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Rehumanize the Terrorist: Comparing the Depiction of Terrorists in Academic Theory and Contemporary Fiction

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CLAREMONT MCKENNA COLLEGE

**Rehumanizing the Terrorist:
Comparing the Depiction of Terrorists in Academic
Theory and Contemporary Fiction**

Submitted to
PROFESSOR JENNIFER TAW

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ABSTRACT

This thesis aims to respond to the following question: How does the depiction of terrorists in popular fiction novels compare to the explanations in academia as to why individuals become terrorists and join terrorist organizations? Is this fictional depiction a reflection or distortion of reality, and what insights can we take away from this comparison? The argument of this thesis is that fiction's depiction of terrorists is both a reflection and distortion of reality, as it presents a unique creative, emotionally resonant narrative that humanizes the terrorists. By giving a voice to their motivations and experiences, readers are able to empathize, relate to, and engage with these terrorists characters as rational, emotional human beings instead of vicious monsters or killing machines. To support this argument, this thesis (a) outlines the conventional wisdoms that pervade the current, popular narrative of terrorism discourse, (b) discusses the academic theories and explanations that challenge these conventional wisdoms, and (c) analyzes five contemporary fiction novels on terrorism, focusing on whether their characterizations of terrorists play into the conventional wisdoms or diverge from them and present a more nuanced, complex depiction.

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INTRODUCTION

What fascinates me most about fiction is how it is able to take ideas, questions, and values that exist in the real world and present them in a creative way. As an International Relations and Literature dual major at Claremont McKenna College, I find the relationship between politics, history and fiction to be particularly striking. My favorite genre of fiction to read is war literature because it conveyed the dimensions of war that one cannot grasp from reading academic theory or following the news. With terrorism being one of the most prominent issues on the international stage today, I wondered why this prominence did not transfer over to the literary sphere—or if it did, why there has not been much attention paid to terrorism’s literary depictions. My thesis focuses on responding to the following question: How does the depiction of terrorists in popular fiction novels compare to the explanations in academia as to why individuals become terrorists and join terrorist organizations? Is this fictional depiction a reflection or distortion of reality, and what insights can we take away from this comparison?

If the purpose of fiction is to tell a compelling, emotionally charged story in a creative way rather than to identify patterns that exist in the real world and analyze them using true experiences and facts, then one may expect the depiction of terrorists in novels to be less nuanced and complex than academic explanations. If novels focus more on action and emotion as the key elements that drive plot rather than the justifications for why the characters operate in the way they do, then one can predict that the novels will fall short of the varying characterizations presented in academic theory, and ultimately contribute in reaffirming the distorted, one-dimensional popular narrative. However, to my surprise and delight, I have found that the novels I have read and analyzed do the

opposite of what I hypothesized. Fiction, instead of being a total distortion of reality, both reflects and reforms what is presented to us in academic theory. But what it does that academic explanations do not is to humanize the terrorists by giving a voice to their thoughts, experiences, and justifications for their actions. Fiction allows the readers not just to learn about the terrorist, but to understand them as rational, emotional, individual human beings instead of horrifying monsters or killing machines.

In terms of structure, I first outline the conventional wisdoms and common misperceptions and the arguments that challenge them within academia. Then, I move on to explain my methodology and how I chose the five novels I will be evaluating in this thesis. In the subsequent chapters, I present my analysis for each of the novels, looking at which conventional wisdoms they each address and whether or not they challenge these misperceptions and offer up a different angle or more complex depiction. Finally, I end with exploring how each novel points to what I call the Intention-Perception Cycle, which refers to the reciprocal relationship between the public's perception of terrorism and the true intentions of the terrorist and how the perceptions of one side affect the actions of the other and vice versa.

CHAPTER 1: THEORY

As Joao Ricardo and Daniel G. Arce M. highlight in “Terror Support and Recruitment,” it is the people—the militants and terrorists themselves—that are the main resource of any terrorist organization.¹ Therefore, designing effective counter-terrorist policies should not solely prioritize taking back territory, targeting intelligence assets, or destroying weapons facilities. Rather, counterterrorism should place understanding “the determinants of terrorist recruitment and militancy” as one of its top priorities, because preventive measures will be more effective in the long-run than countermeasures.² Bruce Hoffman states that the main challenge analysts must overcome is to both identify and understand the “inner logic” that drives terrorism and rationalizes terrorists’ motives.³ Hoffman comments that “it is easier to dismiss terrorists as irrational homicidal maniacs than to comprehend the depth of their frustration, the core of their aims and motivations, and to appreciate how these considerations affect their choice of tactics and targets.”⁴ Andrew Kydd and Barbara Walter echo Hoffman’s sentiment in their paper “The Strategies of Terrorism,” highlighting that the press and media have inaccurately represented terrorists, portraying them as “crazy extremists who commit indiscriminate acts of violence, without any larger goal beyond revenge or desire to produce fear in an enemy population.”⁵

¹ Faria, Joao Ricardo Faria and Daniel G. Arce M. “Terror Support and Recruitment.” *Defense and Peace Economics*, 16:4 (August 21 2006). <<https://doi.org/10.1080/1024269052000344855>>. 263.

² Faria and Arce M, “Terror Support and Recruitment,” 263.

³ Bruce Hoffman, “Rethinking Terrorism and Counterterrorism Since 9/11.” *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism*, 25:5, (January 7 2011). <<https://doi.org/10.1080/105761002901223>>. 313.

⁴ Hoffman, “Rethinking Terrorism and Counterterrorism Since 9/11,” 313.

⁵ Kydd, Andrew H. and Barbara F. Walter. “The Strategies of Terrorism.” *International Security*, Volume 31, Number 1, (Summer 2006), The MIT Press. <<http://muse.jhu.edu/article/201248>>. 52.

It is only logical to assume that if the press and media represent terrorism in this generalized, one-dimensional, distorted manner, then there is a high chance that this representation pervades the literary sphere as well.

However, even though fiction, by definition, is not an authentic depiction of reality, because characterization is an integral and central element of fiction, many novels depict terrorism from a more sympathetic, personal, and emotional lens compared to academia's more scientific, systemic, and analytical approach. Indeed, the focus of novels will be on personal motivations, values and beliefs relating to identity, nationalism and individual experience. The argument presented here is that fiction has the potential to render the discussions, issues, and values of our society with regard to terrorism from an important and insightful perspective. This can complement the academic discussions of terrorism and counteract the often one-dimensional media coverage of terrorist actions, bringing the reader into the mind and motivation of terrorists in ways that can, at least, build understanding and may even develop empathy.

It seems then that academics and novelists have a common goal: to reject the flat, one-dimensional perceptions of who terrorists are and what terrorism is by teasing out the layers of complexity. In his paper discussing the development of "terrorism discourse," Richard Jackson asserts that "discourses are never completely uniform, coherent or consistent; they have porous borders and there are often exceptions, inconsistencies and contradictions by different speakers and texts."⁶ On one hand, academics will engage in debates and discussions about the "terrorist profile," presenting evidence to either support

⁶ Richard Jackson, "Constructing Enemies: 'Islamic Terrorism' in Political and Academic Discourse." *Government and Opposition*, Vol. 42, No. 3 (2007): 394-426. Blackwell Publishing. <<https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1477-7053.2007.00229.x>>. 402.

or undermine the conventional wisdoms surrounding the characteristics terrorists possess. Academics evaluate studies and cite specific individuals and examples. On the other hand, novelists do away with the facts and the figures and approach these discussions with a more artistic, emotional rendering.

While academia aims to find patterns and trends that point to which types of people under what type of conditions become terrorists, fiction focuses on a personal, individual narrative that tells one specific variation of this journey. Because academia and fiction operate in different realms and are subject to different frameworks and parameters, perhaps fiction can offer a “more flexible and ethically responsible alternative to the oppressive confines” of the current terrorism discourse.⁷ While it is true that fiction may reflect and reinforce common stereotypes and misinformation about terrorism, fiction is also able to humanize terrorists by pushing readers to open their minds and think about the conditions and logic that lead one to terrorism. I chose to compare IR theory on terrorism to contemporary fiction on terrorism because I wanted to evaluate the literary depiction of political events, systems and ideas. I wanted to see whether fiction would offer, if not a more sympathetic, at least a more humanizing, explanatory characterization of terrorists.

MISCONCEPTIONS

Before delving into the novels themselves, it is important to first examine the academic theories behind why and how individuals become terrorists. These theories tend to focus on the conditions that may contribute to terrorism and how those conditions

⁷ Jackson, “Constructing Enemies: ‘Islamic Terrorism’,” 426.

influence both the logic of terrorism and individuals' openness to recruitment (these are interrelated). The theories are often introduced as corrections of the problematic conventional wisdom that has sprung up about what leads people to become terrorists. This is significant because these false understandings continue to inform counterterrorism policy; analysts would like to debunk these myths and provide policymakers with a firmer footing. In their paper "Understanding Support for Islamist Militancy in Pakistan," Jacob Shapiro and C. Christine Fair address what they call "conventional wisdoms," which refers to the motivations that have been ascribed to individuals who join extremist/terrorist organizations. Although Shapiro's and Fair's work specifically relates to Pakistan, the problematic assumptions apply to terrorists in general and influence U.S. policy prescriptions for anti-terrorist initiatives. They include:

1. Poverty is a root cause of support for militancy, or at least that poorer and less-educated individuals are more prone to militants' appeals.⁸
2. Personal religiosity and support for sharia (Islamic law) are strongly correlated with support for Islamist militancy.⁹
3. Support for political goals espoused by legal Islamist parties predicts support for militant organizations.¹⁰
4. Those who support democracy—either in terms of supporting democratic processes such as voting or in terms of valuing core democratic principles—oppose Islamism and militancy.¹¹

As Shapiro and Fair mention, while these assumptions dominate the discourse in media and in U.S. Congress, they have no "firm evidentiary basis."¹² Thus, terrorism experts in

⁸ Shapiro, Jacob N. and C. Christine Fair. "Understanding Support for Islamist Militancy in Pakistan." *International Security*, Volume 34, Number 3, Winter 2009/10. <<http://muse.jhu.edu/article/369949>>. 80.

⁹ Shapiro and Fair, "Understanding Support for Islamist Militancy in Pakistan," 81.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Ibid.

academia have been engaging in an ongoing conversation to qualify and challenge, disprove, and debunk these false understandings.

II CHALLENGING FALSE ASSUMPTIONS

Poverty leads individuals to become terrorists

The belief that poverty is a root cause of terrorism is one of the most prominent conventional wisdoms in terrorism discourse. This conventional wisdom is based on the belief that, when one has nothing to lose, one is more likely to resort to self-destructive activities.¹³ In terms of the idea of poverty as a reason to support terrorism or militancy, Alan Krueger and Jitka Maleckova argue that individuals turn to terrorism in response to the political conditions of their society as well as feelings of indignity and frustration, stating that “any connection between poverty, education and terrorism is indirect, complicated and probably quite weak.”¹⁴ They explain that this conventional wisdom is a derivative of the belief that poverty and lack of education are connected to illegal activity. But this assumption is only true with regards to property crimes; there is no relationship between the economic status and economic opportunity of the criminal and the occurrence of violent crimes.¹⁵

Martha Crenshaw supports Krueger and Maleckova and states that, in fact, a significant amount of terrorists are “young, well-educated, and middle class in

¹³ Claude Berrebi. “Evidence about the Link Between Education, Poverty and Terrorism among Palestinians.” *Peace Economics, Peace Science and Public Policy*, RAND Corporation. Vol. 13, Issue 1 (2007). <<http://public-policy.huji.ac.il/upload/segel/ClaudeBerrebi/EvidenceAbouttheLinkBetweenEducation.pdf>>.1.

¹⁴ Alan B. Krueger and Jitka Maleckova. “Education, Poverty and Terrorism: Is There a Causal Connection?” *Journal of Economic Perspectives*. Vol. 17, No. 4 (Fall 2003). <<https://www.jstor.org/stable/3216934>>. 119.

