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Salem State University

The Graduate School

Department of English

Terrorizing Islam: Building American Identity in the 9/11 Novel

A Thesis in English

by

Robert Sullivan

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Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of
the Requirements for the Degree of
Master of Arts

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In his *New York Times* review of John Updike's *Terrorist,* a novel written in the aftermath of 9/11, Robert Stone argues that Updike uses the main character in the novel, Ahmad, the titular "terrorist," to show someone distinctly outside of the American value system examining "contemporary America exposed to the passions of the non-American world." Stone's view is that Updike uses certain kinds of Americans and non-Americans in the novel in order to illuminate how Americans have "struggle[d] to maintain a viable center for our inner life" and the way "people in America have sought to find some equilibrium against the background of headlong change." Stone's argument is that Updike uses the outsider's perspective in *Terrorist* in order to shine a light on what is really happening, somewhere beneath the surface, in a modem America afflicted by unrestrained capitalism and now dealing with being connected to the rest of the world in a new age of globalization and international terrorism.

While on its surface *Terrorist* appears to be a novel about the mindset of a radical Islamic terrorist, Stone sees the novel's focus turned on America rather than on Islam. Central to Stone's review is the idea that Updike is realistically portraying an authentic Muslim's perspective and that this allows Updike to access a deeper truth about America, something that is perhaps invisible to average Americans and that requires a mediator, in this case an antagonistic outsider, to see properly. Stone understands the purpose of *Terrorist* is not to gain insight into the mind of an Islamic terrorist, but rather to use the Muslim character as a means to understand America. He finds Updike's portrayal of the outsider's view as authentic, and in turn accepts Updike's view of America through this perspective as revealing of deeper truths about the American condition. Stone sees a "real" Muslim reflecting a "real" America, but warrants deeper examination is how Updike does not as much describe America as he creates an America as it reacts to the events of 9/11 and how he constructs his Muslim characters in order to do that.

Stone pays some attention to the former, but almost no attention to the latter, and in each case assumes that there is a pre-existing truth for Updike to discover about America or Islam.

The review demonstrates how *Terrorist* uses the presence of an "other" in order to engage in a modem myth-making about American identity. The novel posits that someone is somehow outside of this system of values and identity categories that constitutes what is an "American" in order to clarify just what those values are. As in many of the novels written in the aftermath of 9/11 using the attacks of the day as a backdrop, *Terrorist* endeavors to make sense of an America that has been disrupted by the violent intrusion of an outside presence. In Stone's reading of *Terrorist,* he discusses "Americanization," which he defines as the "setting aside of a social order in ruthless pursuit of profit, a jury-rigged class system based on money, a rootless and dislocated population, a random disordering of priorities." He arrives at this formulation of America through Updike's descriptions of the "moralizing resentment this country brings forth" from the outsiders – Muslims – in the novel. The idea that something has been changed or threatened or challenged is prevalent in these novels, and that Americans, whoever they may be, must find a way to adjust to the presence of the alien in their midst in order to clarify what it means to be an American after 9/11. Stone adjusts by integrating what he perceives are the grievances of "non-Americans" into his view of an America that struggles to come to terms with some of the things that define it as "America."

It is the construction of these perceptions of the outsiders that should be examined in order to understand the ways that novels that deal with 9/11 engage in constructing American identity. Stone describes how in *Terrorist* that "come to preside in judgment are ...an assembly of religiously driven immigrants, certain in their own conviction, which they are convinced equip them to see through the pretensions of their adopted country." But it is not "religiously driven

immigrants" who are presiding, but the author, through his construction of these characters. This raises a number of questions about the process the author is undertaking in writing a novel that constructs America from these created perspectives. What insights are gleaned about an author's portrayal of America through his depiction of the characters who are supposed to judge it? What are these "convictions" they are certain in, and how do they contrast with how the author sees American convictions? What are the "pretensions" of America, and how does the author "equip" his characters to see through them?

If Stone believes that these characters are seeing through America's pretensions, he is supposing that there is something real behind those pretensions, something that America "really" is. In the review, he speaks of the characters inhabiting a "real New Jersey" and being "credible individuals." Stone and other American authors writing about 9/11 are engaged in their own project of "Americanization" where they are using a created image of a strange and exotic Muslim in order to define what is real and what is credible in America in the 21st century. Stone is concerned about such American problems as "a setting aside of the social order in ruthless pursuit of profit, a jury-rigged class system based on money, a rootless and dislocated population, a random disordering of priorities," all issues that are critiqued by Ahmad, which gives the novel's American characters each in their own way an opportunity to respond. The accuracy or credibility of Updike's portrayal of Muslims is not at issue here, especially as there is not a readily accessible "true" version of what it means to be a Muslim, or a fundamentalist, or a ten-orist any more than that version of America exists. What matters is how Updike and other authors have created these foreign identities as a means of constructing a different idea of Americanism. To that end, the creation of these Muslim characters, and more importantly, how these Muslim characters allows the Americans characters to react and to create themse1ves in

these novels should be examined in an effort to look at what kind of understandings about American identity are being argued by authors of 9/11 novels.

* * *

What *Terrorist* has in common with other 9/11 novels is the way that it uses its Muslim characters to define what it means to be an American in a new age. The Muslims in the three novels to be examined here, *Terrorist, Falling Man,* and *The Submission,* are depicted in ways that allow their respective authors to make arguments about the nature of American identity in this new world. Each of these novels feature prominently a Muslim character whose purpose in the novel to allow the American characters to react to them in ways that allow them to define what it means to be an American in the 21st century. Despite what their stated purposed may be, these novels are not primarily concerned with analyzing Muslims. Each attempts to paint a portrait of an authentic Muslim with the purpose of giving their American audiences insight into this new disruptive, alien presence in American political and cultural life, and to an extent they appear to attempt to understand the mindset or grievances of either Islamic fundamentalist or American Muslims. But as these authors each attempt to understand the perspective of the Islamic world they imagine, they are creating an America through these representations of Islam. These novels each in their own way create not only a sense of what "Americanism" means in the 21st century but that there is such a thing as Americanism that needs to be defined.

Muslims are represented in these novels much in the same way that Edward Said in *Orienta/ism* discusses the way Muslims have been used in Western imagination for centuries, that is to say, as a way of defining the West by projecting qualities on the Eastern other that the West may compare themselves favorably against. Said notes in "modern and primitive societies seem…to derive a sense of their identities negatively" (54), defining themselves by what they are

not. In "Open Doors, Closed Minds: American Prose Writing at a Time of Crisis," Richard Grey's essay about the future of post 9/11 literature, he notes that "with the collapse of communism, a sinister other that enables American self-definition may have disappeared ....it has now been replaced by Islam." What each of these novels is doing is not only continuing this project of defining a civilization, but by creating these character traits of both hypothetical Muslims and "real" Americans, the novels perpetuate the idea that "civilizations," broad groups of people characterized by traits particular to themselves and not others belonging to separate, and theoretically rival groups, exist at all. And the degree to which the Muslims conform to or depart from stereotypes has less to do with any commentary the author is making on Islam than it has to do with how the authors wish to portray contemporary America. If the Muslims are fundamentalist, inflexible, misogynist, they may serve to highlight that Americans are supposedly not these things. If the depiction of Muslims is more nuanced, again, it less to demonstrate a more sophisticated view of Islam as much as it is to create a Muslim that can be used to create Western values, ranging from a liberal tolerance to a reactionary nativism, and allow the author to address how these characteristics and values work in creating a new American identity in the post-9111 world.

The catalogue of qualities ascribed to the West in these novels is already described by Said as he discusses the tradition of Western writers comparing themselves favorably against the East: "On the one hand there are Westerners, and on the other there are Arab-Orientals; the former are rational, peaceful, liberal, logical, capable of holding real values, without natural superstition; the latter are none of those things" (49). To this end, these novels describe their Muslims specifically as fanatical, violent, and repressive. Said also notes that actual knowledge or experience with Islam is not necessary for this project, and all that is relevant is that the

Western writer has the power to write about Islam from such a position that his or her proclamations are accepted as true simply by virtue of the writer writing them (211). While these novels may not precisely be representing themselves as the ultimate authority on Islam, they are partaking in a cultural milieu where certain representations of Muslims are understood and accepted. These pre-existence of these ideas gives the authors tools room to explore the way that Americans accept, reject, or accommodate in some way these representations contributes to how Americans define themselves as a culture.

While the novels attempt to represent Muslims authentically, the purpose of this study will not be to assess the degree to which they succeed or fail, but rather to analyze how these representations work in creating American identity. Said points out in *Covering Islam* that there is not a "real" Islam to be uncovered because Muslims, like anyone else, create their own subjective ideas of what it is to be a Muslim in many varied ways across the world. Whether the world of Islam is represented as monolithic or multicultural in the 9/11 matters only in that it highlights what it is about America that is different or important. So, in *The Submission,* when arguments are raised that there are numerous ways to be a Muslim and that terrorists or fundamentalists do not represent all Muslims, it serves to illustrate how and if America will define itself in acceptance or rejection of that idea. Finally, in *Falling Man,* the lack of representation of any other type of Muslim but the rigidly devoted fanatic is not a comment on what Islam is "really" at its core, but rather a way of highlighting the lack of a similar central conviction in the lives of the American protagonists.

As the novels attempt to describe an authentic Muslim or an authentic terrorist, they also attempt to describe an authentic America through the other's eyes. But just as there is no "real" Islam to be uncovered, there is no "real" America to be found either, simply a series of

arguments and projections of what an America in a post-9/11 is supposed to be. The events of 9111 were evidence that there is another way to look at America, not as a paragon of liberty and land of opportunity, but as a target of moral opprobrium from other quarters. It also caused Americans to immediately experience a change in their circumstances, as Michael Rothberg puts it in his response to Richard Grey, America's "borders have been locked down, civil liberties curtailed" (155). This is a threat to the perception, justified or not, of America as a free and open society. Not only is the reality of this view of America under attack, but the value of it, if this type of freedom and openness can both threaten American security and give a voice to the type of attack on American value systems. In response to this kind of a threat to American identity, these novels retrench and try to answer whether or not being an American is simply some kind of tribal identification, that is, an identity that means nothing more than the simple fact of belonging to a group, or are there positive ideological traits that are associated with this nationality.

In these novels, the authors in their own ways attempt to deal with these issues by using the presence of the Muslim outsider. In *Covering Islam,* Said writes that "public image of Islam in the new geopolitical intellectual setting is that it is invariably found in a confrontational relationship with whatever is normal" (42). In order for a new normal in American life to be established, the Muslims in the novel must represent a disconcerting presence, whether they are obviously antithetical to the safety and security of Americans, such as in *Falling Man* or *Terrorist,* where one's American-ness can be defined by simply being someone that the Islamic terrorist wants to harm, or whether the Muslims are depicted as being less overtly physically threatening, as with the Muslim-American architect Mohammed Khan in *The Submission.* In fact, the latter is in its own way depicts a more disruptive Muslim character, one who does not fit neatly into an "us/them" binary. Khan's presence creates a question as to who is allowed to

count as an American, who gets to decide that, and what it means for Americans to accept or reject Khan as an American. The fact that there is even a conversation within the novel about this is a commentary on the power Americans have over outside groups, and, more to the point, the power that an American has to project an identity of the outsider onto another group. The power to decide who belongs and who does not is in this case a defining characteristic of an American.

The need to establish insiders and outsiders and what it means to belong to an American identity arises with the destabilizing of an older sense of identity, which is missed, despite it having also been constructed through a process similar to the one described here. It is no more real or original or authentic than contemporary ideas of identity, but this "center" that Robert Stone speaks of is nevertheless desired because of the anxiety left in the wake of the trauma of 9/11. Peter Morey describes an "anxious activity" that reveals "the urge to fix a completed and secure national identity [that] can be seen as the manifestation of the desire for a unified ego and the attempt to overcome a perceived lack" (38). He argues that the outward show of patriotism and displays of national symbols "are actually symptoms of a desire for origins, for return to the mythical unified state before the sundering caused by the arrival of the Other" and that these images "reanimate the rhetoric of freedom and self-determination by which ...the United States...understands itself as coming into being." Each of the novels examined here are a part of that project, and while they are not dealing in patriotic imagery as such, their depictions of American identity in opposition to the Muslim do betray an anxiety over the supposed sanctity of American values that have been called into question by 9/11. What those who identify as American may have lost is a ce liainty that the American way is the right way and any deviance from it represents a deviance in moral character, and security in the fact that as an American, one

does not have to question the primacy of their value system. But this idea that American values are above reproach and unquestionable has its roots in older, but no less socially constructed, ideas of Americanism.

The definition of American culture in opposition to the other is not a new idea, and much of what the 9111 novel does with Muslims is similar to the process of defining white American identity in opposition to blackness that Toni Morrison describes in *Playing in the Dark.* Morrison argues that one could only define being free by defining what it means to not be free (38), and that American ideals such as "autonomy, authority, newness, difference" (44) all arise from encounters with enslaved African Americans and the projection of an identity onto them. This "fabricated brew of darkness, otherness, alarm, and desire" was created in order to justify the power imbalance between whites and blacks (Morrison). But more than simply create a rationalization for this imbalance, the creation of an African-American identity allowed the white Americans more possibilities to create their own identities. Morrison explores the ways that both black and white identities play off of each other, and they way that those in power are able to create identities for both themselves and others, and they way that they can use these projected identities to their own advantage.

Morrison asks, "In what ways does the imaginative encounter with Africanism enable white writers to think about themselves?" (51), a question germane to a discussion of representations of Islam in the 9/11 novel. While the relationship between Muslims and Americans is not precisely comparable to white Americans and African Americans, Morrison's views on identity formation still lend a helpful lens through which to view these novels. 9/11 may have highlighted, or created, as Morey argues, a "lack" of something in the American identity, and in response, the culture has appropriated and recreated an idea of the Muslim that

allows American writers to think about themselves and about America in certain ways. In *Terrorist,* the titular teenage fundamentalist is a mirror through which Updike can look at America in ways that theoretically skew away from conventional views of America, and by delegitimizing the worldview of Ahmad, which he does by ascribing to him various negative characteristics of Muslims that have become conventional in Western discourse about Islam, he can dismiss these critiques and reassert the primacy of American values. In *The Submission,* Waldman uses Khan as a focal point around which her white American characters battle for the right to determine what is an American, with Khan's Islamic identity disqualifying him from having a deciding voice in this conversation despite his status as an American citizen. In *Falling Man,* Hammad, a fictionalized representation of one of the 9/11 hijackers, is a ghostly, dream-like presence, hovering over the narrative and calling into question the solidity of American values. Hammad's certainty, presented here as a rigid devotion to fundamentalist Islam, contrasts with the uncentered lives of the Americans in the novel. These novels each seek to create an understanding of American identity in the 21st century, and as white Americans used the space created by the invention of African American identity to define themselves, these American novelists use Muslim identity to explore what it means to be an American.

