cases of Islamophobia in the US, and political consequences which include the continuing war in Afghanistan. 9/11 thus seems to defy its location to a specific time and place, and has implications which transcend the attacks since it has so deeply affected personal and political landscapes after the attacks. David Simpson holds that "[t]he figure 9/11 is not a place (although New York City plays a role in the national imaginary), nor yet even a time, since what is missing is the designation of the year, 2001. It will repeat itself every year, and it will remain an open designation" (Simpson 16).

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