¹⁵ Krueger and Maleckova, “Education, Poverty and Terrorism: Is There a Causal Connection?” 121.

background,” and that those who are terrorists include students, professionals, and even individuals with prior political experience.¹⁶ Though this conventional wisdom is one of the most dominant in terrorism discourse, there is a plethora of examples that demonstrate otherwise. For instance, the hijackers who committed the attacks of 9/11 were not “mentally unstable, economically bereft, or abject, isolated loners.”¹⁷ In fact, these suicide terrorists had “relatively high levels of education, socioeconomic status, and stable family ties.”¹⁸ In one study on Hamas and Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ), it was found that only 16% of terrorists were characterized as poor, compared to the 33% of the Palestinian population.¹⁹ In addition, out of the 208 terrorists whose education attainment was identified, 96% had at least a high school education, 65% had some kind of higher education, compared to 51% and 15% respectively in the Palestinian population of the same age, sex, and religion.²⁰ On the other side of the argument, one study shows that for Hezbollah, “poverty is inversely related with the likelihood that someone becomes a Hezbollah fighter, and educated is positively related.”²¹

Mia Bloom takes this argument a different direction and explains that a terrorist organization will target different types of people based on its staffing needs.²² When terrorists need to fill the ranks and up their numbers, they may turn to “low hanging fruit”

¹⁶ Martha Crenshaw, “The Causes of Terrorism.” *Comparative Politics*, Vol. 13, No. 4 (July 1981), Ph.D. Programs in Political Science, City University of New York. <<http://jstor.org/stable/421717>>. 384.

¹⁷ Hoffman, “Rethinking Terrorism and Counterterrorism Since 9/11,” 305.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Berrebi, “Evidence about the Link Between Education, Poverty and Terrorism among Palestinians,” 17.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Krueger and Maleckova, “Education, Poverty and Terrorism: Is There a Causal Connection?” 133.

²² Mia Bloom. “Constructing Expertise: Terrorist Recruitment and “Talent Spotting” in the PIRA, Al Qaeda, and ISIS.” *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism*, 40:7 (Oct 25 2016). <<https://doi.org/10.1080/1057610X.2016.1237219>>.604.

who are considered to be uneducated and underachieving.²³ However, the larger and more successful the organization becomes, recruitment is geared towards bringing in “educated and professional individuals with specific expertise to adapt to changing opportunities and increased pressures from a securitized environment.”²⁴ Krueger and Maleckova postulate that, in the eyes of the talent spotters, a high level of education is indicative of the individual’s commitment to the cause as well as their competence and ability to prepare for a task and carry it out.²⁵ For example, the Provisional-Irish Republican Army (PIRA) would recruit potential members from college campuses to target individuals with advanced education degrees, specifically in Mathematics, Chemistry or Engineering.²⁶ In short, there are times when recruiting is manpower-focused, and there are times when it will be expertise-focused.²⁷

But even if poverty is not a direct cause of terrorism, academics are diligent in exploring how it may indirectly lead someone to the path of terrorism. Krueger and Maleckova mention the “Robin Hood model of terrorism,” or the idea that economically well-off elite who live in poor countries could be inspired by the poverty of their countrymen, making them want to (literally) fight for economic equality.²⁸ In terms of education, while individuals with “improved reasoning skills” will be able to better understand the moral and religious justifications put forth by terrorist organizations, it can also be argued that education makes individuals recognize that there are other

²³ Bloom, “Constructing Expertise: Terrorist Recruitment and “Talent Spotting”,” 604.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Krueger and Maleckova, “Education, Poverty and Terrorism: Is There a Causal Connection?” 122.

²⁶ Bloom, “Constructing Expertise: Terrorist Recruitment and “Talent Spotting”” 609.

²⁷ Ibid., 604.

²⁸ Krueger and Maleckova, “Education, Poverty and Terrorism: Is There a Causal Connection?” 137.

alternatives to violence—protests, strikes, appeals to media, dialogue with political representatives—as a means to achieve a political goal.²⁹

There is a correlation between religiosity and violence

The conventional wisdom that religiosity is strongly correlated with the support of terrorism has been generalized to the point where there is a belief that if someone is Muslim, they are more likely to become a terrorist, which could not be further from the truth. This misperception is derived from the assumption that violence is inherent to Islam, as Islam “makes no distinction between Church and State, has never discarded the notion of religious war, purports to regulate both the public and private lives of Muslims and has much to say about the political life of the community.”³⁰ Yes, there are terrorist organizations that capitalize on the ideology behind Islam to recruit members. For example, ISIS propaganda emphasizes “the individual religious obligation to come and join its ranks, as part of the duty of *hijra* and *jihad*.”³¹ However, it is incorrect to then assume that Islam—and thus individuals of Muslim faith—advocates and encourages violence and acts of terror.

To illustrate the complexity of the relationship between religiosity and violence, Daniel Byman examines the role of religion in Salafi-jihadist insurgencies to answer the question, “How Much Does Religion Really Matter?” Salafi-jihadist insurgencies are groups whose ideologies are “affiliated with, allied to, or sympathize with Al Qaeda, such as Al Qaeda of Iraq (AQI), Al-Shabaab in Somalia, Boko Haram in Nigeria, and the

²⁹ Berrebi, “Evidence about the Link Between Education, Poverty and Terrorism among Palestinians,” 8.

³⁰ Jackson, “Constructing Enemies: ‘Islamic Terrorism,’” 403.

³¹ Bloom, “Constructing Expertise: Terrorist Recruitment and “Talent Spotting,”” 616.

Taliban.³² Salafi-jihadist insurgencies all uphold the goal of “establishing an Islamic state, overturning supposedly apostate governments, and driving the United States, other Western powers, and their local non-Salafi allies out of their country or region.”³³ In other words, the religious beliefs of these groups do inform their ultimate goal. These groups are opposed to democracy and nationalism, and they emphasize “rejection of any deviation from what they perceive as the oneness of God and display hostility to non-Muslims.”³⁴ Much of the recruiting for these insurgencies occurs via religious networks and organizations, of which mosques and religious social organizations play an integral role in influencing people to join the greater movement and allowing talent spotters spaces for them to seek out potential recruits.³⁵ Furthermore, the Salafi-jihadist ideology glorifies martyrdom which, coupled with the ability to attract foreign fighters, allows these groups to “attract suicide bombers and sustain their terror campaigns.”³⁶

However, although Salafi-jihadist insurgencies utilize jihad and the tenets of Islam to ground their mission, expand their power, and build their organization, Byman highlights that these groups have a limited appeal: while their ideology strikes cultural chords and symbols that draw in select supporters, its exclusionary terms alienate the larger demographics.³⁷ In its rejection of nationalism, it excludes many of the anti-government opposition that holds nationalistic positions, and in its rejection of democracy, it excludes mainstream Islamists who are in favor of democratic processes

³² Daniel Byman. “Fighting Salafi-Jihadist Insurgencies: How Much Does Religion Really Matter?” *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism*, 36:5, (April 18 2013), Taylor and Francis Group, LLC. <<https://doi.org/10.1080/1057610X.2013.775417>>. 354.

³³ Daniel Byman, “Fighting Salafi-Jihadist Insurgencies,” 356.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Ibid., 358.

³⁶ Daniel Byman, “Fighting Salafi-Jihadist Insurgencies,” 360.

³⁷ Ibid., 361.

over the tyrannical regimes they are under.³⁸ What Byman's case study shows is that there is a distinction between religiosity and religious extremism. Although there are terrorists who are religious extremists, (a) not all terrorists are religious extremists, and (b) not all religious individuals are more likely to become terrorists. As another example, in one study based on attitude surveys carried out in Algeria and Jordan in mid-2002, neither the Algerian or Jordanian respondents with higher levels of religious involvement are more likely to approve of terrorist acts against U.S. targets.³⁹ The factors that do lead someone to be more likely to approve of terrorism against U.S. targets are "less confidence in domestic political institutions" and "stronger disapproval of American foreign policy."⁴⁰

David Lake, in "Rational Extremism: Understanding Terrorism in the Twenty-first Century," breaks down extremism into two key attributes. The first is that the beliefs of extremists, be they political, religious, or other, "are not widely shared even within their own societies."⁴¹ The second is that extremists, at least initially, lack the means or power to achieve their objectives.⁴² Because the number of people who hold extremist viewpoints is so small, their ideologies have to be built out and grounded on existing sentiments and values so that they can gain both legitimacy and support. In their paper regarding the radicalization of homegrown terrorists, Alex Wilner and Claire-Jehanne Dubouloz state that "Bin Laden, Ayman al-Zawahiri, and other leaders of transnational

³⁸ Ibid., 361.

³⁹ Mark Tessler and Michael D.H. Robbins. "What Leads Some Ordinary Arab Men and Women to Approve of Terrorist Acts Against the United States?" *Journal of Conflict Resolution*. Vol. 51, No. 2 (April 2007). 319.

⁴⁰ Tessler and Robbins, "What Leads Some to Approve of Terrorist Acts?" 323.

⁴¹ David A. Lake, "Rational Extremism: Understanding Terrorism in the Twenty-first Century." *International Organization*. (Spring 2002), pp. 15 - 29. The IO Foundation and the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. <<https://doi.org/10.1017/S777777770200002X>>. 18.

⁴² Lake, "Rational Extremism," 18.

organizations are careful to present solid religious interpretations that speak to religious doctrine and engage current debates when justifying their violent actions.”⁴³ However, this does not make Islam violent and terroristic by nature, though the perceived correlation between religiosity and violence—what Jackson refers to as the “terrorism-extremism” association—leads people to interpret it as such.⁴⁴

If there is a terrorist profile, it more closely resembles a politically conscious individual who partakes in a grassroots movement than a religious fanatic.⁴⁵

Terrorists are mentally ill

Often within the conversation of religious fanaticism is also the conversation of mental instability. In “Terrorism and Mental Illness: Is There a Relationship?”, David Weatherston and Jonathan Moran state that the “image of the psychopathic terrorist persists in the mass media and to varied extents within academic and policy circles.”⁴⁶ However, research from extensive field interviews finds that “pathological characterizations of those who participate in militant and/or terrorist groups are inconsistent with empirical realities.⁴⁷ In fact, “militant activists and those who commit or support acts of terrorism tend not to be psychologically abnormal, disturbed, or desperate individuals as they are depicted popularly.”⁴⁸ Organizations often reject potential recruits

⁴³ Alex S. Wilner and Claire-Jehanne Dubouloz. “Homegrown terrorism and transformative learning: an interdisciplinary approach to understanding radicalization.” *Global Change, Peace & Security*. 22:1, (February 3 2010). <<https://doi.org/10.1080/14781150903487956>>. 41.

⁴⁴ Jackson, “Constructing Enemies: ‘Islamic Terrorism’,” 404-405.

⁴⁵ Jackson, “Constructing Enemies: ‘Islamic Terrorism’,” 417.

⁴⁶ David Weatherston and Jonathan Moran. “Terrorism and Mental Illness: Is There a Relationship?” *International Journal of Offender Therapy and Comparative Criminology*, 47(6), Sage Publications, 2003. <<http://journals.sagepub.com/doi/abs/10.1177/0306624X03257244>>. 707.

⁴⁷ Bloom, “Constructing Expertise: Terrorist Recruitment,” 614.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

who openly seek excitement and danger for perverse personal intentions because they see these recruits as high security risks.⁴⁹ This goes for terrorists who perform all kinds of duties, even those who are trained for and commit suicide missions. For example, “organizational features of the PIRA signify the members are not psychopaths, because the members display attitudes of dedication, cooperation and loyalty.”⁵⁰ Terrorists willing to kill themselves in the process of committing violence is not indicative of a mental disorder. Rather, this internalization and acceptance of performing a task of the highest risk reflects the solidity and depth of their radicalized logic and belief in their goals, which is completely different from being mentally unstable.

In their study, “A False Dichotomy? Mental Illness and Lone-Actor Terrorism,” Emily Corner and Paul Gill outline the development on the academic discussion about the relationship between terrorism and mental illness. According to them, studies in the 1970s emphasized that the compulsion to partake in terrorist activity or join an organization (be it voluntarily or through recruitment) is inherent in individuals engaged in militancy.⁵¹ Moving forward, studies in the 1980s characterized terrorists as “hesitant, emotionally damaged youths who are victims of parental rejection that delayed their achievement of adult identity,” rather than the “aggressive psychopaths” that they were portrayed to be.⁵² These kinds of conclusions were dismissed in the late 1990s and 2000s,

⁴⁹ Martha Crenshaw, “The Causes of Terrorism,” 391.

⁵⁰ Weatherston and Moran, “Terrorism and Mental Illness: Is There a Relationship?” 705.

⁵¹ Emily Corner and Paul Gill, “A False Dichotomy? Mental Illness and Lone-Actor Terrorism,” *Law and Human Behavior*. Vol. 39, No. 1. American Psychological Association. (2015). <<http://dx.doi.org/10.1037/1hb0000102>>. 23.