It may be that these novels can be construed as misrepresenting or stereotyping Muslims, but the purpose here will not be to correct misconceptions or to hold authors to task for their oversights, nor will it be to laud them for their sophisticated takes on Muslim identity. The degree to which these depictions of Muslims are authentic or not will only be relevant if it reveals how these depictions help the author create a Muslim that will in turn help the author create Americans. These are all constructed identities, and as Said points out, it is unclear how

any representation can be "true" (*Orientalism* 272). But it may be constructive to examine how these representations work and what kind of ideas of Americanism are produced as a result.

Terrorist: The Muslim as a Mirror for America

In *Terrorist,* John Updike grapples with the problem of an America whose value systems and identity as an exceptional nation that sets the standard among the cultures of the world as a moral leader has been called into question by the terrorist attacks of 9/11. By using Ahmad Mullow, the American-born Muslim terrorist of the novel's title, as a guide through which Updike voices critiques of American culture, he subverts those critiques. Updike's Ahmad is smart and incisive, and Updike imbues him with a degree of credibility, but ultimately, he is umeliable, a wayward, rebellious teenager. Because of this, the American characters are able to reject Ahmad's point-of-view, and in doing so, affirm their own identities, not only in terms of what it means to be an American, but inasmuch as they are in a position to accept or reject the outsider. Ahmad's mother, his guidance counselor, a girl he has a crush on, her boyfriend, and even the Lebanese-American CIA informant who lures Ahmad into the world of terrorism all stand in judgment of Ahmad, and their judgments are framed in such a way as to react to Ahmad's judgments of them.

Critics and reviewers of Updike's *Terrorist* have disagreed as to whether or not the title "terrorist," Ahmad Mulloy, represents a serious effort on Updike's part to represent the mindset of a radical Muslim (Versluys 174-175). What is missed in this discussion is that whether he is realistic or not, Ahmad's purpose in the novel is to allow Updike to portray Americans who occupy superior positions to Ahnlad. Ahmad can be judged because he is alien, but the degree to which he is "alien" is established by Updike's description of traits that allow the characters to put themselves into those superior positions. And for these American characters, partaking of Americanism comes naturally, as though it is an inborn, inherent quality achieved through native

birth and exercised through the use of power and privilege, even in the cases of the theoretically "underprivileged," specifically Ahmad's classmates, who are described as such in the novel.

One of the more frequent uses of the Muslim character in these novels is to be something that Americans are, at least theoretically, not. Muslims are intolerant and narrow-minded, seek a return to the past, and embrace simplicity and find happiness in God. Americans, in constrast, love freedom of thought, look to the future, and are caught up in a consumerist society and a futile chase for happiness with material things. In *Terrorist,* Ahmad's own definition of himself is tied up in his Islamic faith which he sees specifically as a rejection of American society. He opens the novel decrying as "devils" his teachers, here described as "weak Christians and non-observant Jews" (1). These teachers and his mother, for whom he also reserves a fair amount of scorn, are the significant authority figures in his life, and he sets himself apart from them immediately by referencing their religion. Ahmad feels that if he is what Americans are not, then the flip side of that is that Americans are what he is not. As Ahmad defines Islam throughout the novel, he couples it with a rejection of consumerism and what he describes as licentious sexuality. This results in a somewhat complicated formulation of what it means to be an American through the eyes of Updike. As Stone points out in his review, Updike's view of America through Ahmad's eyes is not entirely uncritical. But that is not to say that even Ahmad's critiques of materialism and sexuality are presented as bad character traits of Americans. Ahmad's is a complex character with a simple ideology, which allows his views on America to be read a number of ways and allows Updike to criticize and valorize aspects of the America of his novel at the same time. One of the more complicated questions that need to be addressed in analyzing Ahmad's critiques of Americanism, and thus of Updike's formulation of American identity, is of just how American does Updike represent Ahmad to be.

Ahmad's ethnic identity can be read as unstable throughout the novel. Ahmad's mother is American, while his absent father is Egyptian. His skin is repeatedly described as "dun colored" (31), which marks him as somewhat unique in his overwhelmingly African-American and Hispanic school (7). His whiteness marks him as closer to his mother than his father, which makes him closer to being an American, and yet an outsider in his own school, which paradoxically makes him less American. In his confrontations with Tylenol, the African-American boyfriend of Joryleen, Ahmad's one friend from high school, Tylenol distinguishes between Ahmad and "Black Muslims" whom Tylonel "don't diss" (14). Tylenol is the only character in the novel to through epithets at Ahmad, calling him a "raghead" during one conversation. In *Terrorist,* Americanism somehow comes naturally to Americans, even to Ahmad. Ahmad has to work hard to reject his American side, and even at that, it never completely leaves him because of his white skin. He even has to wear a bright white t-shirt to school because it is the one neutral color he can find that will mark him as a "non-combatant" in the gang wars between the African-American and Hispanic gangs. Here his whiteness, and his ability to choose whiteness, specifically marks him as someone who does not belong. The African-American characters in the novel are specifically disenfranchised: the city they live in is deeply depressed, guidance counselor Jack Levy periodically notes how few prospects most of the students at the school really have, Tylenol and Joryleen eventually end up as pimp and a prostitute in the novel. Yet despite their status outside the American mainstream, there is no doubt that they themselves are Americans, with the privilege of looking at Ahmad and either pitying him or scorning him for his outsider status.

But according to Updike, even though Ahmad rejects his American side, partaking in American identity is still an option for him. He chooses to follow the religion of his father, but

he could identify with his mother if he wanted to. His decision to not associate with a gang is also a choice. It is hinted at that he could identify with the African-Americans at his school – he notices that he gets "glances" from the "dusky girls" at school, but he rejects them out of hand, invoking once again his religion, claiming that he does not want to have his "body marred" by becoming sexually involved with them. His guidance counselor notes that he has considerable potential if he wanted to go to college, but Ahmad declines the opportunity, believing that more "education ...might weaken his faith" (212). Ahmad's rejection of the American dream is consistent with Updike's representation of American identity as a choice that others may become a part of if they choose. Americans are open and tolerant, and rejection of Updike's idea of American identity is an example of churlishness on Ahmad's part, and incomprehensible malice on the part of Islamic extremists. A fictionalized Homeland Security Secretary at one point laments, "I love this damn country so much I can't imagine why anyone would want to bring it down" (254). While this character is someone cartoonish, as are most of the characters in *Terrorist,* this line gets to one of the central conceits of the novel: Americans are welcoming to all, and if you just could understand how nice we are, we could help you. By making it clear that it is Ahmad's choice to not be an American, Updike allows Americans to be the wronged party, which, contrary to what Stone says in his review, may preclude an American's need to consider the view of the outsider, if their understanding of America is so flawed as to not be grateful for the opportunity to join.

How the various characters react to Ahmad's rejection of America and its values reveals how each character deals with his or her own insecurities as regards his or her place in American society. Tylonel reacts angrily when he finds out that Ahmad has visited Joryleen's church to see her sing (95). Tylenol is a young black male whom Joryleen describes as having next to

nothing (215), and he is jealous of his position and resentful of any interlopers. On the other end of the spectrum, the Homeland Security Secretary is dumbfounded that anyone would not want to participate in the bounty of America. He is the ultimate insider, and he can afford to be magnanimous, whatever the views of his real-life counterpart may actually be. Theresa, Ahmad's mother, a lower-middle class single mother, is too preoccupied with her own life to pay too much attention to Ahmad. She is vaguely tolerant of his decision to pursue his Muslim identity, but demonstrates little serious concern over his rejection of his "American" side, or even of his rejection of her. Theresa's lack of concern is echoed in the other major female character, Joryleen, who humors Ahmad more than anything else.

Ahmad's rejection of America and its values affects no one more than the guidance counselor Jack Levy. Levy, while perhaps not as much an insider as the Homeland Security Secretary, is a white male and is presented as a significant stakeholder in the American Dream. In his role as a guidance counselor, he is supposed to be shuttling students into their proper roles in American society. He wants Ahmad to go to college, but Ahmad explicitly rejects this option, not wanting to become a part of an "imperialist economic system rigged in favor of rich Christians," (78). Levy in desperation even suggests Ahmad join the Army, arguing with him over whether or not Ahmad with be fighting with or against his "brothers." Ahmad's rejection of America unsettles this white, middle-class man because so much of his identity is invested in the integrity of the system. In contrast to the Homeland Security Secretary, who despite being flummoxed by the motivations of people who do not like America is "secure" in his position in the country, Levy has less control over his identity, especially if Ahmad is rejecting the guidance counselor's guidance.

Levy feels beleaguered, complaining after being called out by Theresa for generalizing about "single mothers" that "How tedious it makes conversation these days, every possible group except white males on the defensive, their dukes up" (87). The irony is that Levy is himself being defensive while complaining about "every possible group" being on the defensive. Levy watches Ahmad and Theresa from a position of declining privilege. He himself is growing old, his physical potency waning, as is demonstrated during descriptions of his body during his affair with Theresa. The "these days" he laments represent a departure from a time where his group, white males, had more privilege. The tedium he complains of is a world where he has to approach people without the assumption that he has more power than them, that there are more ways in the world to go than his. Updike here may be commenting on a world after 9/11 where Americans can no longer be assured that the rest of the world looks up to them, where there are other value systems, ones that Americans perhaps cannot understand. Just as the Homeland Security Secretary cannot understand why anyone would want to hurt America, Levy cannot understand why people do not want to conform to his vision of the American Dream, something he has invested his entire life in perpetuating. Levy himself has not attained the happiness that is promised by the American Dream, with an unfulfilling career, a life in a decaying city, and an unhappy marriage to an increasingly overweight wife that he escapes by having an affair with a younger woman outside of his socio-economic class. Yet he remains invested in the promise of the American Dream, chasing Ahmad, competing with his imam, and refusing to let him choose an alternative path right up until the very end of the novel when Ahmad has chosen a radically different path.

Levy's understanding of his own path is fueled in part by what he purports to understand of Islam and how Americans should react to Islam. In his conversation about joining the army,

Levy points out to Ahinad that Iraq is important because "civilization started there" and that they had an "up and coming country until Saddam came along" (38). Given Levy's commitment to his own ideological path, it can be assumed that "up and coming" means proceeding along a path that leads to adherence to his vision of American values. Levy is providing guidance to other countries just as he is providing guidance to Ahinad. He is dismissive of Ahmad's concerns that he would be fighting his "brothers," insisting that many Iraqis are a part of the government. Levy feels that he can decide for Ahmad who is and is not worthy of his sympathy and identification (38). Levy's position as an American allows him to feel powerful enough that he can make these decisions based on limited information. He is disgusted that, as he sees it, many Arabs still admire Hitler (20) and his sympathy with the imam who gives a benediction at the high school's commencement ceremony erodes when Levy begins to reflect up on the events of 9/11 and begins to think of the imam as a man who "embod[ies] a belief system that not too many years ago managed the deaths" of many of Levy's American peers (20). Levy ability to do this comes from a place of American power that says more about his perspective than it does about any of the Muslim cultures he purports to be looking at. Levy, as an American, only needs to know a part of the story in order for him to feel comfortable making judgments on different cultures, so convinced is he at the supremacy of his vision ofright. At the same time, Levy is resentful that much of what it means to be an American now has been decided by Muslims.

Even as Updike describes Levy's haughty rush to judgment with little knowledge to critique American exceptionalism, he also describes American reaction to Islamic terrorism as a critical component of American identity. Levy angrily notes that "America's vaunted freedom is nothing much to be proud of, with Commies out of the running; it just makes it easier for terrorists to move about" (25). The mention of the "Commies" reveals that Updike believes

America is looking for another "other" to define itself against. In this case, Levy is disenchanted with American freedom, fitting perhaps because Levy's entire project in this novel is to deny Ahmad his choice to rebel against Levy's vision of America. Freedom as an American value is subordinated to the idea that the enemy must be controlled and defeated, just as the "Commies" were. Replacing Communists with Muslims in this case also replaces a sense that values and ideals define America with the sense that a nationalist, and militaristic, identity defines America. Levy specifically critiques "freedom," perhaps the quality most associated with America by Americans, demonstrating how profoundly the nature of American identity has shifted for him. That Levy has further allowed his vision of Muslims, here the "creeps who flew the plane into the World Trade Center," to inform his sense of American identity to such a degree is reinforced by his supposition that "freedom" is "much vaunted." By whom? Not by the "creeps," but presumably by Americans themselves, who, according to Levy, cannot be trusted to come up with a reliable accounting of themselves. The presence of Muslims has destabilized American identity to the point where Americans cannot create a stable identity for themselves. The presence of Muslims within American society is especially troubling to Levy, and by the end of

this rumination, he is back to his guidance counselor persona, noting that with their technological expertise, these "creeps" could have potentially been of good use to American interests. This sentiment is another example of Levy's desperate need to corral Ahmad onto an American pathway.

The idea that Updike uses Levy to critique the idea of a singular American ideal is complicated by the fact that Levy gets his way in the end. After Ahmad is convinced to drive a truck full of explosives through the Lincoln Tunnel, Levy intercepts him, and pledges to stick with him and die himself if Ahmad is determined to go through with the attack (38). If Levy

cannot persuade Ahmad away from the path he is on and back to subscribing to "American" ideals, then Levy's entire worldview is invalid and he may as well die in the blast with Ahmad. Levy's identity is entirely invested in the idea of the primacy of a certain vision of American values. The existence of people who do not share American values is such an existential threat to American identity that in order to continue at all, all other perspectives must be cajoled into matching America's. For this to be true, it must mean that one trait of American identity is its universality. If Updike is critiquing this idea, he is doing it by employing a fairly pathetic and impotent Levy as the idea's champion. However, it is hard to argue that in the world of the novel, Ahmad would be better off for having blown himself up in a suicide attack that would have killed hundreds of others. Levy suggests that the bomb was not even properly armed (305), suggesting that any attempt to strike a blow against his vision of the American Dream was ultimately futile, a proposition reinforced by the revelation earlier in the novel that the entire bomb plot had been in large part orchestrated by a CIA infiltrator whose design was to flush out potential terror plots. The novel leaves ambiguous why Ahmad fails to detonate the bomb; whether it was Levy's persuasion, the sight of innocent children waving to him in the tunnel, or simply a lack of nerve. But Ahmad is not remorseful; his final thoughts in the novel are him lamenting that "The Devils have taken my God away" (305). Levy's victory is not complete, because he has not changed Ahmad's mind, but it may be that in order for Levy's ideals to succeed, compliance is all that is necessary, not conversion. This suggests that what happens inside of Ahmad's head was never that important to Levy, and that what the outsider thinks of America is actually not impmiant at all.

By consistently casting suspicion on the validity of Ahmad's views on both America and Islam, Updike creates a Muslim that the American characters in the novel can feel superior to

and paternalistic towards. Ahmad's religious belief exists almost solely to provide a mirror image of everything America is not, doing so by creating an Islamic identity that does not have to be taken seriously. Ahmad's Islam is part rigid and half-comprehended ideology, half teenage rebellion. Ahmad is rigid and steadfast, sometimes to the point of absurdity. He declares that he does not "hate Americans, but the American way is the way of infidels" (36). This formulation of Ahmad's view of Americans sounds both absurd and ungracious. For Ahmad to say he does not hate Americans, but at the same time call them infidels, people who will ultimately bum in hell according to his worldview, is a nonsensical paradox to someone like Levy for whom the terms "American" and "American Way" are inseparable. This idea is also a mirrored version of Levy's demonstrated distaste for all things Islamic, from the imam at the graduation to the distant Arabs who idolize Hitler. Levy has moved on from the idea that Islam itself is not bad, only the extremists, where Ahmad remains ideologically inconsistent. Ahmad's inconsistency within the context of his ideological contrasts with Levy's simplicity.

Ahmad's speech here, using words like "infidels" and in the next sentence warning that America is "headed for a terrible doom," makes him an even more alien presence. These speech patterns are described by Updike as affectations, corning from the mouth of an eighteen year old who has spent his entire life in New Jersey. Ahmad can code switch when he wants to, using more common American vernacular, saying things like "Most people were cool," when speaking to his mother and Levy later in a more comfortable setting (77). It is when he is focused on performing his religion that he sounds artificial, forced. His American side is the "natural" side here, when he can speak in an unaffected manner, whereas his Muslim side is all an elaborate and inconsistent performance. This speech contrasts with both Levy's "standard" American

dialect, and the "nonstandard" African American Vernacular of Joryleen and Tylenol, all of whom are either certain or comfortable with their position as Americans.

Ahmad is presented as a wayward figure, in need of guidance, and the Americans in the novel are the ones who can fill that role. His father's absence suggests that it is not possible for anyone to fulfill that role except for an American. The two Muslim characters who do serve as father figures and guides for Ahmad both fail in the role inasmuch as they do not guide him to a fulfilling, logically consistent path. The imam is an underdeveloped character whom Ahmad feels distant from. And Charlie ends up being revealed as a CIA agent whose loyalties were always with America. Levy becomes a father figure, filling that role more robustly when he begins sleeping with Theresa. Infantilizing Ahmad's search for Muslim identity by turning it into adolescent rebellion or a pathetic attempt to please the father who abandoned him makes Islamic ideology seem foolish, almost laughable, and by highlighting the aspects of his identity that need correcting, the novel creates an American who has the things that Ahmad lacks and who can correct him as one would a wayward child. Levy's identity as an American is tied up in his ability to fulfill a paternalistic role toward the other represented by Ahmad.

The clearest instances of Ahmad's teen rebellion come in the passages where he is angry with her mother and treats her in a way that is intended to shock American sensibilities. Ahmad insists his mother wear a headscarf to his graduation. Theresa explains that Ahmad asks that "if there was one thing he wanted for his graduation it was his mother not looking like a whore" (114). The off-hand manner with which she relates this to Levy demonstrates that Theresa is not taking her son's engagement with Islam and his rejection of her and of his vision of American culture seriously, and that even for Ahmad to go so far as to allude to his mother as a "whore" does not represent a threat to Theresa's identity. She can humor Ahmad because she knows that

she is not in any danger of having her sexuality subjected to male rule. Theresa "spotted some other scarved mothers, Black Muslims ...Turks," but does not feel any particular kinship with them (114). She notes that she is the only one with red hair underneath the scarf, that when she takes off the scarf she enjoys her own identity marked by a phenotype unique to white women. Theresa is free with her sexuality throughout the novel, unencumbered by a husband and able to use and discard Levy's attentions at will. Ahmad reacts viscerally against her, rejecting her more specifically than he rejects anyone or anything else. But Theresa remains largely unaffected by Ahmad's scorn, secure in her own position and sexual freedom.

This is not to suggest that Theresa has no maternal instincts or that her creation of her identity is reflected only in her indifference to her son. She is concerned with her son, though notably mostly only when Levy is present. She is concerned that Ahmad would be "influenced by the wrong people" because as a child he was "so easily led" (236). At this point, Ahmad has in fact been influenced by the "wrong people," having already made his plans to participate in a suicide terror attack. Earlier, after Ahmad gets ajob with a furniture company that ultimately leads to his recruitment into the terrorist plot, Theresa imagines that he has become "more open to new ideas," thought she concedes that she "may be imagining this" (162). Theresa does not know Ahmad, and her weakness here in failing to take the threat of Ahmad's growing extremism seriously echoes Levy's distaste for those who extol America's freedom without realizing it is a weakness. Theresa is the character in the novel who is least encumbered by the judgments of others, particularly as regards her sexuality, and she is arguably the one most responsible for Ahmad's rejection of his American identity and embrace oflslam. Not only has she ignored the threat growing in her own house, but her choices led her to exposing Ahmad to a life of want, where he "tasted America's plenty by licking its underside," feeling the lack of material things

that were "impossible to squeeze from the salary of a husbandless nurse's aide" (149). This not only serves to blame a certain class of American for the dangers of the post-9111 world, but it turns the lens of analysis off of the problems of Muslims and back onto America by making their grievances all about what Americans have done.

The last remaining character that fulfills a parental role for Ahmad also focuses on what Americans have done, but from a Muslim perspective. However, Charlie, the man who takes Ahmad under his wing at the furniture store where he works after graduating from high school, is a complicated character. He is the one who recruits Ahmad into the terrorist cell, but he is also a CIA informant who is ultimately killed by members of his cell, which includes his own family members. Charlie is overtly Western, described as "very American" (142) and is obsessed with television commercials. He is critical of them, but at the same time enamored with them, aspiring to someday create them himself. Charlie is in many respects a "good Muslim," one whose acceptance into the fold of American identity requires an explicit rejection of his Muslim identity. Charlie's is infatuated with American media, expresses admiration for no less a symbol of America than George Washington, violates conservative Muslim sexual mores by procuring a prostitute for Ahmad, and, in the end, officially cooperates with a group dedicated to the defense of America. Charlie's attempts to cross over into Amercanism are doomed, as his abandonment of his Muslim identity leads to the loss of his life. This serves two purposes: to demonstrate just how hostile Muslim terrorists are to those who choose a different path, contrasting with Levy's attempts to guide Ahmad back onto the "right" path, and to signify that in order for a Muslim to become an American, he must literally lose everything about himself. Charlie's figurative death of identity is translated into an actual death and he is not able to leave Islam and cross over into

American culture. American culture remains whole and inviolate, refusing entry to anyone who could potentially disturb its sense of self.

From his first appearance in the novel, it is clear that Charlie has a unique perspective on America. Even though the reader is never privy to Charlie's thoughts, his conversations reveal his reflective character, not unlike Levy's. Charlie's first encounter with Ahmad takes the form a discussion between Charlie, his father, and Ahmad about the nature of America. Where Charlie's father, Mr. Chehab, defends America, discoursing on how good they have it here, Charlie playfully points out the faults in America, specifically the way it treats African-Americans (144-146). The irony here is that Charlie is the one who is working with the CIA, whereas his father is the one who is secretly funding a terror cell. This is further complicated by the fact that Charlie, who stands up for African-Americans and decries the United States' exploitation of them, will later hire Joryleen as a prostitute for Ahmad, participating in the exploitation himself. Charlie's anti-American criticism is subverted by his willingness to engage in the exploitation of an African-American woman, which in Charlie's opinion is a perfectly American activity. At the time Charlie hires Joryleen, it has not been made clear that he is working for the CIA, but he has been established as both a "very American" Muslim and a leader of a terrorist cell. It is difficult to find consistency in Charlie's actions, highlighting the difficulties an outsider may face in navigating the proper ways to perform American identity. Unlike Tylenol, who is able to claim Americanism by nature and has no trouble performing it, Charlie has to work at it. His laid back demeanor is belied by the contortions he has to perform in order to maintain his own sense of self.

Charlie's interest in becoming an American is further described by his intense interest in the American Revolution and how invested he is in the way history contributes to the definition

of national character. As someone who is attempting to become an American, he accesses these stories in an attempt to understand and take part in the America that he sees as being created through this history. Charlie identifies with the revolutionary war soldiers, explaining to Ahmad that "We were toast" (175) when explaining a precarious time during the history of the war. He later explains to Ahmad that the Hessians, enemies in the war, who "butchered us" (177) were able to intermarry with locals and become Americans. Charlie is demonstrating his love of America by paying tribute to the foundational stories of the nation, and he is particularly interesting in the stories of Hessians becoming Americans. The idea of members of an enemy race becoming Americans holds obvious meaning for Charlie in retrospect. Charlie sees American identity as accessible, something he can apply to and transform into if he does the right things. He has this in common with Levy, who has been trying to get Ahmad to do and say the right things, thought he and Ahmad are moving in different directions. Ahmad has something that Charlie does not, however. Ahmad has a white American mother and an easy entry point to American culture, where Charlie only has immigrant parents and no natural access to American identity. Charlie's path faces obstacles thrown up to keep American identity safe and exclusive. Charlie's presence in America is an aberration, and it is worth noting that even his admiration of American history has sinister undertones. Many of the things he extols in the American Revolution can be also read as an admiration of the tactics of terrorist groups who are also fighting an imperial power with few resources. Charlie's attempt to participate in Americanism taints the origin myths of his adopted culture, disturbing America's integrity and security even in its mythology. It is during this conversation that Charlie first broaches the subject of jihad with Ahmad, tainting the subject of the revolution with extremist Muslim associations.

Charlie seems to have little core conviction of his own. Other than his interest in the revolution and his qualified defense of America when Ahmad suggests that the country would have been better staying under British rule and following the path of Canada, there is no sense of why exactly he likes America. He is even less convincing when he is performing as a Muslim. His speech is casual and peppered with American idioms, unlike Ahmad's stilted, formal speech. Despite his role as a leader of the cell, he demonstrates little love for Islam. When he discusses the deaths of innocents in the World Trade Center with Ahmad, his defense of al Qaeda is described as being related "as ifreciting" (184), implying that he is parroting a script he had memorized to perform a role. When he takes Ahmad to meet other members of the cell, one of the members hears the word "America" and "utters a heated long Arabic sentence" (245) that, when Ahmad asks Charlie to translate for him, Charlie dismisses casually, shrugging and calling it "The usual."

Despite not participating fully in the jihad, the lack of conviction continues to mark Charlie as problematic. Having no demonstrated conviction one way or the other, it will be impossible for Charlie to become an American. The Americans in this novel have strong sense of what they believe it means to be American. Theresa believes in her freedom and her choices, Levy is heavily invested the American Dream, and the Homeland Security Secretary has faith in his idea of America as a sacrosanct ideal. Absent any positive definition of what it means to be a member of this group, Charlie is a member of no group. He was described as "very American," but with no sense of how much "very" is.

The "real" Americans of *Terrorist* require no qualifiers. They are each secure in their own place as Americans. To recreate a secure and inviolate America in the wake of 9/11, which showed America to be insecure and which raised questions about the integrity of American

values, Updike has created an American identity that all "real" Americans come by naturally and that admits of no deviation. All of the threats have been neutralized by the end of the novel, and Levy has succeeded in asserting his authority and moving Ahmad away from his alternate path. Levy's victory is the culmination of Updike's effort to ease an anxiety over the disturbance of the American world by the un-ignorable introduction of a conflicting value system. Updike's Americans are those who can judge, correct, and reject alternatives to their worldview.

The Submission: The Argument over America

In the early chapters of *The Submission,* Paul Rosen, the chair of a jury chosen to select from thousands of entries a design for a proposed memorial to the victims of the terror attacks of 9111, reflects on the events of that day. Recalling how often he watched the video footage of the World Trade Center crumbling, he notes how "you couldn't call yourself an American if you hadn't, in solidarity, watched your fellow Americans being pulverized" (13). And he wonders, "What kind of American did watching create? A traumatized victim? A charged up avenger? A queasy voyeur?" Speculating that he and his fellow Americans "harbored these protagonists" inside their hearts, he hopes that the memorial they create will somehow unite America and help heal the country. Waldman uses the word "create" to describe what happened on 9/11, and her novel is about how different Americans staii the process of creating an American using 9111. The memorial is a stand-in for the events of 9/11 and its aftermath. The memorial itself will not define what it means to be an American, or even what the proper way to deal with 9/11 will be, but Waldman uses the process of selecting the design of the memorial and the controversy over who is and is not allowed to speak about it as a way of crafting an idea of America.

But what the novel ends up describing is not a country that has come together after 9/11, but one that is struggling with its identity along class lines and one that is in the process of deciding who gets to decide what America is supposed to be in this world. As this process uses 9/11 as its focal point, Waldman looks at how different groups of Americans use 9/11 and their reaction to it in order to assert their dominance. In *The Submission,* certain characters are allowed into the conversation and certain are not. For there to be an argument about what America is supposed to be, the parties have to come to some idea of who is and who is not an American. While these arguments are not resolved in the novel, they do create a sense that there

is a need to create a new idea of America to replace the old one that was destabilized on 9/11, and that a part of that idea is the tension between different value systems in American culture.

Amy Waldman's novel details the split between Claire Burwell, who initially represents a liberal and inclusive view of America, and Sean Gallagher, who represents a reactionary and protectionist view in the wake of the selection of a Muslim American's design for the 9/11 memorial. Those she frames as liberal elite support the architect Mohammed Khan's submission, while conservative, blue collar characters protest against it. Waldman uses the controversy over the memorial as a way of staging an argument over the nature of American ideals, specifically as they regard tolerance and inclusion in the family of "America." The liberal elites, including Claire, the wealthy widow of an investment banker who was killed on 9/11, support Khan until the intensity of the protests and the attacks of opposing voices make them feel less secure in their position as arbiters of American values. Conversely, the more the voice of the conservatives, represented by Sean, the brother of a fireman killed while engaging in rescue efforts, engages with both the elites and the Muslim characters in the novel, the less strident he becomes in his opposition to respecting outsiders, specifically Muslims, and including them in America.