⁵² Corner and Gill, “A False Dichotomy? Mental Illness and Lone-Actor Terrorism,” 23.

and according to Corner and Gill, a consensus emerged that terrorist motivation had to do more with group dynamics than individual psychology.⁵³

Weatherston and Moran point out that “when terrorists do exhibit symptoms of mental illness this may be as a result of their terrorist activity,” rather than the cause of them partaking in it.⁵⁴ The tasks that come with joining a terrorist organization—operating in secrecy, committing violent acts, questions the trust and credibility of those around you—makes for a highly “hazardous and stressful” environment that can take a severe mental toll on one’s psyche.⁵⁵ And it is in this long-term exposure to the high-stake environment “and the use of instrumental and expressive violence” that may in turn reflect and individual as being a “psychopathic or psychotic reveler in violence.”⁵⁶ One interesting consideration that Corner and Gill investigate is the role of mental illness in lone-actor terrorism as compared to its role in group terrorism. Their results find that “there is a stronger association between mental illness and lone-actor terrorists than mental illness and group-based terrorists.”⁵⁷ This will be explored in more detail in Chapter 5.

The takeaway from this discussion is that, like any of these other factors mentioned, there is a mixed bag. In any organization there will be members “who succumb, as many nonpathological individuals would, to mental health problems, others who remain normal, and others who exhibit pathological tendencies that may explain

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Weatherston and Moran, “Terrorism and Mental Illness: Is There a Relationship?” 702.

⁵⁵ Weatherston and Moran, “Terrorism and Mental Illness: Is There a Relationship?” 702.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ Corner and Gill, “A False Dichotomy? Mental Illness and Lone-Actor Terrorism,” 30.

their involvement in terrorism.”⁵⁸ Though there are indeed terrorists who have mental illnesses or disorders, this should not become an all-encompassing generalization, as this perspective is incredibly skewed. Citing mental illness as a blanket justification for the actions of terrorists undermines the complexity of the processes of radicalization and recruitment. In turn, this clouds our understanding of how these processes function, and therefore prevent governments, communities and individuals alike from coming up with effective counterterrorism and CVE policies.

Support for Islamist Parties Leads to Terrorism

To start, Islamist terrorism does not only stem from Islamist parties—it can be employed in three different categories: “transnational Islamist terrorism; Islamist terrorism associated with national liberation movements; and Islamist domestic insurgencies against incumbent regimes.”⁵⁹ But the most important thing to note is that majority of Islamist movements are non-violent: although some of these movements do have terrorist wings, the terrorist movements comprise a small minority.⁶⁰ For example, Sri Lanka’s Tamil Tigers were established in 1978, when the Tamil United Liberation Front, known as their sister political party, was the single largest opposition party in parliament.⁶¹ Though they might have sprung from a legitimate Islamist party, the two groups are still “sisters,” and thus separate entities of each other. Much like the

⁵⁸ Weatherson and Moran, “Terrorism and Mental Illness: Is There a Relationship?” 708.

⁵⁹ Katerina Dalacoura. “Islamist terrorism and the Middle East democratic deficit: Political exclusion, repression and the causes of extremism.” *Democratization*, 13:3 (2006). <<https://doi.org/10.1080/13510340600579516>>. 510.

⁶⁰ Dalacoura, “Islamist terrorism and the Middle East democratic deficit.” 510.

⁶¹ Dalacoura, “Islamist terrorism and the Middle East democratic deficit.” 510.

counterarguments for the conventional wisdom on religiosity, not all those who support legitimate Islamist Parties support the use of terrorism.

Even with this distinction between majority non-violent Islamist movements and minority terrorist organizations, there are also cases where groups can fall under both categories. Hezbollah, for example, has participated in Lebanon's national elections as a political party since 1992, which contributed to "its transformation from a radical militia to a mainstream political party, one of its many roles."⁶² Another example is Hamas, which was comprised of a "more activist generation of leaders" who emerged from the Muslim Brotherhood in 1988, as they "opposed the Brotherhood twin policy of avoiding confrontation with Israel and gradual Islamization."⁶³ Thus, the birth of Hamas did not stem from political participation, but rather a moment of "civil unrest" and "popular revolt" when the Palestinian Infidada "provided the impetus for its creation."⁶⁴ Unlike Hezbollah, Hamas was not incubated or supported by the Muslim Brotherhood, but rather deviated from them and disagreed with their ideology. While Hamas declined to participate in the first legislative and presidential elections in Palestine in January 1996, the National Islamic Salvation Party, which was supported by Hamas in its formation, did.⁶⁵

In contrast to terrorist organizations that sprouted from larger political movements, there are also Islamist parties that have exclusively pursued non-violent alternatives for affecting change and achieving their objectives are The Muslim Brotherhood of Jordan and the Islamist movement in Tunisia. The Muslim Brotherhood

⁶² Ibid., 515.

⁶³ Ibid., 516.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ Ibid., 516-517.

of Jordan, who has held legal status since 1945, supported the Hashemite monarchy against Arab nationalism and the appeal of radical Islamism, playing a role in the democratization of Jordanian politics and established the Islamic Action Front Party (IAFP) in 1992.⁶⁶ The Islamist movement in Tunisia, though victim to institutional exclusion and repression, stuck to its commitment to legalism, pluralism and incrementalism, championing “accommodation and retreat” instead of rebellion.⁶⁷ What these two examples illustrate is that one’s support of terrorism and indiscriminate violence has nothing to do with one’s alignment to an Islamist party or political movement. Even if conventional wisdom is more complicated and less concretely disputable than the other misperceptions addressed in this chapter. But, the key takeaway from this particular discussion is that this conventional wisdom—though not completely false in its underlying assumption—fails to demonstrate the variation and diversity in the relationships between terrorist organizations and legitimate Islamist parties.

The absence of democracy breeds terrorism

The final conventional wisdom evaluated here zooms out of the political sphere a little farther, shifting from political parties to regime types as a whole. The argument that the absence of democracy breeds terrorism is another misperception that is endorsed at the highest level. President Bush said in a speech in March 2005 that the goal of the United States was “to help change the conditions that give rise to extremism and terror” in the Middle East, in which “tyranny” and “dictatorship” are one of the main

⁶⁶ Dalacoura, “Islamist terrorism and the Middle East democratic deficit.” 519-520.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 520.

conditions.⁶⁸ Within this trope, there is this embedded assumption that democratic nations are less likely to breed or produce terrorists, which is a dangerous assumption to make. According to a U.S. State Department's "Patterns of Global Terrorism" report, between 2000 and 2003, "269 major terrorist incidents around the world occurred in countries classified as "free" by Freedom House, 119 occurred in "partly free" countries, and 138 occurred in "not free" countries.⁶⁹ These numbers show that the incidence of terrorism in a given country is not related to or dictated by the degree of freedom that enjoyed by said country's citizens.⁷⁰

Another element of this conventional wisdom is the idea that "failed states" breed terrorists. "Failed states" have been scrutinized as examples of the consequences of an absence of democracy, and have reified the assumption that terrorists do not come from democratic, first-world, stabilized states. Anna Simons challenges this notion and states that international terrorists do not predominantly come from failed states.⁷¹ She notes that "from disenfranchised populations can come foot soldiers, from alienated populations can come terrorists. And these exist in pockets everywhere, including in our own backyard."⁷² This challenge to the conventional wisdom has been undercut particularly by the media, as Western press "tends to report terrorist incidents with a cross-border element more completely than homegrown terrorist attacks," with most of the reports "[i]dentifying] the location of an incident, but not the identity of the perpetrator."⁷³ In the

⁶⁸ F. Gregory Gause III. "Can Democracy Stop Terrorism?" *Foreign Affairs*. Vol. 84, No. 5, (September - October 2005), Council of Foreign Relations. <<http://www.jstor.org/stable/20031706>>. 64.

⁶⁹ Gause III, "Can Democracy Stop Terrorism?" 66.

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ Anna Simons and David Tucker. "The misleading problem of failed states," 388.

⁷² Simons and Tucker, "The misleading problem of failed states," 400.

⁷³ Gause III, "Can Democracy Stop Terrorism?" 65.

summer of 2016, Omar Seddique Mateen gunned down 49 people at Pulse, a gay nightclub in Orlando and pledged allegiance to ISIS before doing so.⁷⁴ Mateen was not from a failed state, nor was he a foreign national; he was a first-generation American of Afghan descent, born in Queens to Muslim parents, and he attended public schools in Florida.⁷⁵ In October 2017, Sayfullo Saipov killed eight people and injured 11 by driving a pickup truck that plowed down a crowded bike path along the Hudson River in Manhattan.⁷⁶ Saipov was from Uzbekistan, but came to the United States in 2010 via green card, which allowed him permanent legal residence.⁷⁷

The absence of democracy is a believable trope because it rests on the greater idea that terrorism is a weapon of the weak—particularly the assumption that oppression breeds terrorism. If a regime suppresses its opposition, then terrorism may appear to be a logical response, as there is no other way for the opposition to challenge or check the regime than through unconventional, violent means.⁷⁸ Yet, many repressive regimes do not face terrorist backlashes. Even in democracies, extremists can deliberately choose to reject nonviolent paths to opposition that are at their disposal.⁷⁹ To highlight that there is no relationship—either positive or negative—between regime type and terrorism, one can look at the difference between India and China. Once again taking from the State Department’s “Patterns of Global Terrorism” report, from 2000 to 2003 there were 203

⁷⁴ Ralph Ellis et al., “Orlando shooting: 49 killed, shooter pledged ISIS allegiance.” *CNN*, June 13, 2016. <<https://www.cnn.com/2016/06/12/us/orlando-nightclub-shooting/index.html>>.

⁷⁵ Dan Barry, “Realizing It’s a Small, Terrifying World After All.” *New York Times*, June 20, 2016. <<https://www.nytimes.com/2016/06/21/us/orlando-shooting-america.html?rref=collection%2Fnewseventcollection%2F2016-orlando-shooting>>.

⁷⁶ Benjamin Mueller et al., “Terror Attack Kills 8 and Injures 11 in Manhattan.” *New York Times*, October 31, 2017. <<https://www.nytimes.com/2017/10/31/nyregion/police-shooting-lower-manhattan.html>>.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*

⁷⁸ Martha Crenshaw, “The Causes of Terrorism,” 387.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 388.

international terrorist attacks in India, the world's largest democracy (in terms of population), and none reported in China, the world's largest authoritarian state (again in terms of population).⁸⁰ If this misperception that the absence of democracy breeds terrorism were true, then the numbers would have been flipped, with India having less, and China more.

III. TRUE MOTIVATIONS: MECHANISMS TO RADICALIZATION

So, if these conventional wisdoms are not the true motivations behind why people support or join terrorist organizations, then what does motivate people to undertake terrorist actions? Shapiro and Fair outline that support for terrorist organizations exists under the two following conditions: (1) that the group is using violence in support of a political objective that the moderate individual agrees with, and (2) that violence makes sense as the strategy to accomplish these objectives.⁸¹ However, it is important to not generalize and assume that all those who support the actions of terrorist organizations become terrorists. Crenshaw irons this out by clarifying that terrorism "is neither an automatic reaction to conditions nor a purely calculated strategy."⁸² Rather, terrorists are a minority who have reached the conclusion that terrorism is a rational, reasonable, viable means of achieving their political ends.

Clark McCauley and Sophia Moskalenko break down these motivations into several categories. Their classification is shown in the table below:

⁸⁰ Gause III, "Can Democracy Stop Terrorism?" 67.

⁸¹ Shapiro and Fair, "Understanding Support for Islamist Militancy in Pakistan," 83.

⁸² Martha Crenshaw, "The Causes of Terrorism," 389.

Table 1: Pathways to violence: Mechanisms of political radicalization at the individual, group, and mass-public levels⁸³

| Level of radicalization | Mechanism |
|-------------------------|---|
| Individual | 1 Personal Victimization |
| | 2 Political Grievance |
| | 3 Joining a radical group: the slippery slope |
| | 4 Joining a radical group: the power of love |
| | 5 Extremity shift in like-minded groups |
| Group | 6 Extreme cohesion under isolation and threat |
| | 7 Competition for the same base of support |
| | 8 Competition with state power—condensation |
| | 9 Within-group competition—fissioning |
| Mass | 10 Jujitsu politics |
| | 11 Hate |
| | 12 Martyrdom |

McCauley and Moskaleiko's classification shows that there are several mechanisms to be tailored to individuals with varying personalities and experiences. Bloom reinforces this, stating that "propaganda intended to attract formerly incarcerated gang members is significantly different from those messages aimed at recruiting doctors, nurses, and engineers."⁸⁴ I will delve into these mechanisms in more detail as they come up in the novels I am investigating. But what the mechanisms in the table clearly show is that there is no one terrorist personality, and there is no single "terrorist profile." It is possible that those who commit terrorist acts are doing so in response to social conditions and

⁸³ McCauley, Clark and Sophia Moskaleiko. "Mechanisms of Political Radicalization: Pathways Toward Terrorism." *Terrorism and Political Violence*, 20:3, (July 3 2008), <<https://doi.org/10.1080/09546550802073367>>. 417.