As the novel concerns itself primarily with arguments about the nature of Americanism, it works on creating a sense that there is something there in the wake of 9111 that has changed about America. People who once were able to call themselves Americans no longer have that ability, and that occurs as a result of the arguments that arise after 9111. In the novel, these arguments center on Mohammed Khan, an Indian-American Muslim who was born to immigrant parents and who was born in the US and raised in Virginia (91). Despite being a native born

American, and his repeated protests throughout the novel that he is, in fact, an American, his inclusion in American society is contested, and ultimately denied. On the surface, the arguments in the novel seem to be whether or not Khan and fellow Muslims should be allowed to identify as Americans, the deeper argument between the Claire Burwells and Sean Gallaghers of the novel is who gets to decide who can identify as an American and how each side develops those parameters. Khan himself, and, to a lesser extent, the other prominent Muslim character in the novel, Asma, an illegal Bangladeshi immigrant whose husband was a janitor in the World Trade Center and was also killed on 9/11, make their voices heard and each in their own way enter into the argument about whether they should be considered Americans, but ultimately all Khan can do make arguments that Claire or Sean may weigh, judge, and accept or reject. It is clear throughout that Khan has no power in making this determination; as in *Terrorist,* the novel is less concerned with describing the agency of the Muslims as it is with creating a Muslim with certain traits that force the American characters, in this case all white Americans, to react.

The ambiguity of Khan's status allows Sean and Claire to differ over whether or not he should be included in the American family. The very ambiguity is a creation of this novel that defines some aspect of American identity. Claire and Sean disagree over who gets to define American identity, and as they do this, they create a new America that leaves Kahn on the outside. This conversation also creates an Americanism that is something that even can be argued over – an identity that evolves, an identity that can include and exclude certain groups, and that can change and be modified according to the needs of the country. Sean does not argue in the novel that American identity should be static and bounded, but rather that Muslims in general and Khan in particular should be excluded. As the novel progresses, both Claire and Sean shift in espousing specific criteria for Khan to meet, again suggesting that American

identity is something that can be determined and is not simply a pre-existing, objective designation. But the battle over deciding who gets to determine these things raises issues of which class gets to consider themselves "authentic" Americans.

In order to have this debate in the first place, the two classes need to have solid ground upon which they can argue about their right to designate Americanism, and they each find that ground using Khan. Muslims in this novel serve as a way of defining which different kinds of Americans are arguing, but the fact that they can argue about something that is outside of America marks them both as being on the inside, or, more appropriately "being" America. They need to exist in relation to Khan first before they can exist in relation to each other. Much of the novel is spent with these two characters interrogating Khan in various ways, whether in person, through the media, or in the form of public displays of protest, attempting to discern his "true" motivations, which Khan becomes more and more reluctant to divulge. Khan becomes more of a cipher as the novel goes on. His motives seem clear in the beginning, but Waldman creates more ambiguity in the end, making not only Claire, but the reader less clear about Khan's motives as the novels comes to a close. As Claire's feelings about the controversy surrounding the memorial and her role in the selection become more confused, Khan becomes more of what she needs him to be. In order to reject Khan as an American, Claire needs him to be not the ambitious, personable, and secular man he seems to be in the beginning of the novel, but the arrogant, mysterious, and, most damningly, perhaps religious man he looks like at the end.

9/11 is not simply the ground on which this battle is waged, it serves as an inciting incident and perhaps an occasion to make, or remake America, into something new that meets the needs of the respective classes at war in the novel. As the novel opens, Claire sits on a jury of artists, critics, financiers, and politicians who are in charge of selecting the winning design for

the memorial. Claire is the only family member on the jury (3), which she feels sets her apart, but as the widow of a wealthy investment banker, she is squarely in their circle. Sean is not on the jury, which causes him a considerable amount of consternation (58). The jury is put together simply to judge a design, but from the outset, this stands for the right and the ability to judge what it means to remember 9/11 and in what way Americans should do it. As this will evolve after the selection of Khans entry into a proxy war over American identity, it is important to note that Claire gets a seat at the table and Sean does not. The elites are in charge and the blue collar, middle class Gallaghers are left out, despite having suffered as much as Claire. This was not accidental, as the powers that be were concerned that too democratic a committee would result in something not refined or artistic enough. Claire herself worries that her fellow surviving family members would not like the design she votes for because they are "so jingoistic, so literal minded" (5). At this point it has not been revealed that Khan is the designer of the winning submission, but it foreshadows the emotional, perhaps unreasoning, and from Claire's point of view, un-American sentiments of the more conservative family members represented in Sean Gallagher.

Even Claire's sentimentality is called into question by some of the other members of the jury, particularly the artist Ariana, who questions whether nor not the family members should have any special rights above any other American in deciding the fate of the memorial. Ariana asserts to Claire that the memorial "isn't a graveyard. It's a national symbol" and should be emotional accessible to "anyone who visits – no matter how attenuated their link in time or geography to the attack" (5). Her argument underscores the importance of 9/11 to the creation of a national identity. But Ariana's attitude is contradictory. One the one hand she believes that all Americans, not just the families, have a say in how America feels after 9/11, but on the other

hand, she does believes that elites, in the form of artists, should have a primary hand in shaping that identity. The issue here is making sure that the "right" people have control over the memorial, and by extension, 9111, because 9111 is the unitary event that makes a creation of America in this mold possible. How America will feel about 9/11 is important to control because the fact that someone feels the way about 9/11 that the memorial will dictate will be a part of what makes those people Americans.

The jury itself is also a contradiction, composed of elites, and yet democratic. The selection process is blind, which is what allows Khan to win in the first place. This embodies a certain American ideal that merit should be valued over ethnic origin, or opportunity is available to all people in American regardless of race or religion. Before the selection, when all the entries were still anonymous, Ariana backs the alternative to Khan's design so enthusiastically that it is suspected that she knows who submitted it, and her support is considered a fairly serious abrogation of the democratic process (6). But once the process has served its purpose and the result is revealed to be politically problematic, the jurors react differently, depending on their particular roles. A number of the members of the jury try to reverse the democratically arrived at decision. Wilner, the aide to the governor, bluntly sums up the reaction when he says, "Jesus fucking Christ, it's a goddamn Muslim" after the winning selection's designer is revealed (16). Paul, not just the committee chairman but also a well-connected worker in the financial sector, spends the rest of the novel trying to convince Khan to withdraw his submission. Both of these men are motivated more by expediency than by any desire to exclude Muslims. Wilner decries "multicultural pandering," not because he has any specified animus against multiculturalism, but because he is working for a politician with national ambitions. In the epilogue it is revealed that the governor has become Vice President, and it is implied that it is in part due to her activism

against Khan's design, demonstrating how power can be gained by appealing to the Sean Gallaghers of the country against the elite voices, of which she herself is actually one, having picked the jury herself.

Waldman equates the memorial with national recovery, which in this novel takes the form of creation of a new idea of America, and the different parties continue to use the memorial, and the process of dealing with 9/11, as both a way to create a new identity and a way of asserting their right to dictate what that new identity will be. When their primacy in determining the design of the memorial is challenged, the jury does not retreat, but retrenches, and it reasserts its preeminence in dictating the appropriate way for the country to process 9/11. Ariana, despite her original opposition to the design, ends up being Khan's most vociferous backer on the committee, claiming by the end of the novel that if they were to abandon Khan's design in the face of public outcry then "anything challenging or difficult or produced by a member of an out-of-favor group will be fair game" for attack (236). Leo, an academic, comments that it "might be a healing gesture" (17). Violet, the mayor's aide, stumbles over herself, saying that if Khan is Muslim that is the "worst case" scenario, but then backpedalling and conecting herself, nodding to cultural sensitivity.

Controlling the message is of critical importance to both sides, because the message is more important than the actual end product. The elites do not want this to be a dialogue with the people they have deliberately excluded. Waldman expands the scope of the debate, describing a country that must incorporate more voices in order to be a coherent entity. As soon as the word gets out, the jury has lost its role as the sole arbiter of what is appropriate to place at the memorial spot. Not only will they be reduced via political pressure to providing only "guidance" (234), but the public outcry, led by Sean Gallagher and his ally, the anti-Muslim activist and

Pamela Geller doppelganger Debbie Dawson has been heard and has assumed an equal role in the discussion. What is important is not so much that Sean, Claire or Ariana win or lose the argument, but that Sean has managed to assert his voice into the conversation. Neither group, Sean or the jury, want to let the other dictate to them whether or not a Muslim is an acceptable choice to take a part in something that both sides agree is essential to creating a sense of American identity. Claire immediately backs Khan, and her character becomes defined by how she reacts to Khan throughout the rest of the novel. She begins by supporting Khan, motivated by both her liberal tolerance and by her love of her design, but by the middle of the novel, she begins to be skeptical of Khan's motives and in the end her feelings towards Khan are overwhelmingly negative. Though she meets with Khan twice in the novel, her views of him are less informed by actual interaction with the man himself than they are by the way the media frames Khan and the controversy over the memorial garden design and the way the other "9/11 families" react to the selection. In fact, her two meetings with Khan are characterized by a failure to interact in any meaningful way, with Khan all but ignoring her in the first meeting, and with Claire essentially intentionally misreading Khan and his intentions by the final meeting. Claire's reactions to Khan reveal the way that she grows increasingly anxious about her place in America and what her socioeconomic class does and does not entitle her to in a post-9/11 America.

Claire begins the novel occupying a sort of middle ground. Though as a wealthy Ivy League educated white woman she is squarely in her element among the artists, academics, and political and financial movers and shakers on the jury, the only reason she herself is on the jury is that she is a 9/11 widow. She was placed on the jury to represent the families, but she was also chosen to exercise some restraint over the families because those in charge feared that the

sentimentality and lack of the "right" kind of taste would result in something lacking what they consider the appropriate artistic merit being erected on the memorial site (8). That Claire was chosen over Sean Gallagher is indicative that it is not so much the politics of the jury that were a concern, after all, a number of jur y members share Sean's objections to Khan's selection, as sensibilities. The mix of people on the jury may be revealed to be heterogeneous in terms of political ideology, at least to an extent; those on the jury who oppose Khan's selection seem to be doing it out of a sense of paternalism towards "other" Americans, for instance the "heartland," which is "much more narrow-minded" (18), positing that there are different Americas, and it is the job of the one America – educated, emotionally measured, responsible – to take care of the other America -provincial, reactionary, untrustworthy. Leo, the academic, cautions that before announcing Khan as the winner, "We must consider the public reaction, the possibility of an uproar" (21). By acknowledging that there is a public, an "America," that the jury does not necessaril y represent, the novel expands the scope of what can be considered "America" by describing another set of people whose interests are critical. They consider themselves the guardians of American sensibilities, not allowing the "heartland" to make the decisions for themselves, a concern that does bear itself out in the story.

The presence of the Muslims in the novel is what allows Sean to assert his class's role in the argument over America. *The Submission* is largely about who gets to decide what it means to react to something appropriately as an American, and one of its central questions is whether or not the reaction matters as much as the agency to react in a way that any individual or group sees fit is what is important. The reactions of the other classes are not painted in a sympathetic light, but right or wrong are less at issue then the ability to determine one's own identity and make one's voice heard rather than being dictated to by elites. In this respect, the lower classes have

more in common with the Muslims in the book, as the committee attempts to shield them both from the truth of the selection, worrying that "the backlash [to the selection] could deal a real setback to [Muslims'] quest for acceptance" (21). The elites have differentiated between themselves and the rest of America with less power than they have, essentially putting lower class whites (the protestors in this book are universally white) in the same group as American Muslims. The Sean Gallagher faction resists this, aiming to place Muslims in a different category. They are only able to do that by attempting to subvert the Americanism of the jury, mocking their elitism, noting how they were "up at Gracie Mansion, drinking Dom Perignon," while they made their selection (86). The battle lines here are formed by Sean who defines what it means to be a "real American" in order to expel Muslims from partaking in American identity. But while the converse is also true – Sean has use anti-Muslim sentiment in order to gain power over the elites, whether or not that is one of his explicit aims. And inasmuch as his arguments, and Claire's, are the very things that are creating the very idea that there is an American identity, the existence of the Muslims in the novel allows Sean and Claire to suggest that there even is an American identity that they are arguing over.

Claire's response to the objections to Khan conforms to a tradition of liberalism. When a jury member bemoans the selection and the motives of those who support it, complaining about America's "stupid tolerance," Claire responds that "Tolerance isn't stupid" (18). She complains that American ideals "change only if we allow them to. And if we do, they've won" (21). This statement makes a number of assumptions, foremost among them being that Claire's liberal values are universal, objective, bedrock American values, and that these are the things that are under attack by the terrorists. This is a useful framing for a wealthy individual because it allows her to ignore any tangible grievances that the terrorists may have had in favor of an idealistic

dispute that she can still win despite having lost her husband. She does not have to confront her husband's role in an economic system that may have lead to the inequalities that provoked the 9111 attacks, or the wealth he left behind that allows her to continue to maintain this position of power on the jury that allows her to be an arbiter of these values. Even her espousing of these values serves her immediate interest – getting the memorial garden built. Claire championed the garden design before she knew that Khan was the designer, so while she may cite liberal values as a way of getting what she wants, her ultimate goal here is not necessarily to define these values. Her values are in service to her interest, but her values and her sense of her goal erode simultaneously, and she will end up opposi ng Khan. Despite winning that battle, she ends up with no coherent value system and no memorial garden for her husband.

Claire's place on the jury is contingent on her position as a widow, and her place in that social class is, at least in part, contingent upon the wealth of her late husband. She seems to derive much of her liberal program from the memory of her husband, whose actions during his life directly influence Claire's initial attitudes toward Muslims in general and Khan in particular. While going through some of Cal's old files, Claire looks over a letter ofresignation from his parents' country club that Cal had authored when he was twenty (33). He resigned in protest over the club's exclusion of minorities, echoing Claire's struggle against the jury members who wanted to exclude Khan. Claire admits to herself that when she fought for Khan it was "Cal's indignation she channeled" (32). 9/11 has required a reframing of her liberal agenda, away from Cal's protest in the name of equality for African-Americans and toward her current struggle. But the fact that the club to this day remains "as lily-WASP as it had ever been," and that Claire regards his protest as not only futile but as a failure reveals a skepticism on Claire's part about the efficacy of Cal's elitist liberal activism and indicates that she may not be entirely committed

to the cause at hand. Claire was not a member of Cal's social class when he married her, and even though she is an Ivy League graduate, Cal paid off her student loans, taking ownership of her entry into his social class (34). Claire's dedication to the memorial garden is due in large part to her dedication to Cal, and by extension Cal's dedication to liberal causes, but as she becomes more and more distant from Cal's ideals, she becomes more distant from Cal's social class, even though, as the jury's argument amongst themselves shows, not all members of Cal's class share the same ideals. Her relationship with Cal is a critical component of her power to set the agenda, and when that weakens and when even the slightest amount of doubt is cast upon its value, Claire begins to lose certainty in her vision of American identity.

The transition of Claire's worldview from her original liberal position to one closer to Sean's, actually reinforces the idea of Americanism that Waldman is creating in the novel by allowing Claire, and later Sean, to experiment with different kinds of American identity without actually losing her place as an "American," in contrast to Khan, whose shifts in identity push him further and further away from America. One of the first cracks in Claire's resolve occurs when she reads a column by Alyssa Spier, an ethically-challenged journalist who rises to prominence by covering the Khan story for the conservative New York Post and exploiting, and exacerbating, blue collar animus towards Muslims and Mohammed Khan. Spier relates that her sources have informed her that "the winsome widow on the jury has a soft spot for Mohammed Khan" and goes on to ask, "If, metaphorically speaking, she's sleeping with the enemy, whose side is she on?" (109). Spier's choice of word are meant to be suggestive, and Claire reacts strongly to the suggestion that there has been some sexual infidelity toward her late husband and toward her "race." Spier does not mean to even imply that an actual sexual act has occurred, but phrasing the question in such a way implies that support for Khan is tantamount to a betrayal,

and raises a spectre reminiscent of anti-African American propaganda that raised fears of miscegenation between black men and white women. Sean Gallagher, that representative of blue collar whites who is sexually attracted to Claire despite disliking her, has a jealous reaction the night the column appears online, driving to her house, stalking around and destroying property (1 10). Claire attempts to convince herself to shrug it off, noting that being attacked by the New York Post is "a badge of honor," but she is clearly distraught over this attack, from a newspaper that is not aimed at liberal elites, but at the people she is theoretically apart from, much as Khan himself will later feel betrayed by an article in the *New Yorker* opining against him (124). This marks the beginning of her identification with the "families," most of whom are represented as emotional, reactionary, and bigoted against Muslims. She tells herself that her stand for Khan "as much as any physical place, would be Cal's memorial" (109), reassuring herself that Spier's suggestion is not true, that she has not been unfaithful to her husband, her race, her class, or her country. But she wishes that she could have kept her support secret, and is ashamed that she does not want this theoretical idealistic memorial to Cal to be public. She wants to stay loyal to Cal's memory, and she wants to reappropriate her "sleeping with the enemy" from Spier and turn it into an act that honor's Cal, but she does not want to make a public declaration of her support because of the scorn it brings her from that section of America she is supposed to be both representing and suppressing.

Spier's insinuations start Claire on a spiral of doubt about Khan and his motivations, masking a deeper insecurity about her own motivations. After having been linked, however "metaphorically" with Khan, Claire reconnects with an old college boyfriend, Jack, the man she dated before Cal. Jack is another member of her class, not as wealthy as Cal, but Dartmouth educated and successful nonetheless (192). Jack sends her a flowers and a note, and Claire

begins to fantasize about him again, expecting a sexual reconnection with her liberal activist college boyfriend. Jack is even more devoted to liberal causes than Cal was (199), and after the Spier article, this provides Claire an opportunity to reaffirm her fidelity to her class and race, which she has been growing more and more insecure about. She is disappointed however when he announces that he reached out to her because of her role in the controversy, even though she was already aware that was the case (200). In middle of their date she realizes that their "common values," which he met with her to remind her of in hopes that she would continue in her support of the memorial, were "his values" and that she "subscribed to them so strongly because he did, because she wanted to win his approval" (201). This marks her break from both Jack and her vision of an ideological monument to Cal and a movement towards a view more in line with Sean Gallagher and far more skeptical of Khan.

While there are two competing ideas of what it means to be an American, the novel examines how 9/11 has caused an internal tension between different "American" values and how that split can be reconciled. The fact that it can be reconciled suggests that American-ness is something that allows of contradictions, and is strong and pervasive enough to admit them. When Claire tells Jack that she feels like she has "one leg in New York and one leg in America," (200) she is identifying for the first time this split in her own identity as an American. Her distinction between "New York" as the emblem of liberalism and elitism and "America" something that exists separately from an integral part of her identity foreshadows which way she will eventually side in her own internal conflict. Spier asks what side she is on, and as she fails to connect with Jack, the night ends with them beginning to be intimate but ultimately not sleeping together, she begins to decide. She is not sleeping with the enemy, nor is she sleeping with Jack, whose purpose it was to convince her to side with the "enemy." By proxy, she also

abandons intimacy with Cal and his liberalism. She has asserted herself as a free agent, complaining to Jack that he is "as bad as the people who want me to stop [Khan]" (203). Muslim terrorists have killed her husband, but she was still able to maintain her sense of identity until another Muslim provided an opportunity for competing interests to intrude upon her worldview. When she raises concerns about Islam, Jack tells her, "That's not the kind of Muslim Khan is," to which she points out that Jack is simply picking out what kind of Muslims are acceptable to him and ignoring the rest. This is also what she is doing, and will continue do to so until she finally figures out what she wants to be. These two are figuring out who they are and what American values they want to have, and are creating their own personal visions of Muslims in order to justify their beliefs. Her identity has become upset and the question of what is to become of Khan and the memorial garden is the backdrop against which she is deciding what kind of an American she will be and what form that idea of Americanism will take.

Claire is further influenced by her associations with the families of the victims of 9/11. Claire is uncomfortable with her position as one of the faces of the families, unlike Sean, who thrives on it. Claire reflects that their association is accidental and how she feels "false to pretend the relatives had anything other than loss to share" (140). But the families' association with each other provides if not a unifying principle, an opportunity to clarify who they are and how they relate to each other. People of wildly varying social classes died in the attacks, and the schism between them is made clear during a cruise for families of the victims where Claire's son is excluded from playing with the other boys because of Claire's publicized support for Khan. William comes to Claire crying that the other boys during their play told him "I couldn't be a fireman because of you" (142). Playing firemen, a common activity for young boys, takes on an added significance in the context of the 9/11 attacks. Not only have the first responders been

valorized, but many of the families at this event would have been the families of firemen. Denying William the opportunity to play a firefighter does more than say, "You can't play with us," it says "You can't be one of us" (142). Whether or not these children themselves are the children of firefighters does not matter, but they recognize that a firefighter is a representative of the blue collar workers who died in 9/11 and those who survive and have a privileged voice in discussions of 9111 due to the disproportionate number of members of their group killed on that day. William tells Claire that the boys told him that "You like the bad guys. So I can't be the good guy" (142). By appropriating the image of the firefighter, the children gain a power to identify good guys and bad guys as they see fit. There are no Muslims at this event, but the boys are using their power they gained by demonizing Muslims to exclude other Americans from a group of "right" thinking people. When Claire goes to confront the boys' mother, she is unsuccessful in persuading her to talk to her boys, and they get into an argument over American values and how they should react to Muslims. The mother calls Claire's values "crap" while Claire tries to reason with her (143). Claire loses the argument, not because her facts are not sufficient, but because on that boat at that event emotion is what carries the day, and it is Claire who ends up hiding below decks with her children, excluded from the society of others who she had so recently been superior to. Below decks, Claire reflects on how this is hard for her and that for all of Cal's ideals, the only thing he ever lost was money, not the social status and sense of belonging and identity that she finds slipping away from her (144). The security of her family and her own place in the world is beginning to take precedence over the memorial garden, especially after she begins to identify with Cal less and less.

Her values cannot survive the obscuring of what is in her self-interest, and she has nothing to replace the garden with. In the face of a decline her privilege, not in terms of her

wealth but in her ability to set the agenda, in the face of opposition from Sean, her values are revealed to be transient and she falls prey to the same emotional reactions that she was appointed to the jury to temper. After hearing that the memorial garden may be modeled after gardens prevalent in the Islamic world, Claire begins to question Khan, but is able to "regain her senses" (117). To "regain" her senses implies that she is returning to some original, natural state where she sees things clearly, but later when she has more fully moved from skepticism to outright distrust of Khan , she feels a "repulsive, reptilian distrust" that "never left her now" (191). Her feelings have become "reptilian," animalistic, and she is descending into a state of constant emotion with no space to regain her sense and think rationally. On the surface this is because of Khan, but the real anxiety Claire feels comes because of her slow movement from one view of her identity to another and in the process is leaving many of her old values behind. The point here is not that Claire is moving from the right point of view to the wrong one, but that she is shifting what she is prioritizing: she is moving from a system that values an abstract set of virtues and a belief that those virtues are best arbitrated by elites and disseminated to the masses, to a system where emotion and a brand of nativist pride take precedent over edicts handed down from on high. These emotions are often deployed as instruments of the powerless against the powerful. When Sean Gallagher inveighs against Muslims, he is using a tool at his disposal to aggregate power to his social class. He does not have the same tools Claire, Khan, or Rubin have, so he what is accessible to him in order to gain a voice. Claire never fully realizes that power, and Sean ends up understanding its limitations.

The willingness to participate in the discussion is a critical part of the creation of Americanism. The voices of the elites are heard because of their power and access to the means of dissemination of their perspective, but the less privileged need to fight harder to make their

voices heard and become a part of this American conversation. Unlike Claire, who was reluctant to step into the spotlight, Sean craves the attention he has received since losing his brother on 9/11. Claire was able to continue to perform her identity as a member of the educated moneyed elite after the death of her husband, and was only upset in her sense of self when Khan was selected as the prize winner. Sean, on the other hand, experience a dramatic improvement in his material well-being as well as his personal sense of identity as the result of 9111, and, just as that was beginning to fade, the controversy over Khan's design managed to bring him back to the forefront. Sean is described as "lurching wildly throughout the white space of adult life" (56) before 9/11, but found a purpose while working at Ground Zero trying to recover the body of his brother. After the event, he made a small living giving speeches to "Rotary Clubs and Kiwanis Clubs and police and firefighter and veterans organizations" about the rescue operations. While operating in a very different milieu than Claire, Sean is able to achieve a certain amount of fame and power after the attacks. He uses this as a way of ordering and making sense of his life, even using the things he has lost, not only his brother but his business and his marriage, as a badge of honor. Rather than simply being a failure and a drunk, he uses 9/11 as way of constructing his own identity – he is a "family member." But as the attacks recede from memory, Sean finds himself adrift once again. Sean is a man for whom "catastrophe summoned his best self' (56), and without it, he has no sense of who he is or where he fits into American public life.

The controversy over the memorial provides an even more powerful way for Sean's class to participate in the creation of American identity than the 9/11 attacks did. Sean reflects that "A Muslim gaining control of the Memorial was the worst possible thing that could happen – and exactly the rudder Sean...needed" (56). While 9/11 may have given him some purpose, his speeches were always about the rescue efforts, given to people of a similar class, essentially

preaching to the choir. Though the attacks were carried out by Muslim extremists, Sean would have had no opportunity to demonize them. It was an obvious point to make and there was no social advantage to be gained by doing so. But Khan's selection gives Sean two groups to demonize: Muslims, even American Muslims, and, more importantly, the liberal elites who allowed it to come to pass that a Muslim would design the memorial. Sean's reacts to the selection by speaking out against both groups in order to accrue more power to both himself and to his social class. The emotional appeals Sean makes to patriotic sentiment are not simply aimed at stopping Khan's memorial garden, but rather to increase the ability of blue collar Americans to have a say in what it means to be an American and what ideals will survive in post-9111 America.

9/11 itself gives the class Sean represents a chance to be heard and to make themselves a part of, indeed perhaps the primary part of, a new iteration of American identity. Sean blames being left off the jury for his slide into obscurity, but his position outside of the jury lets him attack it and define himself in opposition to it. Sean is precisely the kind of person they wanted to keep off the jury, particularly because he is a member of a firefighter's family and the artistic elites were worried that firefighters would want to "put a giant helmet in Manhattan" (104). Officially on or off the jury , Sean's voice would have no place in that world. The "democratic" jury would have effectively silenced him had they co-opted him into the process, but having him on the outside enables him to critique not only the decision, but the process. Though the actual design does end up being criticized for its Islamic influences, the larger concerns Sean raises have little to do with the design and more to do with the person who designed it and the people who selected it. He criticizes the jury on multiple levels, mocking their supposed naivete, mimicking them, saying "And they found out they picked a Muslim, and they say, 'Wow that's

terrific, what a message that will send to Muslims that we're their friend and that we have nothing against Islam because what did Islam every do to us?" (86). He is criticizing the outcome and the values that lead to the outcome, or at least the values as he chooses to frame them. Openness and tolerance are equivalent to foolishness, weakness, and insensitivity to the America Sean speaks for. Sean, whose opinions reflect the opinions of the family members of the victims as they are portrayed in this novel more closely than Claire's do, manages to speak from the perspective of people who have actually been harmed by the terror attacks and feel vulnerable because of it. The jury's views are so out-of-touch, unrealistic, and dangerous that these people, these types of people, should not be entrusted with making decisions that affect the safety of America. This is also a comment upon the importance of culture to the integrity and well-being of a country, as these jurors are all essentially cultural arbiters, and Sean and his compatriots view this moment as important enough to raise a protest. This is not Sean cynically exploiting a controversy in order to aggrandize himself; this is Sean seeing a moment where the ruling elites are failing the interests of his class, and he takes action to rectify what he sees as a significant social problem -the failure of the liberal elites to listen to the voices of the working class.

Sean has a complicated relationship with Claire, a woman who he would never come into contact with if not for their shared tragedy. Prior to the selection of Khan, the jurors met with representatives of the 9/11 families, and "knowing that Sean's support for whatever memorial they picked, she cultivated him" (86). Claire assumes a position of authority over Sean, and Sean for the moment acquiesces and assumes a subordinate role. Sean is fascinated by Claire, "awed by her beauty, her wealth, her intelligence. He'd never met a woman with so many advantages" (86). He notes her "advantages" and the first time he meets her attempts to kiss her, a move that is coolly rebuffed with what Sean sees as a patronizing dismissal. Claire advises him

to not "waste his youth on her," while Sean replies that she should not dictate to him what he does with his youth. Claire is obviously not rejecting Sean because of a concern for his future, but she frames her rejection in paternalist terms, and it grates on Sean that she presumes to know what it good for him. Sean can only compensate for this dismissal by fantasizing about her sexually, "project[ing] Claire onto the ceiling of his bedroom, where he'd once tacked posters of Victoria's Secret models" (87). His fantasies underscore his impotence in the face of the superior social position Claire holds over him. Even in his fantasies, he still looks up to Claire, and he equates her with Victoria's Secret models, idealized visions of femininity mediated through the lens of a powerful corporate entity whose purpose is to sell an idea of identity. Sean understands himself by comparing himself to more powerful people, and he is defined by what it is about these people that he is not: not beautiful, not wealthy, not educated. This vision of his identity consigns him to a perpetually inferior role, even with his newfound fame after 9111.