⁸⁴ Bloom, "Constructing Expertise: Terrorist Recruitment," 606.

objectives that extend beyond their own personal situation and have little to do with their own individual experiences and background.⁸⁵ It is also true for someone to support terrorism not because of “discontent with personal or even societal circumstances but rather from perceptions about who or what is responsible for the status quo.”⁸⁶ Be it to attract attention, provoke institutions, intimidate opponents, appeal for sympathy, or promote adherence of the faithful, the common quality that all terrorists share is the perception of an absence of choice.⁸⁷

Alienation, Othering and Prejudice

Although the four conventional wisdoms that Shapiro and Fair discuss do not completely or accurately speak to the reasons individuals are radicalized into terrorists, these assumptions share a common theme: the idea of othering. Emily Crenshaw explores othering by investigating the contrast between the depiction of homegrown and foreign terrorists in newspaper coverage. In this specific context, she defines othering as the process by which the media depicts the perpetrators as inherently unlike everyone else.⁸⁸ She argues that “a news cycle that habitually others the attacker and obscures the related political and social issues” through “coverage that emphasizes spectacle” and “employs vilifying language” pushes those following the news “towards certain extremities of opinion and thought that would not have been reached had those media narratives been

⁸⁵ Edward Newmann, “Exploring the “Root Causes” of Terrorism.” *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism*, 29:8 (Nov 2006). <<https://doi.org/10.1080/10576100600704069>>. 755.

⁸⁶ Tessler and Robbins, “What Leads Some to Approve of Terrorist Acts?” 324.

⁸⁷ Martha Crenshaw, “Causes of Terrorism,” 396.

⁸⁸ Emily Crenshaw, “American and foreign terrorists: an analysis of divergent portrayals in US newspaper coverage,” *Critical Studies of Terrorism*. (October 1 2014). <<https://doi.org/10.1080/17539153.2014.953306>>. 364.

absent.”⁸⁹ In his paper, ““Constructing Enemies: ‘Islamic Terrorism’ in Political and Academic Discourse,” Richard Jackson argues that the discrepancy underlying Emily Crenshaw’s observation—and the general terrorism discourse in general—reflects “a long tradition of culture stereotypes and deeply hostile media representations and depictions,” especially of Islam and Muslims.⁹⁰ The frameworks used to depict Muslims in mainstream media are often centered on violence, threat, extremism, fanaticism and terrorism, on top of “a visual orientalist tradition in which they are portrayed as exotic and mysterious.”⁹¹ This distorted representation ties back to “deeper socio-cultural fears, anxieties and stereotypes of the oriental ‘other’ that go back to the imperial age.”⁹² But this othering does not only happen across nations and culture, but also within them.

In the specific case of homegrown terrorism, Wilner and Dubouloz assert that socio-political alienation is one of the three precursors of radicalization.⁹³ They explain that the discrimination, victimization and xenophobia, coupled with the lack of integration of Western Muslim communities with their larger societies, results in the failure of these individuals to assimilate or align with their host or even native country.⁹⁴ This in turn leads to what McCauley and Moskaleiko refer to as group radicalization in like-minded groups. The alienation that Western Muslims feel pushes them to seek like-minded individuals, leading to identification with a small, isolated group.⁹⁵ The unity and

⁸⁹ Emily Crenshaw, “American and foreign terrorists,” 364.

⁹⁰ Richard Jackson. “Constructing Enemies: ‘Islamic Terrorism’,” 400.

⁹¹ Richard Jackson. “Constructing Enemies: ‘Islamic Terrorism’,” 400.

⁹² Ibid.

⁹³ Wilner and Dubouloz, “Homegrown terrorism and transformative learning,” 37.

⁹⁴ Ibid., 38.

⁹⁵ Ibid.

sense of belonging transforms feelings of helplessness and humiliation into potency and agency.⁹⁶

IV. RECRUITMENT PROCESS

Just as there is no single terrorist profile and no single pathway to radicalization, there is also no single form of recruitment. Every terrorist organization has varying selection processes and priorities that affect their recruitment operations in different ways.⁹⁷ Terrorist organizations are not subject to the same rigidity, checks, or bureaucratic procedures that other systems are subject to, and thus are more malleable and evolve according to the circumstance. Bloom calls this “competitive adaptation,” or the ability for a terrorist organization to adapt “in response to changes in the security environment.”⁹⁸ To illustrate this idea, she cites Al Qaeda as an example, explaining that as the group’s “capabilities declined, so too did the quality of its recruits, giving rise in recent years to the stereotype of the terrorist, far from the evil-mastermind in James Bond films and closer to the bumbler in the media and popular culture.”⁹⁹ A group’s ability to recruit and retain effective terrorists depends on the effectiveness of the group’s system and structure, which hinges on three elements: culture, institution, and organization.

In terms of culture, Munger defines culture as “the set of “inherited” beliefs, attitudes, and moral strictures that a people use to distinguish outsiders, to understand themselves and to communicate with each other.”¹⁰⁰ The culture of an organization can

⁹⁶ Ibid., 39.

⁹⁷ Bloom, “Constructing Expertise: Terrorist Recruitment,” 618.

⁹⁸ Ibid., 618.

⁹⁹ Bloom, “Constructing Expertise: Terrorist Recruitment and “Talent Spotting”” 612.

¹⁰⁰ Munger, “Preference modification vs. incentive manipulation,” 134.

be founded on the tenets of religion, political ideology, ethnicity, etc. However, it is important that we don't misperceive these cultural elements as naturally leading to or inducing violence. The culture of the organization is more for the purposes of cohesion, not a justification for the use of violence. According to Munger, culture "is a commitment device, a way of solving the problem of high transactions costs in a setting where problems of ex post opportunism would otherwise eliminate ex ante chances and cooperation."¹⁰¹ On one hand, "Institutions are the humanly devised rules of the game, formal (constitutions and laws) or informal (norms, moral systems, manners), but they tend to be long-lived and not easily evaluated, because there is no specific feedback metric for comparison." The final element, organization, relates to the institution in the sense that it is the "optimizing response to the set of incentives and constraints created by institutions."¹⁰² Bloom breaks down recruits into two distinct types of members: (a) individuals who are influenced by current terrorists to join the organization support the same political cause, or (b) the "hard-core ideology driven" individuals that volunteer to join the organization without being convinced by current members.¹⁰³ Not only will the role of the recruits in the organization be based on whether they volunteer or are brought in by a talent spotter; their role will also relate to their background, connections, and skills, like any institution or corporation. For instance, Osama Bin Laden is known to have been a "terrorist CEO," because he "applied business administration and modern management techniques to the running of a transnational terrorist organization" and implemented a similar framework used "by corporate executives throughout much of the

¹⁰¹ Ibid., 133.

¹⁰² Munger, "Preference modification vs. incentive manipulation," 141.

¹⁰³ Bloom, "Constructing Expertise: Terrorist Recruitment," 617.

industrialized world.”¹⁰⁴ Hoffman outlines the four different “positions” of terrorists within the structure of Al Qaeda’s organization:

Four Different Levels - Operational Styles in Al Qaeda¹⁰⁵

1. The professional cadre: “Terrorist teams that are predetermined and carefully selected, are provided with very specific targeting instructions, and who are generously funded.”
2. The trained amateurs: Terrorists who are “provided with a modicum of basic terrorist training... given open-ended targeting instructions.”
3. The local walk-ins: “These are local groups of Islamic radicals who come up with a terrorist attack idea on their own and then attempt to obtain funding from al Qaeda for it.”
4. Like-minded insurgents, guerrillas, and terrorists: “This level embraces existing insurgent or terrorist groups who over the years have benefitted from bin Laden’s largesse and/or spiritual guidance; receiving training in Afghanistan... or have been provided with arms, materiel, and other assistance by the organization.”

This goes back to Munger’s conception of an institution, because we are indeed making a judgement at the institutional level: “given our world view and moral beliefs, yes, terrorists are irrational, and even evil. But within the given and fixed, institutional setting in which they operate, terrorist militias are rational, optimizing responses to the incentives expectations, and constraints created by those institutions.”¹⁰⁶ Though the likelihood that fiction will take the time to outline the structure or terrorists organizations to this degree of detail is low—as the focus would probably be on personal experience and emotional drive—it will be interesting to see how the novels capture the recruitment process if it is mentioned at all.

¹⁰⁴ Hoffman, “Rethinking Terrorism and Counterterrorism Since 9/11,” 308.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., 308-310.

¹⁰⁶ Munger, “Preference modification vs. incentive manipulation,” 142.

MOVING FORWARD

It is essential to point out that just because the aforementioned conventional wisdoms were challenged on their false premises does not mean that the elements they cite as being root causes of terrorism—poverty, lack of education, religiosity, support for Islamist parties, living in a non-democratic regime, and so on—do not in any way factor into someone choosing the path of terrorism. The argument presented in this chapter is not to render these misperceptions completely untrue or inaccurate, but to point out that these factors do not singularly and directly lead someone to become a terrorist. As Newman points out, “the vast majority of the millions of people who suffer from these grievances do not become terrorists. Most societies where these root causes exist do not give rise to terrorism.”¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁷ Newman, “Exploring the “Root Causes”,” 756.

CHAPTER 2: METHODOLOGY

To understand the comparisons and contrasts between the narrative of terrorism in academia and in fiction, I will be using a textual analysis methodology to qualitatively examine these novels. The structure and approach of this methodology is modeled on Robert Appelbaum's and Alexis Paknadel's typology for comparing terrorism novels as published in their paper, "Terrorism and the Novel, 1970-2001." Out of a bibliography of over one thousand (1,000) works, Appelbaum and Paknadel used a sample of twenty-five (25) terrorism novels published between 1970 and 2001 for comparative analysis. Their aim for this investigation was to find recurring trends and themes within the literary canon on terrorism fiction. Although I am similarly looking for common trends and themes in these novels, I will be linking them back to the academic discussions on terrorism in order to see how their narratives compare. Thus, for the purposes of my thesis, I will have a different sample size and scope.

While Appelbaum and Paknadel exclude post 9/11 novels from their sample, I believe that it is crucial to examine the treatment of terrorism in texts following 9/11, as it was an incredibly impactful event that morphed and reshaped the concept of "terrorism" into the fixed and inelastic abstraction that society presently holds. In his paper, "Constructing Enemies: 'Islamic Terrorism' in Political and Academic Discourse," Richard Jackson asserts:

"One of the most important consequences of the 11 September 2001 attacks was... [that] terrorism emerged as arguably the single most important security issue... At the same time, the terrorism discourse—the terms, assumptions, labels, categories and narratives used to describe and explain terrorism—has emerged as one of the most important political discourses of the modern era... As a term of elite and popular discourse, terrorism has come to possess clearly observable ideographic qualities.

That is, like ‘freedom,’ ‘democracy,’ and ‘justice,’ ‘terrorism now functions as a primary term for the central narratives of the culture, employed in political debate and daily conversation, but largely unquestioned in its meaning and usage.’¹⁰⁸

In other words, the current terrorism discourse is derived from the theories, information, and perceptions of terrorism studies, which “[grew] tremendously and gained genuine authority” since the 9/11 attacks.¹⁰⁹ Therefore, my sample of five terrorism novels will consist of two novels published before September 2001 and three novels published after September 2001.

In order to select five novels from the large sample of terrorism novels, I collected syllabi from academic courses that covered Terrorism and Fiction, looked at the novels that were included in these syllabi, and picked the three most popular novels from each period. In addition to reviewing the novels listed in academic syllabi, I surveyed eight academics whose expertise and specialities lay in terrorism and/or literature, and asked them to name the three best pre-9/11 terrorism novels and three best post-9/11 novels.

Through this collection process, I came up with this short list of novels:

| Period | <i>Title, Author (Year)</i> |
|---------------|---|
| Pre-9/11 | <i>The Secret Agent</i> , Joseph Conrad (1907) |
| | <i>Mao II</i> , Don DeLillo (1991) |
| Post-9/11 | <i>Saturday</i> , Ian McEwan (2005) |
| | <i>The Terrorist</i> , John Updike (2006) |
| | <i>The Reluctant Fundamentalist</i> , Moshin Hamid (2007) |

¹⁰⁸ Richard Jackson. “Constructing Enemies: ‘Islamic Terrorism’ in Political and Academic Discourse.” 394.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., 398.