The reconciliation, even in the combative form it takes, is effected when the Muslim presence is re-introduced into American discourse. It is not until Mohammed Khan and his design enter the picture that Sean is able to re-establish the connection with Claire and use it to invert the power dynamic between the two of them. Sean is the primary speaker at the first press conference given after the news leaks that a Muslim designer's design has been selected at the memorial, and he immediately asserts himself as the voice of the families affected by the terror attacks. He calls Claire "our supposed family member on the jury" and derides her for "not reaching out to us" (86). The distance that was an emblem of Claire's power over Sean has now become a way for Sean to tum the tables and seize power from her. Criticizing that fact that she "hasn't reached out to us," Sean is highlighting the tensions between the two opposing viewpoints, which in tum highlights the importance of dialogue, of two-way communication

between the competing factions, to each of their efforts to create America. When Claire does show up at the press conference, late, because she has failed to communicate with the organizers, she is forced to respond to Sean's concerns rather than set the agenda for herself. In her absence, the governor of New York has aligned herself with Sean, against Claire, who served on the same jury as the governor's representative, giving Sean's voice official sanction. 9/11 brought to light the class resentments Sean has felt by putting him into contact with Claire, and the controversy surrounding Khan's memorial garden has given Sean the opportunity to use the nature of the power imbalance to gain more power for himself. As he noted, the selection of Khan's design may have been the best thing that happened to him, and his social class. The presence of a perceived Muslim threat, whatever form that might take, provides a forum to air class grievances. Claire and Sean's final exchange at the press conference begins with Sean asserting that his "mind closed towards Muslims after they killed my brother" (88). Again, Sean posits a "they," not specifically to demonize and attack Muslims, but to score a rhetorical point against Claire. Claire is defending Muslims and the values of tolerance, but Sean argues for the primacy of emotion, and makes an explicitly anti-rational statement that his "mind is closed." Sean has declared Claire's education, one of the markers of her power over him, to be irrelevant, specifically because she has chosen to defend this imagined "they."

This imagined "they" has the power to provide opportunities for dialogue for the segment of the population that is on the surface most opposed to "them." In fact, it is because of the opposition to a constructed image oflslam that Sean's class has a say in this post-9/11 dialogue about the construction of America. Sean's meeting with Paul Rubin further describes Sean's growing sense of class animosity and the way that he uses Khan as a way of striking against the elites. As is the case with his encounters with Claire, Sean finds himself in a place he never

would have been, a very expensive restaurant frequented by moneyed elites, had it not been for his prominence as a 9/11 family member and his role as their spokesman against the memorial garden design. His feelings here are stated explicitly, that "he felt himself in the camp of the enemy -not Muslims but the people born with silver sticks up their asses, the people who had made Manhattan a woman too good to give Sean her number (128). And when Paul points out to Sean that the families wanted the selection of the memorial design to be a "democratic exercise everyone could participate in," Sean replies that "That's not who we mean by everyone." Sean's reply has two meanings: on the surface he is making a comment that the "we" means the families and their representation of America and that Muslims are not included in the "everyone." But in the context of the conversation, during which Sean complains a few times that he should have been on the jury, it sounds as though Sean means to exclude Claire, and by extension people who represent her class interests, from "everyone." He claims that Claire does is "not representing us," that hers is not the authentic voice of his America. Paul responds by claiming that the process is complicated and that Sean is merely offended that Claire "is not taking dictation from you," a defense of the concept ofrepresentative democracy.

The two are talking past each other here. Paul is himself in the process of trying to get Khan to withdraw from the competition, but there is no sense that he means to ally himself with Sean. His aim here is to keep Sean silent, to undermine Sean's growing power. Paul cites rules that were established by the elites in order to defend the position taken by the elites. It is less important to Paul to get what he wants than it is to demonstrate to Sean that it is Paul's voice, Paul's rules that matter. As Sean becomes more frustrated and angry by his treatment, he becomes increasingly class conscious. Sean understands that by taking him to the expensive restaurant and declining to introduce him to the other patrons who come over to their table to say

hello, Paul is attempting to marginalize him. The way Sean puts it is that "he saw himself too clearly: An audience not a player," in this setting. It is phrased as though this is how he is seeing himself, but this is how Paul sees him, and Sean in this moment is allowing Paul's perceptions to define him. Sean is in fact becoming a "player," despite Paul's attempts to make him the "audience." Sean is cowed by the surroundings, but instead of internalizing his feelings of inferiority and aspiring to "get the number" of this world, he begins to reject it and the values that sustain it. When Paul begins to discuss Khan's rights, Sean dismisses this as a legalistic abstraction and turns discussion of legal "rights" into a discussion of what is "right and wrong" (129). By invoking the rights of his parents and the other victim's families, he shifts the discussion from abstractions to the effect Paul's decisions have on real people. This shifts the balance of power away from Paul and to Sean, who has all of the emotional authority on his side because he has defined the reactionary emotions of the families as a primary concern over the building of the memorial garden. The failure of liberal American values to provide a satisfying account for how to deal with the trauma of 9111 has opened up an opportunity for alternative value systems to gain power. The conversation in the upscale coffee shop was less about the propriety of the memorial design, and more about how Paul will keep Sean from being a part of the decision making process. Paul's dismissal of Sean's concern unwittingly gives Sean even more power as he tries to "whittle Sean down to boy-size" by telling him, "Go lie down on the site if it will make you feel better. But the hearing will stay within appropriate bounds." Sean takes this idea and uses it, redefining what may be considered "appropriate bounds" for decision making.

At the ensuing "lie-down" protest against the proposed memorial at the proposed site, Sean and his compatriots take their arguments for their vision of American identity public in an

attempt to wrest control of the narrative away from the elites, whom they attack as much as, if not more than, Muslims. Included in the participants are "men in camouflage who may or may not have been veterans" (149) and people holding up signs that read "They can have the First Amendment because we have the Second" (150). The association of Americanism with militarism highlights the way that some have considered support for the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq as an emblem of patriotism, and how a failure to show the same enthusiasm for the War on Terror can mark someone as un-American. These men "may or may not" have been members of the military, but they need only identify with military culture in order to associate themselves with Sean's brand of Americanism. These men are rebelling against an idea of elitism, but are still within the framework of an "official" American identity, the military being a longstanding institution of American culture. And the undertones of violence are made more explicit in the sign referring to the value of the Second Amendment. The sign refers to another revered icon of American culture, the Bill of Rights, but makes a claim about the relative importance of the respective amendments that is counter to the liberal elite view. Sean himself proclaims that "We all know the Constitution matters" but that "it's not the only thing that matters." This is met with a mixed response, the audience unsure how to take the tension between loyalty to a certain idea of America and a rebellion against other "traditional" ideas of American values. While Sean tries to replace the elite as an arbiter of American identity, he is still using the vocabulary of the values that the elites have handed down, and his act seizing power is complicated and undermined by the impossibility of formulating an entirely new value system.

This tension is further exacerbated when Sean and the protesters begin their act of civil disobedience, lying down at the site. The protesters know that they are going to be arrested, but Sean holds out hope that the policemen will "choose patriotism over duty" and choose not to

arrest the protestors (152). Sean's hope for unity with the policemen is important given elevated status of police as first responders and heroes in the aftermath of 9/11. Sean uses his association with another elevated group, firefighters, in order to appropriate power, but here his is not able to consolidate his blue collar union with the police, who are in this case symbols of law and order. They have already undermined his ability to make his voice heard by closing down the streets where Sean was planning to have the lie-n. By closing down the streets, the police have both minimized the disruptive value of the protest and have turned an act of rebellion into a carefully controlled form of speech acceptable to the power structure already in place. The police, instruments of order, have not simply squelched Sean's ability to speak, they have changed the nature of the medium of his speech. Sean used Paul's attempt to marginalize Sean against Paul, but there are limits to how far out of the previously established discourse Sean can move. And just as the attempts to silence Sean's voice have given him a larger voice, the lie-in has given the opportunity for counter-protests to gain a larger voice.

The utility of a Muslim in framing the discourse for Americans is again demonstrated as the narrative that Sean wishes to sell at the protest begins to falter. Sean's frustration at the undermining of his protest leads back to him attempting to use a Muslim as a means of highlighting the grievances of his class. Unable to gain the attention he wanted by launching the protest, Sean grabs the headscarf off of a Muslim woman, resulting in him being handcuffed, not in the pre-planned orchestrated way, but as a response to him engaging in what is seen as an act of violence (153). But as Sean realizes, "his determination to escape the script only served to affim1it" (153). When the headscarf pulling becomes the point of the protest the media focuses on, Sean comes under increased scrutiny. The media reports that his ex-wife alleged that Sean hit her while they were married (163), and The *New York Times* editorializes against Sean, citing

him as a symptom of a "new ominous strain of intolerance in the land" (164). The media, especially the establishment *New York Times,* marginalizes Sean's voice by impugning the source and once again invoking liberal American values as an alternative to Sean's movement. Sean becomes increasingly thrust into the radical fringes, leaving his family home, where they look down on him after the pulling of the headscarf and the news of his history of domestic violence, for the home of Debbie Dawson, who lives in an expensive apartment in Manhattan where she devotes her time to her anti-Muslim crusade. Sean's actions have inspired similar incidents across the country, which the President of the United States goes on television to label a "plague" (178). By the time Sean's quest to be heard reaches the most important political figure in the country his message has been tainted to the point where it is not clear who he speaks for.

Sean is ultimately unable to break through the limitations that have been set upon him to make an impact. Though eventually Khan is pressured to withdraw from the design competition, it is Claire and Paul, assisted by a Muslim activist who will go on to engage the American power structure on traditionally American terms by becoming a US Congressman. By the time that the memorial garden has been scuttled, Sean has changed his own view of the world and is beginning to trace his own identity according to the values he has been fighting throughout the novel. During an orchestrated meeting with the woman whose headscarf he pulled, a woman who is far more educated than he is and whose accent "sounded as American" as his own, he feels small and humiliated (182). His qualified apology to the woman results in his ostracism from Debbie's apartment and from his own movement. When he sees Asma speaking up during the public hearing over the garden design, "He wished he had told her she was brave" (261). His empathy and newfound tolerance calls into question his place in his family and, by extension, his

place in America. After he tells his mother that he "has to find some other way to be. Some other reason to be," (263) his mother tells him that if he does not continue to fight the memorial he will not be welcome in the family, and that outside of the family he will be "nothing" (264). Sean has reached the limits of what his reaction to 9/11 will allow him to be. Exposure to sympathetic, "acceptable" Muslims has burned away his desire to define himself negatively in contrast to his vision of Muslims. His refusal to let himself be defined by his opposition to Islam costs him his identity as a member of his social class, and it is not clear in the novel whether his change of heart allows him to develop a new sense of identity. All that the novel makes clear is that the using 9/11 as a means of developing American identity is not a simple process of wearing flag pins and preaching xenophobia. There are a number of competing frameworks that must be accounted for, and none of them exist in a vacuum.

Claire moves in the opposite direction Sean does, from a liberal sense of tolerance to a suspicion of Khan and of Muslims. By the end of the novel, Claire's doubts prompt her to meet with Khan in order to demand of him an explanation of his design and of his intentions. That Claire feels she is entitled to answer grates on Khan, and Khan's refusal to cater to her in tum grates on Claire. Claire begins to project onto Khan whatever she needs to in order to resent him. Upset that Claire seems to think he should be accountable for the actions of all Muslims, Khan posits a hypothetical: "How would you feel if I justified what happened to your husband by saying it wasn't about him but about his country and his policies – damn shame he got caught up in it, that's all – but you know, he got what he deserved because he paid taxes to the American government. I get what I deserve because I happen to share a religion with a few crazies?" (271) Claire takes what is clearly meant to be a talking point seriously, sickened "that Khan did see Cal as mere collateral damage in a war America had brought upon itself, that he believed Cal,

generous, good natured Cal, bore responsibility, guilt, simply because he was an American." Claire is reads this statement not in the way that Khan intended, but in a way that is personally useful to her. Khan is trying to make a point about the differences between himself and Muslim terrorists by pointing out how absurd it is to lump all Americans together, but by now Claire is so invested in defining herself in opposition to Islam she literally cannot hear Khan's arguments because she was "thinking and listening at the same time, which made it hard to hear." She stalks out, discontinuing a dialogue that was characterized by a complete lack of actual interaction, emblematic of the lack of interest in making any connection with Muslim in favor of using a fictionalized version of a Muslim in order to develop the type of identity that helps Claire do what she wants to do. In this case, Claire is able to do what Sean was not – stop the memorial garden from being built.

Claire's migration from the values of the liberal elites to Sean's side allows the working classes represented by Sean to claim a victory, but also ensures that this victory happens on the elite's terms. The elites sacrifice a portion of their liberal values, which, as evidenced by the argument among the jury immediately after the selection, were not universal elite values anyway, and in return are able to maintain their role in judging and dictating American values. As Sean becomes more aware of "actual" Muslims, he loses power, and in order to maintain power, Claire has to become more and more deaf to the voices of the actual Muslims in the novel.

The battle for the soul of America detailed in *The Submission,* while in the end failing to describe what that battle has decided, has decided that there is a soul to be fought over. The thesis of the novel, and the characters in the novel, is that while it is not clear that one vision for America is right and the other is wrong, this is nevertheless a worthwhile, indeed necessary battle to be fought. The battleground is the territory left behind by the aftermath of 9/11, and

without that space, the voices of the different visions of America could not come into conflict, and thus not combine to synthesize this particular view of the existence of American identity.

Falling Man: American Incoherence

In Don DeLillo's *Falling Man,* the American protagonists, Keith and Lianne, a separated couple brought back together after Keith escapes from his office in the World Trade Center during the attack, do not interact directly with Hammad, a fictionalized representation of one of the hijackers responsible for the 9/11 attacks. Instead, the focused, driven, and ideologically secure Hammad serves as a distant and almost dream-like counterpoint to the Americans, who have been suffering from a malaise of spirit both before and after 9/11. Hammad is simplified version of an Islamic fundamentalist terrorist, lacking the depth of Updike's Ahmad or Waldman's Khan, and Delillo has been criticized by this lack of delving into the psyche of his Muslim character (DeRosa 166). But this lack of nuance is only an issue if the purpose of this novel is to delve into the motivations of a tenorist rather than to explore the reaction of Americans to terrorism in general and 9/ 11 specifically. DeLillo explores what it means for Americans to use 9/11 as a way of understanding themselves, and how they try, and in many cases fail, to use 9/11 to build identities that will fill voids in their lives that existed prior to 9111.

While the novel is not a thorough investigation into the motivations of Hammad, it does serve to illuminate the worldview of an American middle class that tries and fails to find new meaning after 9/11. Kristiaan Versluys argues that, "by opposing the enervation of his American characters to the evil intent of the Islamic terrorists, Delillo indicates that 9/11 can only be understood geopolitically as the class of two opposing frames ofreference, two world visions on a collision course" (44). DeLillo creates two opposing visions: one American vision, and one imagined Muslim vision for the Americans to react to. But where in *Terrorist* or *The Submission* the Muslims were complex and contained many facets that the authors could use to create oppositions with the Americans in their novels, the Muslim in this novel is distant and

unreachable, which makes it impossible for the American characters to fully develop their own identities. They are busy creating, debating, and analyzing the motivations of their "enemy," but are ultimately unable to confront them and create meaningful identities for themselves in the process.

DeLillo's Americans try to use the events of 9111 as a way of finding meaning in their lives, but as Kristiaan Versluys notes, "the terrorist attacks in no way precipitate a cleansing or catharsis. Instead, the shock following the attack on the twin towers acts as a catalyst, exposing modernity and its many discontents" (21). The problem Keith and Lianne have is not dealing with the trauma of 9/11, but dealing with the fact that the trauma does not provide the "cleansing or catharsis." The family is brought back together by 9111, but when it is revealed that the attacks have exposed their lack of a focused identity and purpose, the family falls apart and the characters find themselves back where they started. They are unable to either rediscover a past sense of identity or to develop a new sense of identity in reaction to a new world. The new post-9/11 world appears, if not the same as before, as lacking in meaning. DeLillo does not create Muslims for the Americans in his novel to define themselves against; he has his characters create Muslims that expose their deeper problems with defining their own identities. Hammad is barely present in the novel, echoing American characters who themselves are barely present to their friends and family members.

Where other novels use their depictions of Muslims to create a positive identity for Americans, DeLillo's Hammad creates a negative identity for the Americans in the novel. Hammad has a purpose and belongs to a coherent community, where Lianne and Keith are marked by an aimlessness in their personal and professional lives and an inability to make their family work as a cohesive unit. This is not to say that Hammad's lifestyle is endorsed by

DeLillo or that in itself it represents some kind of viable alternative to Lianne's lack of purpose. But Hammad, and the rest of the 9/11 hijackers that the characters obsess over – analyzing them, dissecting their motives, imputing values onto them that, at least in the novel, have little to no basis in contact with any Islamic culture – represent for the Americans an alternative mode of existence that does not call into question the meaningfulness of their own identities as much as provides a framework against which they may evaluate their "discontents."

The relationship between the Americans and Muslims in the novel is characterized by a profound distance, mirroring the distance that Lianne and Keith feel from each other. The Americans spend their time theorizing about Muslims and their motivations, and using these conversations as springboards for more specific conversations about themselves. Their inability to come to any consensus between themselves or with friends or family members over the proper emotional response to the attacks creates tension between them and their family members and shows how far apart they are in figuring out how they fit into this world. They project fictionalized (and in the case of their son, mythologized) versions of the terrorists to argue about, but their inability to grasp onto anything solid to analyze keeps them from coming to any solid idea of what they are meant to be. Hammad, as one of the hijackers in the World Trade Center attack, is actually dead throughout the entire narrative as it is related from the perspectives of Lianne and Keith. He is completely absent from their lives – the never know him or his name, but he hangs over their narrative, a haunting presence that defines their lives, and yet remains completely inaccessible to them, dooming their attempts to find resolution.

Hammad is an ambiguous figure, taking on almost dream-like characteristics in the novel. As a fictionalized version of one of the 9/11 hijackers, he occupies ambiguous space between the real and the fictional, and it is uncertain whether he is supposed to represent a "real"

version of the 9111 hijackers, a vision of the American idea of a radical Muslim that DeLillo wishes to investigate (DeLillo himself a contributor to this American mythology in his post-9/11 essay "In the Ruins of the Future" which lays out some of the supposed traits of Islamic fundamentalism and compares them to traits of Americanism, or a projection of the anxieties and arguments of the circle of Americans in the novel.). Hammad's interconnectedness with Lianne and Keith is established at a few points. He is the only other character in the novel who has the narrative told from his point-of-view, though he does not interact with either Lianne or Keith. Early in the novel, there is a disjointed paragraph in the middle of a narration from Lianne's point of view, where an unnamed male character is woken up by strange music and voices chanting "Allah-uu" (38). The characters is situated somewhere in a valley, suggesting that it is not Keith, who is firmly ensconced in Manhattan at this time. While it is not specified that this is Hammad, and this is before Hammad is even introduced, it seems likely that this is who it is supposed to be, as this is told from his perspective and he is the only character in the book who would likely encounter this scene. That he is waking up to hear this suggests a dream state, and interspersed as it is with Lianne's narrative, it is not clear whose dream it is. Coupled with the ending of the novel, where the perspective suddenly shifts mid-paragraph from Hammad in a hijacked airliner crashing into the World Trade Center to Keith in the building at the moment of the attack, these scenes suggest that Hammad's perspective and the perspective of Lianne and Keith are somehow intertwined. Because Hammad is already a fictionalized version of a real person, after a fashion, he can also be read as a version of the 9/11 terrorists fictionalized specifically from the perspective of the Americans, and Hammad's more straightforward chapters that detail his training, his move to America, and, more importantly, his ideological progression reflect the anxieties and tensions in Lianne and Keith's life as they try and fail to

make sense, not of the tragedy on 9/11 as such, but on their inability to define for themselves new narratives in the face of tragedy.

Hammad 's narrative begins with a number of the classic markers of a Western stereotype of a Muslim. Within three pages of his introduction, he and his fellows are getting up from their prayers, their beards are described, and he casually refers to a white woman as a whore (74-77). But the narrative is complicated when another critical element the stereotyped Muslim fundamentalist, their willingness to blame everything wrong with the world on the Jews, is questioned by Hammad. Hammad reacts to another Muslim's critique of everything that he feels in wrong with architecture, including thin walls, narrow aisles, and toilets that are too close to the floor by wondering whether this attack was "funny, true, or stupid" (79). Hammad's vague questioning of his reaction to his fellow trainee terrorist mirrors the debates the American have about how best to understand these new forces in their world, and here he articulates three possible reactions to Islamic ideology: to mock it, to fear it, or to dismiss its validity. These are all positions that Westerners may take after 9111, and while Muslims themselves may have any of these reactions themselves, the project of *Falling Man* is less about understanding the perspective of the fundamentalist Muslim than it is about understanding the process a certain type of American undergoes in dealing with the injecting of an unfamiliar worldview into their lives, in this case in a violent fashion. Hammad's purpose here is not to represent the viewpoint of a Muslim terrorist, but to act as a canvass upon which DeLillo can paint an idea of what Lianne or Keith think a Muslim is, a place to play with ideas of identity and experiment with ways to create Muslims that will help them create themselves. As the narrative progresses and Lianne and Keith's attempts to create a new purpose for their lives stalls, Hammad grows increasingly distant ideologically, growing more rigid, less questioning, even as his physical

presence grows closer, culminating in his physical death, which causes Keith's metaphorical rebirth, the time he spends recreating his life in the wake of the trauma he, his family, and his community have suffered.

In order to explore some of the ideas of Muslim identity that the American characters will play off of, Hammad is humanized and distinguished from his more zealous compatriots early in his narrative. He is "bulky" and "clumsy," in sharp contrast to his friend Amir, a leader of his cell, who is "intense," "small," and "thin" (79). He is tethered to the world in a way that Mohammed Atta is represented here as not. He has a girlfriend whom he wants to marry and raise a family with (82). As this separates and humanizes him, it also highlights the goals of Keith and Lianne to reunite their nuclear family under one roof. Devotion to radical Islam keeps Hammad from realizing the goals that Keith and Lianna can achieve. This is one of the way they may use Hammad and Muslim identity they create, to cast themselves positively, to figure out something they can do to change their lives that had been adrift before 9/11. Hammad is sympathetic and tragic here, in the same way that Keith and Lianne will be as they realize that their goals are similarly unattainable. Hammad is the vehicle through which the limiting strictures of Islam are defined in a negative light, so that Western values may be compared positively against them. This is critical because Keith and Lianne are searching for a positive value to give meaning to their lives. Where Hammad finds that he has to "fight against the need to be normal" (83), Lianne and Keith struggle mightily to figure out what normal is, Lianne speculating as she and Keith try to make a life together that "she might be wrong about what was ordinary" (105). But as Hammad gets geographically closer to them, moving from Germany to Florida in the next interlude, his personality begins to shift and he becomes increasingly ideological, in part due to the influence of American culture. As Keith and Lianne pursue an

Americanism that they can make a life out of, Hammad is becoming disenchanted with American culture by contact with it. As the novel uses Hammad to help define American identity, the Americans find that the closer Hammad gets to America, the more elusive their own identities become. They cannot realize themselves only by imaging a version of their opposite.

The depiction of the Muslim changes to suit the needs of the American characters as their lives change and as they attempt to adapt to their changing world and changing circumstances. When Hammad moves to Florida, he loses some of the markers that made him distinct from the other terrorists. He loses weight, specified as "twenty-two kilos" (171), perhaps using the metric system to clarify that he is not planning on assimilating into America during his time here. This weight loss makes him more physically similar to Amir, whom he seems to have grown closer, living with him in Florida and together pledging to do their duty, "which was for each of them, in blood trust, to kill Americans." The emergence of this as Hammad's defining value is mirrored in the growth of Lianne's fear and hatred of Muslims throughout the novel. Hammad begins to define Americans as people he must kill; Lianne worries that that is who they have become, fearing that "All of us, we are targets now" (47). Though these concerns about the definitions of Americans happen at very different points of the novel, the non-linear nature of the narrative and the way that Hammad's story is connected to Lianne and Keith's indicate the evolving nature of the way Lianne is using the terror attacks to define herself and her countrymen. Hammad's perspective on Americans echoes the Lianne's feelings of vulnerability in the wake of 9/11, which, in turn, reflects her feelings about her family's vulnerability. Keith has left before, and, in fact will do so again. The recursive structure of the intertwined narratives leaves Lianne and Keith without any possibility of resolving their anxieties. The terrorists have killed at the beginning of their story and will kill again at the end. They are perpetually vulnerable, and

continue to be defined by their vision of the terrorist in terms of what they lack; in this case, security and stability.

The inability of the American characters to come to any kind of understanding, imagined though it may be, of this disruptive new presence in their lives Hammad defines Americans by what they do and do not see. When in the grocery store, Hammad notes that the girl at the checkout counter smiled at him "but did not see him" (172). The Americans are unable or unwilling to penetrate and understand Hammad, perhaps especially in this new fundamentalist identity, reflecting the American's inability to understand things that do not conform to their own narrative. The store clerk is emblematic of American consumerism, too concerned about the goods "stacked on endless shelves" to see past what Hammad considers an illusion to the reality of his presence (173). As Hammad becomes less of a dream and more of a nightmare for Americans, his criticism of American culture grows stronger. This focusing of his character into an iconic figure of Islamic tenor does not provide Americans with something to compare themselves against favorably. While Hammad's actions are not to be read as laudable, he does have what Keith and Lianne lack -purpose. And Hammad is not a hypocrite; unlike many other portrayals of the terrorists last days. Harnmad does not go to a strip club, and he refuses to listen to the stories the other terrorists tell about visiting prostitutes, asserting that "He wanted to do this on thing right, of all the things he'd ever done" (174). He stops changing his clothes, eschewing any kind of vanity (175). He refuses to give an American viewer any space with which to judge him and to create a positive sense of identity in contrast to him, rendering him invisible, or perhaps simply useless, to the American perspective. Hammad himself clarifies his vision, claiming that what Americans "hold so precious, we see as empty space" (177). What could be a exploration of supposed Islamic values – spirituality, rejection of consumerism,

obsession with death, to name a few – is in fact a critique of American values. DeLillo creates a Muslim that not only destabilizes the validity of American values, but also undermines all attempts to coopt Islam into the project of reestablishing them. And because Hammad is not an attempt to represent a "real" Muslim but rather a projection of certain notions of Islam, he calls into question the very idea of using the 9/11 as a way of defining American identity in the new world created by the attacks.

The conflation of Hammad's death and Keith's escape from the Twin Towers highlights the futility of Keith's struggle to rebuild his old life with Lianne and his son after the attack. Both Keith and Lianne believe that this is an authentic opportunity to create something new. Lianne believes that "Keith had been alive for six days now" (47), which notes not only that it had been six days since Keith had escaped alive, but in phrasing it as you would a discussion of a newborn child, intimating that he was something new and different for six days. That the couple would fail to create a new sustainable life as a family living together was inevitable given that they are using Hammad, as an exemplar of the disruptive force that Muslim terrorists have exerted on their life, as their organizing principle. As Hammad's narrative ends, Keith's begins, creating a circle of cause and effect. The transition between Hammad's narrative and Keith's is both seamless and jarring, occurring at the end of the novel in the middle of a sentence that starts with Hammad sitting in a plane and witnessing the final moments of the plane right up until he sees the fiery explosion that marks his own death, and then moving to Keith being thrown against a wall by the force of the explosion (239). Hammad's death marks the end of the process of the novel's exploration of the motivations of a Muslim terrorist at the precise moment it brings the narrative full circle and marks the beginning of Keith's, and eventually Lianne's, attempt to explore their own motivations. DeLillo is not examining the Muslim mind as much as he is

describing the futility of finding meaning in something as inaccessible to an American perspective as the mindset of a Muslim fundamentalist. Whether it is inaccessible because of an actual fundamental gulf between the perspectives of the two cultures, a view DeLillo endorses in "In the Ruins of the Future," or for other reasons is less the issue that the inability to understand the perspective of the other exposes an inability to articulate properly the terms of one's own identity. Keith and Lianne's new identities are entwined with Hammad's, but the more they try to understand Muslims, the more it is revealed that their endeavor will not help themselves, and Hammad grows increasingly separate from them, ending in his death at the event that spurs Lianne and Keith's re-evaluation of themselves, spurring an endless cycle of death, rebirth, and frustration. This cycle reveals the emptiness of Keith and Lianne's character by revealing how little they are able to understand what it is that defines them.