I acknowledge that in asking academic experts and consulting academic syllabi to determine the “best” novels on terrorism to read, this can mean that this selection of novels is more curated than if I were to pick novels based on other parameters, such as the number of copies sold. Due to the nature of this selection process, these novels—in comparison to the ones not recommended by these academic sources, are likely to present better (more accurate, more nuanced, more understanding) depictions of terrorists and terrorism than other fictionalized accounts of terrorism. However, even with this caveat, it is still valuable to analyze this selection of novels in order to see how they compare to both the media accounts of terrorism and discussions of terrorism in the academic sphere. It will be interesting to see what aspects of these fiction novels make them appealing to academics to the point where they not only read them, but assign them for class so that their students might glean a valuable perspective that will make them understand terrorism more completely.

I created a qualitative textual analysis rubric with which to evaluate each text for its characterization of terrorists. I used Appelbaum and Paknadel’s typology as a starting point for my rubric. For their typology, they had the following categories:

1. Date / Author / Title, Genre, Register
2. Protagonist(s) / Focalizer(s)
3. Climactic Action
4. Terrorist Incident(s)
5. Identity of Terrorist(s)
6. Identity of Target(s)
7. Motives/Methods/Objectives of Terrorist(s)
8. Location

While I have incorporated these categories into my rubric, I expanded it further to focus in on the rhetorical mechanisms and techniques that these novel are using. Although

Appelbaum and Paknadel's rubric effectively captured the data they needed to support their respective arguments, these eight categories are insufficient to distill, analyze, and evaluate the elements of the novels I will be investigating. More than identifying the conflict, the actors involved, and the perspective in which its relayed, I wanted to investigate how the delivery (the language, the tone, the diction) shapes these elements and manipulates the overall depiction of terrorism. While their rubric paints an accurate, clear picture of *what* narrative conveys, I believe that it is just as important to understand *how* the narrative is being delivered. For each novel, after outlining a brief synopsis/summary and explaining the historical context of the terrorist event that the novel is based on, the structure of my analysis for each novel will be as follows:

1. Historical Context
2. Misconceptions
 - a. Characterization of the Terrorist
 - b. Objectives and Motivations
3. Challenging Misconceptions
 - a. Characterization of the Terrorist
 - b. Individual / Personal Motivations
4. Radicalization and Recruitment
 - a. Mechanisms of Radicalization
 - b. Recruitment Process
5. Takeaways

The "Characterization" category will examine the identity of the individual who engages in terrorist behavior: physical identity (physical appearance, age, nationality, ethnicity), social status (class, occupation, reputation), and relationships (family, friends, workplace). The "Setting" category will examine the kind of environment and society the terrorist operates in: location, time, as well as political and cultural context will be considered. The "Motivation" category will examine the terrorist's individual reasons for engaging in terrorist activity, be it his/her opinions, views and stances on religion,

politics, nationality, etc. as well as the experiences that shape these views. The “Mechanisms of Radicalization” category will investigate the process by which the individual is radicalized. This process can be noted by drastic shifts in the individual’s perspective (encounters to do with othering, isolation, or violence), but can also be gradual developments that are exacerbated by events. The “Recruitment Process” category will bring attention to what the individual’s process of recruitment is like. The final “Takeaways” category will link the novel back to the role of the novelist to reintroduce humanity to these terrorist characters, pushing readers to rethink their relationship to them despite their horrendous actions.

CHAPTER 3: *The Secret Agent*

Joseph Conrad's *The Secret Agent* relays the story of Mr. Verloc, an agent provocateur set with the task of bombing the Greenwich Observatory in London. This task was ordered by Mr. Vladimir, a Russian diplomat, who is exasperated at the London police for refusing to arrest the anarchists. Mr. Verloc recruited his brother-in-law, Stevie, to help him carry out the job. However, Stevie is mentally challenged, and accidentally trips, detonating the bomb and killing himself in the process. Inspector Heat finds an address sown into the blown up coat he had found on site, and realizes that it's Mr Verloc's address. Inspector Heat visits Mr. Verloc's home and tells Mrs. Verloc, Winnie, that her brother has died in the explosion. When Mr. Verloc returns home, he tries to apologize to her, and then blames her for Stevie's death, for pushing the boy onto him, and for leading the police straight to them by sewing the address into Stevie's coat. In a fit of rage, Winnie stabs Mr. Verloc and kills him. The novel ends with Winnie attempting to leave the country, but when one of Mr. Verloc's friends thwarts her plans, she commits suicide by jumping off a boat.

I HISTORICAL CONTEXT

The Secret Agent, rather than referencing real terrorist attacks, was based on the real incident of a bomb explosion in Greenwich Park on February 15, 1894.¹¹⁰ Though it is not officially confirmed that the Observatory was the target, the man carrying the explosives, Martial Bourdin, was an anarchist carrying chemical explosives that most

¹¹⁰ Rebekah Higgitt, "The real story of the Secret Agent and the Greenwich Observatory bombing." *The Guardian*. August 5, 2016.

likely detonated prematurely.¹¹¹ Apparently, Bourdin was not only carrying the explosives when he left his lodging in Fitzroy street, but was also carrying a large sum of money, which suggests that he had the intention of escaping.¹¹²

II MISCONCEPTIONS

Characterization of the Terrorist

Initially, when the story begins, Conrad plays into the archetype of the terrorist who is involved in criminal activity, is secluded from the rest of society, and operates in the shadows. Mr. Verloc is businessman who sells bric-a-brac and contraceptives, but also sells pornographic material. However, the fact that Mr. Verloc lives with his wife, her mother, and her younger brother, all of whom are aware of his trade, makes him more unusual and strange than sinister. Conrad presents Mr. Verloc as eccentric, but multifaceted, as the narrator comprises Mr. Verloc's life of selling his "shady wares, [exercising] his vocation of a protector of society, and [cultivating] his domestic virtues."¹¹³ This matter-of-fact, casual tone indicates to the reader that Mr. Verloc is not our villain, but our protagonist.

Mr. Verloc is assigned to bomb the Greenwich Observatory by Mr. Vladimir, the new First Secretary in the embassy of what is assumed to be The Soviet Union. Mr. Vladimir addresses Mr. Verloc using a patronizing and condescending tone: he assumes Mr. Verloc to be incompetent. When conversing about how Mr. Verloc "began [his] connection with [them] by stealing the French gun designs" and got himself caught, Mr. Vladimir tells him that he "[doesn't] seem to be very smart," and that he "wouldn't

¹¹¹ Higgitt, "The real story of the Secret Agent," *The Guardian*.

¹¹² Ibid.

¹¹³ Conrad, *The Secret Agent*, 5.

deceive an idiot.”¹¹⁴ This links back to Bloom’s argument that terrorist organizations recruit “uneducated and underachieving” individuals.¹¹⁵ When Mr. Vladimir asks Mr. Verloc what he “[gets] out of a condition like this,” Mr. Vladimir points out that he “[hasn’t] got even the physique of [his] profession.”

As the novel goes on, it becomes apparent that Mr. Verloc is not as incompetent as his superior assumes him to be, and his complexity and nuance is revealed to us as he plots to bomb the Observatory and as he interacts with the members of his family. However, Conrad does present the readers with a terrorist character who is completely one-dimensional and projects several of the conventional wisdoms discussed in Chapter 1. He is ironically referred to as “the Professor,” and he is the one who constructs the bomb that Stevie carries to destroy the Greenwich Observatory.

“His imagination had been fired early by the tales of men rising from the depths of poverty to positions of authority and affluence. The extreme, almost ascetic purity of his thought, combined with an astounding ignorance of worldly conditions, had set before him a goal of power and prestige to be attained without the medium of arts, graces, tact and wealth—by the sheer weight of merit alone. The way of even the most justifiable revolutions is prepared by personal impulses disguised into creeds. The Professor’s indignation found in itself a final cause that absolved him from the sin of turning to destruction as the agent of his ambition. To destroy public faith in legality was the imperfect formula of his pedantic fanaticism; but the subconscious conviction that the framework of an established social order cannot be effectually shattered except by some form of collective or individual violence was precise and correct.”¹¹⁶

In this passage, Conrad injects so much diction relating to the distorted terrorism discourse and the misperceptions it is based on: “poverty,” “ignorance,” “impulses,” “destruction,” “fanaticism,” and “violence.” Unlike Mr. Verloc, who engages in acts of

¹¹⁴ Conrad, *The Secret Agent*, 17.

¹¹⁵ Bloom, “Constructing Expertise: Terrorism Recruitment,” 604.

¹¹⁶ Conrad, *The Secret Agent*, 64-65.

terrorism as part of his job in order to earn income to support his family, the Professor seeks to take revenge and “shatter” the “framework of an established social order” to address his “indignation” deriving from his low socioeconomic status. As the conventional wisdom relating to poverty assumes, the Professor turned to terrorism in response to his frustration with his place in the socioeconomic order, and hoped to gain “authority and affluence” by engaging in terrorism.¹¹⁷ Furthermore, diction like “extreme,” “purity,” “creed,” “sin” and “faith” give the Professor’s motivations a religious undertone, which plays into the conventional wisdom that there is a correlation between religiosity and violence. On top of it all, to mention all these motivations and then say that he also had an “astounding ignorance of worldly conditions,” diluting his justifications even further and rendering him incompetent and undereducated. By the time the readers get to the end of this passage where the narrator explains that destruction has become his “agent of ambition” and that violence is the best way to “destroy public faith in legality,” we have already characterized the Professor as irrational, dangerous, and mislead. Conrad feeds the readers a vindictive, power-hungry and ignorant terrorist to serve as a foil to Mr. Verloc. Compared to the Professor, Mr. Verloc is less nihilistic and menacing.

Another character in the novel who serves as a parallel to Mr. Verloc is Stevie, his brother-in-law that he recruits to help him carry out the mission. While the Professor embodies the conventional wisdoms relating to religiosity, poverty, and lack of education, Stevie embodies the misperception that individuals who are mentally ill are more likely to become terrorists. Winnie, Mr. Verloc’s wife, believes that her “delicate

¹¹⁷ Shapiro and Fair. “Understanding Support for Islamist Militancy in Pakistan,” 81.

brother” or “the poor boy was pretty safe in this rough world” under the tutelage of Mr. Verloc.¹¹⁸ Although the novel does not explicitly state that Stevie has a mental illness, it is apparent in the way he interacts with his family that he has some sort of condition. With that, it is intriguing that Conrad writes him to then be the one to handle the bomb, and then to make a mistake and end up killing himself.

Objective / Motivations

The motivation for the bombing of the Greenwich Observatory is voiced by Mr. Vladimir. He explains to Mr. Verloc that he is “not very satisfied with the attitude of the police here,” and that the bombing should stimulate “the vigilance of the police” and “the severity of the magistrates,” as “the general leniency of the judicial procedure here, and the utter absence of all repressive measures, are a scandal to Europe.”¹¹⁹ In other words, Mr. Vladimir wants the police to be more effective and punitive in fighting the anarchists. He goes on to say that the bombing will serve as “the accentuation of the unrest—of the fermentation which undoubtedly exists” in English society.”¹²⁰ He comments on what he wants the international impact of the attack to look like:

“What we want is to administer a tonic to the Conference in Milan. Its deliberations upon international action for the suppression of political crime don’t seem to get anywhere. England lags. This country is absurd with its sentimental regard for individual liberty... England must be brought into line. The imbecile bourgeoisie of this country make themselves the accomplices of the very people whose aim is to drive them out of their houses to starve in ditches. And they have the political power still, if they only had the sense to use it for their preservation. I suppose you agree that the middle classes are stupid?”¹²¹

¹¹⁸ Conrad, *The Secret Agent*, 7.

¹¹⁹ Conrad, *The Secret Agent*, 14.

¹²⁰ Ibid.

¹²¹ Ibid., 24.

Again, because Mr. Verloc is technically part of the counter-terrorist force committing a terror attack in order to pressure the police force into taking a more aggressive stand against the anarchists, the objectives of his mission are necessarily based on a more political than personal stance. As Martha Crenshaw points, terrorism can serve “to disrupt and discredit the processes of government” by aiming at the “insecurity and demoralization of government officials.”¹²² As Mr. Verloc explains in the passage above, the bombing of the Greenwich Observatory is meant to put England in line and pressure them into taking action against those who seek to destroy the regime.