The difficulties the Americans have in seeing their imagined versions of their opposite numbers are highlighted in the various discussions and arguments the characters get into over the nature of Muslim terrorists. In a conversation between Lianne, her dying mother Nina, and her friend, a German man with ties to the German Red Brigades of the sixties and seventies who is currently going by the name of Martin, they go around in circles trying to explain Islamic fundamentalism and why it has resulted in this attack on America. The conversation itself is confused, littered with non-sequiturs and unattributed dialogue that gives it a sense of discontinuity and fragmentation, as though the characters are flailing about, trying to grab hold of something elusive, failing to connect with each other because they ultimately have nothing substantial to say. Martin argues that the terrorists, "think the world is a disease," and immediately clarifies that what he means by "the world" is "This world, this society, ours" (46). The use of the definite pronoun in the first reference to "the world" makes it sound like he think

the Muslims are motivated by a religious rejection of the material world, but then he quickly pivots and qualifies his statement to mean that he thinks the Muslims are attacking "this society," by which he means American, Western culture. This juxtaposition suggests that the Westerners not only do not have a good idea as to what the terrorists want, but do not know yet what it is useful for them to believe the terrorists want.

The issue for the Americans is that they are trying to define themselves in opposition to the "enemy," but they have no sense of what the enemy is. When the next speaker, whether it is Lianne or Nina is not clear, says that "There are no goals [the terrorists] could hope to achieve," she is revealing how lost they are in the face of an enemy that they cannot describe (46). She think their goal is to "kill the innocent, only that" (46). If the motivations of the Muslims are incomprehensible and senseless, there is nothing there for them to positively react to. Martin responds that their goal is to "strike a blow to this country's dominance. They achieve this, to show how a great power can be vulnerable. A power that interferes, that occupies" (46). The only thing that he can posit as a defining characteristic in American identity that results from the presence of the terrorists is vulnerability, but there is still no sense of what exactly they are vulnerable to. According to Martin, Americans are vulnerable because they have angered people because of their interference in other cultures, but the terrorists' only goal is to demonstrate America's vulnerability, not to effect any changes as such. Martin elaborates that while America has "the capital, the labor, the technology, the armies, the cities, the laws, the police, and the prisons," the enemy they are trying to understand "has a few men willing to die" (47). Martin states this as though Islamic countries have none of these things, as though their defining characteristic is their willingness to die, because his essential project here is to highlight the meaninglessness of the fruits of a materially developed, socially stable, and technologically

advanced culture. For his purposes he must create an Islamic culture that is none of these things, but not to valorize the Western culture, but to nihilistically dismiss its value.

The conversation shifts and clarifies that they are not talking about the terrorists specifically, but conceptualizing an idea of a culture. The conversation revolves around vague ideas of "us" and "them," and an overarching conception that Muslim culture is necessarily opposed to the West. Nina responds abruptly to Martin's argument that what distinguishes Muslim culture is that they have a few men willing to die by simply uttering, "God is great," implicitly criticizing Islam for some of its adherents' religious fanaticism (47). But Martin moves the conversation away from God, immediately telling Nina to "forget God," and argues that it is history, politics, and economic forces that have shaped their lives more than religion. Martin does not let the two Americans rest on absolutes like religion, instead forcing them to look at the forces that have led to the attacks as conditional and complex. But Martin is still making an attempt to create an Islamic world that he can understand. He unilaterally dismisses the importance of religion for the terrorists, saying that that while "they use the language of terrorism ...this is not what drives them" (47). The Islam that Martin creates serves his purpose as a non-American, but still a denizen of the West, to maintain a sense of his own self separate from the Americans he is associated with, and to make the Americans confront their own complicity in the attack without recourse to what he considers simplistic projections of religious motivations onto the terrorists.

Arguing against him, Nina creates that Muslim world that hates America because they are inherently flawed, stating "It's not the history of Western interference that pulls down these societies. It's their own history, their mentality. They live in a closed world, of choice, of necessity. They haven't advanced because they haven't wanted to or tried to" (47). There are

internal contradictions in Nina's speech where she says that the Muslim societies have remained backwards by both choice and necessity, never clarifying why it would be necessary. Similar to Martin's arguments, Nina's assertions overly generalize Muslim culture, but again, notthrough any desire to fonnulate an understanding of the Muslim world, whatever that may be, but in order to define America as an "advanced" society. But the contrast is undermined by her contradiction. Muslims are backward "of necessity," implying there is some fundamental flaw in their nature that does not exist in Westerners, and they are backward by "choice," implying that Westemers have made better conscious decisions. Her definition shifts in the same sentence to suit her needs, and it reveals that the definition of an American is similarly tenuous, based as it is on an imaginary picture of the other. Nina repeated insists that the terrorists attack out of "panic" (46, 47), without clarifying what they might be panicking over and why their panic has taken this form. She is the one in the argument reacting angrily, with a "hard tight fury" in her face, and it is left unclear whether this is because she is talking about the Muslims she is so angry at or because she is encountering resistance to her efforts to construct a narrative from someone who is close to her (47). Worse still, he is not simply proposing his own narrative, he is disrupting her ability to create one of her own at all, undercutting her basic assumptions about the Islamic culture she is trying to use to build an America where people are rational and advanced, and where the lives of its citizens deserve to be evaluated on an individual level, not as parts of a system that produce inequality in other parts of the world.

This conversation is an example of the process of "explaining terrorist politics through a Westerner" which "undercuts the assumption that terrorism is a religious or regional category and constructs it, rather, as an ideological stance" (DeRosa 170). Even Nina is in her own way dismissive of religion as such, preferring to blame Islamic culture for the terrorists' desire to

harm America. Constructing terrorism as ideology works in this novel to expose the inconsistencies of American ideologies. Ideology is, at least in theory, accessible to understanding by an outsider in a way that religion and regionalism are not, as one must either be a believer or a native to completely participate in either of those identity categories. This is a limitation Lianne understands, having travelled to the Middle East earlier in her life but late realizing that "it was tourism in the end, with shallow friends, not determined inquiry into beliefs, institutions, languages, art" (46). This is an avenue closed off to Lianne now, because of the trauma of 9/11 and because of her need to create a narrative that helps her keep her family together. She cannot afford the luxury of actual inquiry into another culture, though this memory she recalls during the conversation shows that she is cognizant of the fact that there is something missing from her project of understanding a Muslim, and a terrorist, mindset. She realizes that her studies have failed her, another indictment of a characteristic of middle class America, the valuing of education. This realization keeps her largely neutral during this conversation, and by the end "her mother's anger submerged her own. She deferred to it" (47). In the absence of her own understanding, she is allowing other to define identity for her, but this scene does not satisfy her, leaving her with "sadness, hearing these two people, joined in spirit, take strongly opposing position." She is left adrift at the failure of this conversation to generate a coherent narrative, and the conversation has achieved no resolution by the time she leaves the room. She leaves to look into a mirror, and "The moment seemed false to her, a scene in a movie when a character tries to understand what is going in her life by looking in the mirror" (47). By comparing this moment to a movie, DeLillo is highlighting the idea that Lianne is in the middle of an active process of creating a version of her life, rather than simply living it authentically. The moment strikes her as false because she is creating an understanding of 9/11, Muslims, and her own life that has no

substance. The mirror cannot reflect back anything meaningful because she has not taken anything meaningful out of the room and the conversation between Martin and Nina.

The importance of attempting to know the "enemy" is underscored again and again as argument picks up again twice more, chapters later, almost without missing a beat. In the second argument, Martin and Nina rehash their debate about religion, Nina getting more virulently angry at Islamic culture, dehumanizing them to the point where she compares their culture to a virus (113). Martin, consistently insistent on an ostensibly rational approach to understanding the terrorist mindset, rejects this and posits that an understanding of the terrorist as people is critical. He links the necessity of identity formation in the wake of such a significant trauma to the effectiveness of terrorism as a tactic when he tells Nina, "First they kill you, then you try to understand them. Maybe, eventually, you'll learn their names. But they have to kill you first" (113). According to Martin, the terrorists have to harm Americans in order to get them to notice them and take accountability for America's actions throughout the world. But the double meaning here is that in order to make a new identity in the face of an event like 9/11, the old identity has to be destroyed, with the incident provoking the revaluation of identity, in this case the disruption of a privileged, secure place in the world as a member of the upper-middle class in America, providing the framework for the reevaluation of identity. Once "they" have disrupted these notions of identity, the Americans begin the process of trying to understand what it is an American means by a "Muslim" or a "terrorist," and to what degree those two terms are conflated, Americans may or may not "learn their names," which is to say it is unclear whether they will actually end up exploring another culture and relating to it on the other culture's terms, or whether they will remain in the process of trying to understand them, and projecting the values onto the other culture that the Americans need to in order to evaluate their own.

Martin is skeptical of the ability of America to develop the kind of sight necessary to come to terms with either Muslim identity or its own identity, and is dismissive of America's continued relevance in the new world where Americans are unable to construct a coherent identity. In a later conversation with Lianne and a group of other Americans after a memorial service for Nina, Martin tells her that he believes that America is becoming irrelevant to non-American Westerners, that they are "all sick of America and Americans," and the subject of Americans "nauseates" them (191). He forecasts that "the day is coming when nobody has to think about America except for the danger it brings. It is losing the center. It becomes the center of its own shit. This is the only center it occupies." This speaks directly to Lianne's fears of a life without a core of ideals around which she may form her identity. Keith's return to the family is spurred by 9/11, but absent any reason to continue to be there, and when they are unable to clearly define either who the terrorists are or who they are, Keith begins to slip away, beginning an affair with another 9/11 survivor growing emotionally distant, and spending more and more time on the road rather than at home. There is no center to her family, and by extension her life. Americans are, as Martin says, losing their center because they do not have the ability to see the other. Martin believes this because he himself thinks that he has a solid grasp on Muslim culture, and he uses both his vision of Muslim culture and of America to define himself as a European and a Westerner. It is the dangerousness of America, its ability to interject itself violently into other cultures without having to understand them that dooms America to its irrelevance because they will be unable to understand themselves if they are not able to understand others. The American identity simply becomes being dangerous, with no purpose, resulting, as Martin puts it, in the "center of their own shit" (191).

Martin's dismay at this prospect is a result of his own inability to define himself in relation to America reliably any longer. With Nina dead, he no longer has anyone to argue with who will attempt to reinforce some idea of Americanism that Martin can react against. Lianne does not inherit that role from her mother, instead speaking to him of her mother, not of politics and identity. Martin, once again believing he as the power to define others, tells Lianne, "You will always be a daughter. First and always, this is what you are" (193). With her mother dead, however, this is simply another way for Martin to point out that she has lost a centering principle in her life. Lianne does not engage with his political beliefs, and Martin wistfully recalls what with Nina, "the conversation never ended" (194). But now that she is gone, he is deprived of that conversation, he has no sense of what an American is. "I don't know this America anymore. I don't recognize it," he says during Nina's memorial, adding, "There's an empty space where America used to be" (194). As with many of the statement in this novel, the grammar reveals an ambiguity that allows these conversations to be read as personal statements about the nature of identity and as the novel's commentary on how these identities are formed. In the first part of his statement, Martin is talking about his own perspective, but he then transitions into a definite statement about America. His not being able to know and understand America translates to him as America being objectively empty, implying that the ability to know an identity is what creates it. As another attendee of the memorial service tells Martin, "If we occupy the center, it's because you put us there. This is your true dilemma" (192). But this is not a novel about the problems of Europeans, and Martin's dilemma is used to highlight the consequences of the de-centering of the American identity. The question of the novel is what remains of America when its ability to impose itself on other identities is disrupted. The man asks Martin, "What comes after America?" a question neither Martin nor the novel have an answer for. What *Falling Man*

does is investigate what Versluys calls the discontents of modern life by using 9/11, an event precipitated by the failure of America to develop a system whereby they might truly see and understand other cultures, to show how America is unable to look past its privileged center and understand itself as a part of a system of global cultures.

Lianne's quest for identity is characterized by a certain self-awareness that nevertheless fails to lead her to any answers. When she recalls from her undergraduate days a trip to Cairo, presumably a part of the tourism she later regrets as a missed opportunity to engage in a more substantive examination of another culture, she remembers how she felt uniquely defined by being different from the masses in a festival. This "heightened sense of who she was in relation to others" (184) comes after 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." She understands herself to be defined by difference, and she takes herself to be "privileged, detached, self-involved, white" (184). Lianne's anxiety over her identification stems from the inherent contradiction in her situation, that she is "educated, unknowing" (185). The emblem of her privilege, indeed the reason she is on this trip in the first place, is her education, and its value undoes itself in this scene. Because of her privilege she is able to encounter different people, but her education and her self-awareness make her confront the emptiness of her own means of identification. Lianne is lost in the crowd, separated from her friend who is also "somewhere out there, being white" (185). This disconnection foreshadows the later disconnect between her and her family later in time, if not in the novel, when again their secure sense of privilege is both highlighted and disrupted. The presence of the other exposes her privilege, and the act of become aware of it incites a reevaluation of herself that results in a dismantling rather than a rebuilding of her identity. She recalls this incident during a trip to an anti-war rally, where

Americans have gathered to collectively address and argue the proper response of their culture to the influence of Muslims. And endorsement of one idea or another about the proper military response to 9/11 would imply some positive realization of an American value, but Lianne is there only as an observer, once again existing on the boundaries of a community with, at least as she sees it, a coherent identifying characteristic, but this time not defined by it at all, not even negatively as she was in Cairo. Her older self is more aware of the futility of this kind of identity formation and declines to participate, much as she has consistently declined to participate in conversations with Martin.

When Martin says that he does not recognize this America anymore, he is positing that there once was an America that he did recognize, a belief that it is not at all clear the American characters in the novel share. Martin, a German, and Hammad, also an outsider, are the only two characters in *Falling Man* who profess to understanding America at all, and each of them are also comfortable in their own identities. The Americans are unable to recognize themselves, and unlike in *Terrorist* or *The Submission,* where the Muslims are presented as knowable and sympathetic, Hammad is constructed in such a way as to prevent Americans from using him to construct a new, positive identity. *Falling Man* resists the idea that a new identity can be created simply by using 9/11, and that the problems Americans had in living fulfilling lives in a pre-9111 world will continue to pursue them in a post-9111 world. The effort to build something new is doomed to failure and incoherence because of a lack of understanding of either themselves or the other.

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