III CHALLENGING MISCONCEPTIONS

Characterization of the Terrorist

One of Conrad’s most interesting authorial choices in this novel is that Mr. Verloc is *not* the terrorist in this situation, even if he is the one assigned with committing an act of terrorism. He infiltrates anarchist ranks in order gather intelligence and build a network, but the bombing is for the purpose of emboldening the police to crack down on the anarchists themselves. Embedded in this inversion is some strong commentary on how governments themselves use acts of terrorism, though they are not labelled as the terrorists. The narrator explicitly highlights this discrepancy in judgement and rhetoric: “The terrorist and the policeman both come from the same basket. Revolution, legality—counter moves in the same game; forms of idleness at bottom identical.”¹²³

Even if Conrad paints Mr. Verloc in a dubious light, as captured by his low class, his business, and his isolation, he also strips Mr. Verloc’s occupation from the political,

¹²² Martha Crenshaw, “*Causes of Terrorism*,” 386-387.

¹²³ Conrad, *The Secret Agent*, 56.

religious, or terror agenda associated with it. Instead of characterizing Mr. Verloc as a cold-blooded terrorist, he is depicted as someone who performs the job solely for the income and security, and is actually quite indifferent to the political objectives:

“His idleness was not hygienic, but it suited him very well. He was in a manner devoted to it with a sort of inert fanaticism, or perhaps rather with a fanatical inertness... He was too lazy even for a mere demagogue, for a workman orator, for a leader of labour. It was too much trouble. He required a more perfect form of ease; or it might have been that he was the victim of a philosophical unbelief in the effectiveness of every human effort... His general get-up was that of a well-to-do mechanic in business for himself... But there was also about him an indescribable air which no mechanic could have acquired in the practice of his handicraft however dishonestly exercised: the air common to men who live on the vices, the follies, or the baser fears of mankind; the air of moral nihilism common to keepers of gambling hells and disorderly houses; to private detectives and inquiry agents; to drink sellers and, should I say, to the sellers of invigorating electric belts and to the inventors of patent medicines.”¹²⁴

The academic theory posits that individuals partake in terrorism because they believe that violence is the alternative they can pursue to resolve their grievance and loss or achieve their personal/political/religious objective. In other words, terrorism gives these individuals agency and purpose, an opportunity to take the solution in their own hands and—provided with the resources, network, and organization—act on their beliefs. However, Mr. Verloc is far from the determined, active, zealot we assume terrorists to be. In the excerpt above, the narrator highlights his “idleness” and “fanatical inertness.” Going against the conventional wisdom, Mr. Verloc’s participation in terrorism has nothing to do with a political agenda or ideology, be it a “demagogue,” a “workman orator,” or a “leader of labour.” Instead of feeling like he had the power to shape policy and influence people through his actions, he is characterized as “the victim of a

¹²⁴ Conrad, *The Secret Agent*, 10-11.

philosophical unbelief in the effectiveness of human effort.” This outlook seems to be antithetical to be driving an individual to become a terrorist.

Individual / Personal Motivations

Mr. Verloc’s lack of ideological or personal stakes in the violent act he is involved in prevents the readers from immediately forming an either positive or negative view of him. The fact that he “did not trouble” with the labels of anarchist or socialist or proletariat is because his mission in life is simply “the protection of the social mechanism, not its perfectionment or even its criticism.”¹²⁵ Perhaps what Conrad is arguing is that even if Mr. Verloc operates within the anarchists’ ranks, he is still part of the counterterrorist force, and thus does not have the same resolve or intense drive to fight and inflict violence as terrorists do.

IV RADICALIZATION AND RECRUITMENT

Mechanisms of Radicalization

The Secret Agent only touches on Mr. Verloc’s past in conversation, hinting that Mr. Verloc was in the military prior to becoming a secret agent, and currently is a spy working for a foreign government. But what Conrad puts significant emphasis on is Mr. Verloc’s relationship with his wife, Winnie, and by extension, with her brother, Stevie. This focus provides ample evidence to show not Mr. Verloc’s radicalization, but Stevie’s. The strong familial ties of the Verloc family points to “The Power of Love” mechanism that McCauley and Moskalenko discuss as one of the paths to individual radicalization.

¹²⁵ Conrad, *The Secret Agent*, 12.

According to them, the love that comes with familial ties is integral to an impenetrable organization structure, for though “trust may determine the network within which radicals and terrorists recruit,” it is love that “often determines who will join.”¹²⁶ After Inspector Heat breaks the news to Winnie that Stevie has died in the bombing attempt, Mr. Verloc reflects on Stevie’s character:

“Mr Verloc never meant Stevie to perish with such abrupt violence. He did not mean him to perish at all. Stevie dead was a much greater nuisance than ever he had been when alive. Mr Verloc had argued a favourable issue to his enterprise, basing himself not on Stevie’s intelligence, which sometimes plays queer tricks with a man, but on the blind docility and on the blind devotion of the boy. Though not much of a psychologist, Mr Verloc had gauged the depth of Stevie’s fanaticism.”¹²⁷

The important takeaway from this excerpt is that Stevie’s “docility,” “devotion,” and “fanaticism” was not geared towards a larger political or religious goal, but was a manifestation of the love, affection, and loyalty he felt towards his family. Even though Mr. Verloc then refers to him as a “nuisance” or an accident that now had to be covered up, he still acknowledged that allegiance to him was unbreakable, and is the reason Mr. Verloc feels remorseful and accountable for his death.

Recruitment Process

Again, there is not much detail given to Mr. Verloc’s recruitment process as a secret agent. The only indication we get of his past is that he had “done his military service in the French artillery.”¹²⁸ In contrast, Stevie did not receive any formal training or education on the matter, which is a divergence from the academic literature on terrorist recruitment, given the nature of the task Stevie was given. Towards the end of *The Secret*

¹²⁶ McCauley and Moskalenko, “Mechanisms of Political Radicalization,” 421.

¹²⁷ Conrad, *The Secret Agent*, 182.

¹²⁸ Conrad, *The Secret Agent*, 16.

Agent, the narrator discusses that Stevie was recruited informally by taking strolls with

Mr. Verloc:

“He had foreseen Stevie arrested, and was not afraid, because Mr Verloc had a great opinion of Stevie’s loyalty, which had been carefully indoctrinated with the necessity of silence in the course of many walks. Like a peripatetic philosopher, Mr Verloc, strolling along the streets of London, had modified Stevie’s view of the police by conversations full of subtle reasonings. Never had a sage a more attentive and admiring disciple. The submission and worship were so apparent that Mr Verloc had come to feel something like a liking for the boy.”¹²⁹

The intriguing thing about this passage is that it does not read like a methodical, vigilant, rigorous procedure. It reads more like a father figure and a young adolescent spending quality time together. As McCauley and Moskalenko put it, “after an individual joins a radical group, love for friends and comrades in the group is likely to increase further as common goals and common threats increase group cohesion.”¹³⁰ In literary terms, Mr. Verloc serves as Stevie’s mentor, and the mentor role is a common trope in fiction. Instead of illustrating recruitment as a process, Conrad highlights the importance of relationships in terrorist organizations, which—though this theme is an undercurrent in academic theories—is absent from the news and media. Given that these two men are the terrorists, they could have easily been painted as the antagonist and his henchman. But Conrad does away with that perspective and paints Mr Verloc as the “sage” and the “philosopher,” while Stevie is the “[loyal],” “attentive,” “admiring” disciple. The injection of affection and care into this relationship between the current member and the trainee, Conrad achieves the dual purpose of a) humanizing them and b) showcasing that

¹²⁹ Conrad, *The Secret Agent*, 182.

¹³⁰ McCauley and Moskalenko, “Mechanisms of Political Radicalization,” 421.

individuals choose to partake in terrorism for reasons other than—or in addition to—revenge, sadism, and fanaticism.

This excerpt highlights the idea that instead of a step-by-step process, indoctrination and recruitment can happen fluidly and simultaneously. And especially in having a member-recruit relationship connected through emotional, personal ties, the recruitment reinforces and strengthens a sense of belonging.

TAKEAWAYS

What *The Secret Agent* highlights about terrorism that is absent from explanations is the role of personal relationships and their importance in terrorism. Conrad turns the people we have perceived as vicious monsters and killing machines by removing their tough exterior and showing them care for one another. *The Secret Agent* sheds light on the side of the binary that is not prominent in academic text; yes, terrorist organizations need recruits, but recruits join organizations for more than the cause. They join these groups because they need a community, a support system who will welcome them, keep them safe, and give them a sense of belonging. When individuals have been ostracized and discriminated against, they can be pushed to engaging in terrorist activity if it means that they get to be a part of a greater community who values and understands them.

CHAPTER 4: *Mao II*

Don DeLillo's *Mao II* is distinct from the other novels in the sense that it weaves multiple stories into one narrative. In relation to the theme of terrorism, there are two stories that are strung together. The first string follows the central protagonist, Bill Gray, an author living a reclusive life, struggling to finish the novel he is currently working on. Gray secretly agrees to a request of his former editor, Charles, to travel to London to speak on behalf of a Swiss writer being held hostage in Beirut. When Charles and Gray meet at a cafe in London, a bomb detonates and destroys the cafe, though Charles and Gray make it out alive. They are taken to safety, and then Gray is introduced to George Haddad, a representative of the Maoist group who kidnapped the writer. Gray decides to go to Lebanon himself and negotiate the release of the hostage, and leaves for Beirut behind Charles' back. While at a stopover in Cyprus, waiting for a ship to take him to Lebanon, Bill is hit by a car and suffers a lacerated liver, which kills him in his sleep while en route to Beirut.

The second string of the story is from the perspective of the Swiss writer that Gray planned to speak on behalf of, and shares his experiences in captivity. *Mao II* is sprinkled with small snippets of him interacting with his captor. While Gray and the Swiss writer are connected via the fact that they are both writers, they never meet each other. But, the two strings are directly weaved together by another character, Brita, a photojournalist. In the first string of the story, Brita photographs Bill in his home and talks to him about writing and the political dimensions of his stories. In the second string of the story, Brita travels to Beirut to photograph Abu Rashid, the leader of the terrorist organization responsible for the kidnapping of the Swiss poet.

I HISTORICAL CONTEXT

The circumstances upon which *Mao II* is centered are based upon the Lebanon Hostage Crisis, the decade (1982 to 1992) in which the Iranian-backed terrorist group, Hezbollah, systematically abducted foreign nationals in Lebanon.¹³¹ Of all the kidnappings, 96 of the captives were Westerners who were involved in the foreign forces in Lebanon, particularly Americans who were part of the peacekeeping operation.¹³² On June 14, 1985, a Trans World Airlines flight en route from Rome to Athens was seized by Hezbollah terrorists and diverted to Beirut.¹³³ By June 17, the 40 remaining hostages were extracted from the plane and held hostage throughout Beirut by Hezbollah.¹³⁴ The hostage crisis lasted for 17 days, and the terrorist organization had a list of demands, including the release of those involved in the 1983 bombing of the U.S. Embassy in Beirut.¹³⁵ Other than the Flight 847 passengers, American nationals included Dean of Agriculture at the American University of Beirut, Thomas Sutherland; Director of the American University Hospital, David Jacobsen; Chief Middle East correspondent for the Associated Press, Terry Anderson; Roman Catholic priest Rev. Lawrence Martin Jenco; American University librarian Peter Kilburn; Presbyterian minister Rev. Benjamin Weir;

¹³¹ Josie Ensor. "Terry Waite and Hizbollah: the making of the 'Party of God'," *The Telegraph*. December 9, 2012. <<https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/middleeast/lebanon/9732079/Terry-Waite-and-Hizbollah-the-making-of-the-Party-of-God.html>>.

¹³² Ensor, "Terry Waite and Hizbollah: the making of the 'Party of God'," December 9, 2012.

¹³³ Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training (ADST). "Terror in the Sky — Hezbollah Seizes TWA Flight 847." *Huffpost*. <https://www.huffingtonpost.com/adst/terror-in-the-sky---hezb_b_9214302.html>.

¹³⁴ ADST. "Terror in the Sky — Hezbollah Seizes TWA Flight 847." *Huffpost*.

¹³⁵ *Ibid*.

and Political Officer at the American Embassy, William Buckley.¹³⁶ By June 17, 1991, all the hostages were released.¹³⁷

II MISCONCEPTIONS

Characterization of the Terrorist

The misconceptions in this novel house themselves in the first string of the narrative, or the parts of the novel that are centered around Bill Gray, the novelist. When Gray arrives in London, he meets his former editor, Charles, at a cafe. Charles explains that “there’s a young man held hostage in Beirut. He’s Swiss, a UN worker who was doing research on health care in Palestinian camps. He’s also a poet... We know next to nothing about the group that has him. The hostage is the only proof they exist.”¹³⁸ Previous to this conversation, terrorists were only spoken about in general terms, in the broader context of the war on terror. But the first detail we get about terrorist actors in this novel is that the non-terrorist characters “know next to nothing” about them. With no indication of the group’s motivations or justifications, this omission of characterization primes the readers to fall into the trap of conceptualizing them as the crazy extremists committing indiscriminate acts of violence for fear and revenge, and nothing else.¹³⁹ The hostage is the only element to base their characterization on, which results in these

¹³⁶ The New York Times Archives. “Hostages in Lebanon; Other Americans Held in Lebanon.” *The New York Times*. 1985. <<https://www.nytimes.com/1985/06/20/world/hostages-in-lebanon-other-americans-held-in-lebanon.html>>.

¹³⁷ Al Jazeera. “Timeline: Lebanon - A Chronology of key events in Lebanese History.” *Al Jazeera*. June 4, 2009. <<https://www.aljazeera.com/focus/lebanon2009/2009/06/200961145224882101.html>>.

¹³⁸ Don DeLillo, *Mao II*. 1991, Penguin Books Ltd. New York, U.S.A.

¹³⁹ Kydd and Walter, “The Strategies of Terrorism,” 52.

terrorists being immediately alienated and dehumanized as they are branded the evil villain, and their hostage the victim.

Objectives and Motivations

Within the same conversation in the cafe, Charles explains to Gray that the terrorist organization had received word that they were hosting an event on behalf of the hostage, and that he had been “receiving phone calls. Anonymous... bomb threats.”¹⁴⁰ Gray dismisses Charles’ concern for their safety, claiming that “people who make phone calls don’t set off bombs. The real terrorists make their calls after the damage is done. If at all.”¹⁴¹ Due to their anonymity and elusive identification, Gray dismisses their threat on the grounds of superiority and is complacent about his belief that nothing will happen because he thinks it uncharacteristic for a terrorist to notify someone that they are acting before they do so. This exchange between Charles and Gray shows how the lack of understanding about terrorist motivations and actions can lead to dehumanization that leads to considering the terrorists as evil, mysterious monsters (as Charles does) or as incompetent, inferior people (as Gray does).

Shortly after this exchange, the cafe indeed explodes. The blast made “[Gray] jerk half around but he didn’t leave his feet or go back against the wall. He felt the sound in his chest and arms. He jerked and ducked, shielding his head with his forearm, windows blowing out... The street was filled with glass, snowblinking.”¹⁴² Not only is Gray’s complacency undermined, but Charles’ anxieties are realized. Again, there are no faces,

¹⁴⁰ DeLillo, *Mao II*, 121.

¹⁴¹ DeLillo, *Mao II*, 122.

¹⁴² DeLillo, *Mao II*, 125.

bodies, or reasons attached to this attack, and all the readers have to judge the terrorists is this visual imagery of the explosion. When the bomb explodes in the cafe, Gray and Charlie come out of it dazed, but unharmed. Charles argues that “the bomb was the culmination. They made their point even if we don’t know exactly what it is.”¹⁴³ In depicting them as this unknown, omniscient force, DeLillo brands these terrorists as an all-powerful, all knowing, evil entity, instead of an organized group of human beings acting with a political agenda.

III CHALLENGING MISCONCEPTIONS

Characterization of Terrorist

The very conventional wisdoms that are conveyed in Bill Gray’s narrative are challenged by the second string focused on the Swiss hostage. The terrorist character in these scenes is juxtaposed against the anonymous force in the London bombing scenes. Through these dual narratives, DeLillo showcases the dichotomies between the foreign and the familiar, the private and the public, as well as highlights the relationship between action and intention. When the terrorist character enters the novel, he is referred to as a “boy.” Instead of the professional adult portrayed in *The Secret Agent* or *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*, *Mao II* portrays the terrorist as a child. The torture the boys inflict on the captive is explicit in its visual imagery:

“The boy tortured him sometimes. Knocked him down, told him to stand. Knocked him down, told him to stand. The boy tried to pull his teeth out of his mouth with his bare hands. The pain extended long past the boy’s departure from the room... The boy had him lie on his back with legs bent up and he beat the bottom of the prisoner’s feet with a reinforcing rod. The

¹⁴³ DeLillo, *Mao II*, 128.

pain made it hard for him to sleep and this stretched and deepened time, gave it a consciousness, a quality of ingenious and pervasive presence.”¹⁴⁴

The child enacting these horrible means of torture upon this innocent writer creates a disconnect, as the readers have difficulty reconciling the innocence associated with childhood with the ruthless violence of terrorism. To repeat the word “boy” several times in this excerpt, and have it associated with violent phrases like “knocked him down,” “pull his teeth,” and “beat” with a “rod,” DeLillo paints a very different picture of a terrorist than what is portrayed in the press and media. Later on, the boy’s physical appearance is mentioned. Because the boy is wearing a hood himself, the narrator can make no comments on the boy’s age or ethnic features, and only mentions that the boy “wore a dark T-shirt under the top part of someone’s jogging suit and almost always had fatigue pants and ratty striped sneakers.”¹⁴⁵ Again, DeLillo removes identity from the picture when forming the image of his terrorist, and instead puts him in common clothes that everyone can picture. Though subtle, the tool of using material things to create familiarity (and ultimately, sympathy) is powerful in its impersonality.

Individual / Personal Motivations

Unlike the other novels examined in this thesis, the boy has absolutely no dialogue, and all of his actions are rendered through the perspective of the victim. The readers get no entry into his thoughts or motivations, and we are left to infer for ourselves what his intentions are. DeLillo further characterizes this child terrorist by showcasing that instead of being someone who is strategic and deliberate and cautious, he is rather

¹⁴⁴ DeLillo, *Mao II*, 108-109.

¹⁴⁵ DeLillo, *Mao II*, 202.

random and forgetful. For instance, the captive—who is the narrator for these scenes—observes that the boy sometimes forgets to put the captive’s hood back on after meal times and forgets meals altogether.¹⁴⁶ He describes the boy as “the bearer of randomness.”¹⁴⁷ The haphazard behavior of the boy seems to go against Hoffman’s argument that terrorism “has always been and will always be instrumental: planned, purposeful and premeditated.”¹⁴⁸ However, this divergence is not created by depicting the terrorist as an individual who is incompetent, reckless, or mentally ill. The inconsistency of the boy does not lead the readers to believe that he is inferior to them. Rather, his inconsistency humanizes him, and conveys that although the violence he is inflicting on the captive is indeed “planned, purposeful, and premeditated,” he is not a killing machine who is absent of morality and humanity. At one point, the Swiss writer mentions that “there were times when the boy pretended to leave the room but remained to watch him.”¹⁴⁹ While it might be a little of a stretch to say that the boy cared for the hostage, this shows that the boy was at least intrigued, contemplative, or curious. The Swiss writer even mentions that he “identified with the boy,” and “saw himself as someone who might become the boy through the effortless measure of the mind thinking back.”¹⁵⁰ Even the captive himself recognized that the boy was operating under a logic that he understood as not being very far off from his own. Perhaps the hostage sees what Munger argues, in that the culture of an organization is a “conditioning force” on behavior, and provides an

¹⁴⁶ DeLillo, *Mao II*, 110.

¹⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁸ Hoffman, “Rethinking Terrorism and Counterterrorism Since 9/11,” 313.

¹⁴⁹ DeLillo, *Mao II*, 204.

¹⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 203.

explanation for terrorist acts that are deemed as “irrational.”¹⁵¹ Through the hostage, the reader understands that the boy has been conditioned to inflict violence, and that even though it seems as if he’s operating independently, there is an understanding that he is absent of choice.

Though the boy torturing the hostage juxtaposes the unknown voice responsible for the bombing of the cafe, the challenges to conventional wisdoms are not only found in this second string of narrative. After seeking refuge from the explosion in the cafe, Charles introduces Gray to George Haddad, a political scientist and representative of the Maoist group who kidnapped the Swiss writer. In his conversation with Charles and George, Gray asks if the group is “a new fundamentalist element.”¹⁵² Essentially, Gray is assuming that the organization operating in Beirut is comprised of religious extremists. However, George—and by extension, Don DeLillo—pivots from this assumption and informs Gray that “they’re a new communist element.”¹⁵³ He explains that the “unit that took the poet is one element in a movement. Barely a movement actually. It’s just an underground current at this stage, an assertion that not every weapon in Lebanon has to be marked Muslim, Christian, or Zionist.”¹⁵⁴

George goes on to outline that “there are leftist elements” of the Lebanese Communist Party that are “aligned with Syria,” and that “the PLO has always had a Marxist component and they’re active again in Lebanon.”¹⁵⁵ First, by aligning the anonymous group with the Communist ideology instead of religion, DeLillo unhinges the

¹⁵¹ Munger, “Preference modification vs. incentive manipulation,” 144.

¹⁵² *Ibid.*, 123.

¹⁵³ DeLillo, *Mao II*, 123.

¹⁵⁴ DeLillo, *Mao II*, 129.

¹⁵⁵ DeLillo, *Mao II*, 124.

reader from the assumption that violence is linked to religiosity, and instead puts a political objective at the forefront.¹⁵⁶ And second, by qualifying this group as an “element” and “component” of the larger Communist party, DeLillo challenges the conventional wisdom that the absence of democracy leads to violence by showcasing that not all non-democratic parties are inherently in support of violence and terrorism.¹⁵⁷

Act of Terror

After the bomb attack on the cafe, Gray tells Charles that “[he] didn’t expect an explosion. But the second it happened I stood in the blast and it seemed completely logical. It seemed legitimate and well argued.”¹⁵⁸ Gray goes on to say that “terror is the force that begins with a handful of people in a backroom... Take up the case of the downtrodden, the spat-upon... Order is consistent with permanent revolution.”¹⁵⁹ This acceptance that there is a logic and framework here that cannot be understood except by the terrorists themselves is an idea that pervades both strings of narrative in *Mao II*. It is something that Gray recognizes in the actions of the terrorists who blew up the cafe, and it is something the Swiss hostage acknowledges about the boy who tortures him. As Munger puts it, “the U.S. and its allies are playing one game, and the people we label “terrorists” are playing another.”¹⁶⁰

¹⁵⁶ Jackson, “Constructing Enemies: ‘Islamic Terrorism’,” 417.

¹⁵⁷ Gause III, “Can Democracy Stop Terrorism?” 66.

¹⁵⁸ DeLillo, *Mao II*, 155.

¹⁵⁹ DeLillo, *Mao II*, 158.

¹⁶⁰ Munger, “Preference modification vs. incentive manipulation,” 143.

IV RADICALIZATION AND RECRUITMENT

Mechanisms of Radicalization

It is in this final scene that we also realize that the boy torturing the captive is the son of Abu Rashid, the leader of the terrorist organization. Through the perspective of Brita, the boy is described as “very dark, wearing the picture of his father safety-pinned to his shirt, and his eyes are slightly murderous, this is the only word, but also completely calm and completely aware.”¹⁶¹ Finally, in the reveal of the boy’s identity and affiliation to the organization, the narrator characterizes him as evil and criminal. This reveal harkens back to McCauley and Moskalenko’s fourth individual radicalization mechanism: “The Power of Love.” They state that because a huge part of recruitment involves personal connections with existing terrorists, organizations recruit “from the network of friends, lovers and family” in order to avoid taking someone in who might betray the organization to the authorities.¹⁶² Mia Bloom speaks to the prevalence of “kinship recruitment,” and cites Chechen and Irish Terrorist Organizations, as well as ISIS as examples of groups that recruit family members together in order to fortify the group’s operational secrecy and protect against infiltration.¹⁶³ In reference to the specific case of kinship recruitment presented in *Mao II*, Bloom explains that oftentimes “younger brothers or children of recruits easily step into their siblings’ or father’s shoes,” and this transition helps to secure the longevity of terrorist organizations.¹⁶⁴ This circumstance is

¹⁶¹ DeLillo, *Mao II*, 237.

¹⁶² McCauley and Moskalenko, “Mechanisms of Political Radicalization: Pathways Toward Terrorism,” 421.

¹⁶³ Bloom, “Constructing Expertise: Terrorist Recruitment,” 607.

¹⁶⁴ Bloom, “Constructing Expertise: Terrorist Recruitment,” 608.

similar to that presented in *The Secret Agent*, except it is blood instead of marriage that binds the two terrorists.

Recruitment Process

In the last scene of the novel, before Brita speaks to Abu Rashid, she passes a group of boys in the courtyard sitting down, listening to a man. When Brita asks Abu Rashid what the boys are learning, Abu Rashid, through the mouth of his interpreter, gives her the following explanation:

“We teach them identity, sense of purpose. They are all children of Abu Rashid. All men one man. Every militia in Beirut is filled with hopeless boys taking drugs and drinking and stealing. Car thieves. The shelling ends and they run out to steal car parts. We teach that our children belong to something strong and self-reliant. They are not an invention of Europe. They are not making a race to go to God. We don’t train them for paradise. No martyrs here. The image of Rashid is their identity.”¹⁶⁵

This passage reflects academic theories by conveying how terrorist organizations utilize education as a recruitment tool. Several terrorist organizations use schools as recruitment grounds by transmitting group ideologies, mental and physical training, and indoctrination through the education system.¹⁶⁶ By linking a sense of “identity” with a goal or a “sense of purpose,” DeLillo’s words align with Bloom’s argument that indoctrination and recruitment are not so much separate steps in a linear procedure, but rather an interwoven process that happens organically and simultaneously.¹⁶⁷ It diverges from the common tropes of motivations for why one should participate in terrorism. Stating that the boys “are not an invention of Europe” implies that the leaders of this

¹⁶⁵ Don DeLillo, *Mao II*, 233.

¹⁶⁶ Bloom, “Constructing Expertise: Terrorist Recruitment,” 615.

¹⁶⁷ Bloom, “Constructing Expertise: Terrorist Recruitment,” 615.

group do not rely on anti-Western sentiment to create a narrative of victimization that enrages the boys and in turn antagonizes the enemy. Nor do they preach that participating in violence will help them in their “race to go to God,” which signifies that the leaders do not base their ideology on Islam. It is evident that DeLillo is all too aware of the conventional wisdoms that surround the conversation of what makes up the terrorist profile, and rejects these misperceptions in the voice of a leader of a terrorist organization. Like *The Secret Agent*, *Mao II* highlights that indoctrination and recruitment go hand-in-hand.

What makes this scene so compelling is that it reads like a military commander addressing his platoon, but in actuality, it is a father talking to his son and children his son’s age who have suffered great pain and loss in the Lebanese civil war. As Gause puts it,

“Terrorist organizations are not mass-based organizations. They are small and secretive. They are not organized or based on democratic principles. They revolve around strong leaders and a cluster of committed followers who are willing to take actions from which the vast majority of people, even those who might support their political agenda, would rightly shrink.”¹⁶⁸

This statement harkens back to Munger’s argument on culture, and how this particularly organization fosters a culture that is centered on action, merit and purpose instead of religion, crime and ethnicity. This is the invisible instrument that conditioned the boy to torture the hostage, and this is most likely the same instrument that allowed the terrorists who blew up the cafe to justify their act of violence.

¹⁶⁸ Gause III, “Can Democracy Stop Terrorism?” 68.

TAKEAWAYS

DeLillo artfully weaves two narratives together, with each string conveying a different depiction of terrorism. This juxtaposition of narratives is something that is unique to *Mao II* and effectively demonstrates that there is neither a single terrorist profile nor a single pathway to terrorism. Most importantly, DeLillo does not portray his non-terrorist characters as achieving clarity or complete understanding as to why terrorists act the way they do. Neither Gray nor the Swiss hostage ever get any insight into the motivations behind the terrorists that harmed them, but at the end of the day, they *recognized* that they never would. But instead of casting them aside as irrational, illogical and murderous, the two of them retained a humanize view of their terrorists, acknowledging that though they were operating on a different framework, they were human beings all the same.

CHAPTER 5: *Saturday*

Ian McEwan's novel, *Saturday*, follows a British neurosurgeon, Henry Perowne, as he goes about his Saturday. The novel catalogues his routine and his errands: his early rising due to insomnia, breakfast with his son Theo, a squash game with his American colleague, Jay, grocery shopping for this evening's family dinner, visiting his mother in a mental institution, etc. However, this routine is disrupted when he gets into a car accident and a brawl ensues between him and the passengers of the other car. Though he is able to escape, unbeknownst to Henry, he is followed to his house. The two men invade his home by entering with a knife to his wife's throat. They harm the grandfather and force his daughter to strip naked. Henry calls out the perpetrator's mental condition, lying to him and saying that there is a cure. He lures the perpetrator to his study on the second floor, where he and his son are able to push the perpetrator down the stairs. The story ends with Perowne performing a brain surgery on the very criminal who harmed him, invaded his home, and terrorized his family.

I HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Saturday takes place on February 15, 2003, the day when protesters filled the streets of almost 800 cities across the globe to voice their opposition against the war in Iraq.¹⁶⁹ Specifically, the novel is set in London, United Kingdom, where, according to the police, at least 750,000 people took part in Britain's biggest ever demonstration. Indeed, the organisers of the protest put the figure closer to two million.¹⁷⁰ In fact, this is a line

¹⁶⁹ Phyllis Bennis. "February 15, 2003. The Day the World Said No to War." *Institute for Policy Studies*. February 15, 2013. <http://www.ips-dc.org/february_15_2003_the_day_the_world_said_no_to_war/>.

¹⁷⁰ BBC News. "'Million' march against Iraq War." *BBC News*. February 16, 2003.

straight from the novel regarding the protests: “The police are saying that two hundred and fifty thousand have gathered in central London. Someone for the rally is insisting on two million people by the middle of the afternoon.”¹⁷¹ The demonstration showcased the disapproval of the British public to Prime Minister Tony Blair’s decision to support the U.S. in its military action against Iraq. Blair stated in a speech that he did not “seek unpopularity as a badge of honor,” but “sometimes it is the price of leadership and the cost of conviction.”¹⁷² The U.S. invasion of Iraq is an important backdrop because it primes the reader into thinking about the turbulent political climate in the Middle East. The way that the tension is built up in the novel makes the readers anticipate some sort of attack, and with this political moment in the background, it pushes the readers to assuming that the terrorist will mirror the conventional wisdoms that are popular in the discourse. However, McEwan undoes all of this priming in the last third of the novel and, in one brilliant inversion, dismantles the misperceptions that he had made the readers assume, though this will be discussed in more detail later in this chapter.

In terms of perspective, *Saturday* is written in the third person. However, unlike *The Secret Agent* or *Mao II*, this point of view only follows one character instead of moving between the streams of consciousness of other characters. The story is centered around British neurosurgeon, Henry Perowne. The historical context of the war on terror is perhaps the most peripheral in this novel, but is nevertheless a powerful undercurrent that sets up a lot of parallels. Therefore, because the story is told from the perspective of a civilian who is not involved in politics, government, or a terrorist organization, it is

¹⁷¹ Ian McEwan, *Saturday*, 125.

¹⁷² BBC News, “‘Million’ march against Iraq War,” February 16, 2003.

expected that the readers will be exposed to certain misconceptions about the types of people terrorists are.

II MISCONCEPTIONS

Characterization of the Terrorist

Although the “terrorist” character in the novel represents all the challenges to the misconceptions surrounding terrorism, McEwan presents the readers with several conventional wisdoms before the terrorist enters the plot. There are three significant instances in particular that *Saturday* showcases Perowne’s distorted perspective because he subscribes to these misperceptions. First, the novel begins with Perowne waking up in the middle of the night due to his insomnia and, through his window, sees a plane in the distance, going down in flames. This sparks his reflection on the current international political moment: the war on terror and the Middle East. This event catalyzes his contemplation on terrorism and violence, and this motif persists as the narrative continues. As he watches the plane and the plume of smoke trailing behind it as it descends, he reflects on the 9/11 attacks that occurred two years before:

“[Perowne] often wonders how it might go—the screaming in the cabin partly muffled by that deadening acoustic, the fumbling in bags for phones and last words, the airline staff in their terror clinging to remembered fragments of procedure, the levelling smell of shit. But the scene construed from the outside, from afar like this, is also familiar. It’s already almost eighteen months since half the planet watched, and watched again, the unseen captives driven through the sky to the slaughter, at which time there gathered round the innocent silhouette of any jet plane a novel association. Everyone agrees, airliners look different in the sky these days, predatory or doomed.”¹⁷³

¹⁷³ Ian McEwan, *Saturday*. First Anchor Books Edition, April 2006. New York, U.S.A.

Just as how the novel is set on the day of the global anti-war protests against the U.S. invasion of Iraq, Perowne's linkage of the plane he sees to the 9/11 attacks sets the reader up to assume that the terrorist in the novel will be a jihadist from the Middle East. But instead of explaining the motivations behind the attack or who the perpetrators were, Perowne's thoughts only focus on the "screaming," "fumbling," and "clinging" of the "innocent" captives "driven through the sky to the slaughter." The emphasis on the violence and the omission of an explanation for this violence paints the 9/11 hijackers as the "irrational homicidal maniacs" that pervade the distorted narrative.¹⁷⁴ In addition, Perowne's insight at the end of this reflection about how every airplane seen in the sky will now look "predatory or doomed" feeds into the incomplete narrative that terrorists commit these indiscriminate acts of violence *solely* to horrify the public.

Another instance that highlights a conventional wisdom is when Perowne listens to the news in order to find out more about the plane he saw in the early hours of his Saturday. Be it on the radio or the TV screen, the information and speculation that is relayed to him aligns with his reflections on the 9/11 attacks and the U.S. war against Iraq. First, there is speculation that the two pilots of the plane are Chechens. When Perowne checks back on the news while he is preparing dinner, an airport official concedes "that one of the men is of Chechen origin, but [denies] a rumour about a Koran found in the cockpit." The official adds that "even if it were true, he adds, it would mean nothing. It is, after all, hardly an offence."¹⁷⁵ The mention of the "Koran" builds on this distorted characterization of terrorists that was established with Perowne's callback to the 9/11 attacks. With this scene, McEwan adds in the conventional wisdom that religiosity

¹⁷⁴ Hoffman, "Rethinking Terrorism and Counterterrorism Since 9/11," 313.

¹⁷⁵ McEwan, *Saturday*, 126.

correlates with violence through irony. The fact that the official has to say that it would “hardly” be “an offense” even if a Koran was found is indicative that the public, including Perowne, view the Koran as symbolically significant and reaffirming of their misperceptions on the kind of people terrorists are.

The third scene that primes the readers to picture a terrorist with an Islamic, jihadist, Middle Eastern face is when Perowne is driving in between errands, and “watches three figures in black burkhas emerge from a taxi.”¹⁷⁶ In the excerpt below, he describes them and shares his opinions on Muslim customs and tradition:

“He can’t help his distaste, it’s visceral. How dismal, that anyone should be obliged to walk around so entirely obliterated,. At least these ladies don’t have the leather beaks. They really turn his stomach. And what would the relativists say... That it’s sacred, traditional, a stand against the fripperies of Western consumerism? But the men, the husbands—Perowne has had dealings with various Saudis in his office—wear suits, or trainers and tracksuits, or baggy shorts and Rolexes, and are entirely charming and worldly and thoroughly educated in both traditions... He’s caught himself in a nascent rant. Let Islamic dress codes be! What should he care about burkas? Veils for his irritation. No, irritation is too narrow a word. They... serve the gently tilting negative pitch of his mood.”¹⁷⁷

This passage is significant because Perowne catches himself othering these women, judging the Muslim tradition for being inferior and exasperating in its archaic, gendered customs. Though it is not as direct of a connection to terrorism or violence, Perowne’s rant hints to the “dramatic oppositional binaries” that the popular narrative is founded on, including liberal versus conservative, religious versus secular, and medieval versus modern.¹⁷⁸ In other words, Perowne paints a polarizing picture of the opposing camps, with the free, capitalist and democratic West on one side and the oppressive, constricting

¹⁷⁶ McEwan, *Saturday*, 124.

¹⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 124-125.

¹⁷⁸ Jackson, “Constructing Enemies: ‘Islamic Terrorism’,” 401.

doctrine of Islam on the other. The fact that they “[turned] his stomach” showcases that the narrative surrounding terrorism and violence is imbued with distorted and negative stereotypes of Muslim culture. The “Us” versus “Them” narrative is so blatantly demonstrated, and though he subtly criticizes the patriarchal societal structure, his rant is still founded on a religious basis. What is jarring about this scene is that Perowne’s “distaste” (even disgust) towards these women is the strongest, most “visceral” reaction he has in the entire novel. He does not even express the same level of negative sentiment towards Baxter, both when he hits Perowne with his car or when he invades Perowne’s home.

Objectives / Motivations

As evident in the aforementioned scenes, Perowne—a secular man who practices neurosurgery—has a polarized opinion on religion, and he often ruminates on its merit and value. He sees religion not only as antithetical to the scientific explanations that his work (and by extension his thought process) is grounded upon; he thinks that religiosity is indicative of a mental shortcoming:

“If Perowne were inclined to religious feeling, to supernatural explanations, he could play with the idea that he’s been summoned... He should acknowledge a hidden order, an external intelligence which wants to show or tell him something of significance... The primitive thinking of the supernaturally inclined amounts to what his psychiatric colleagues call a problem, or an idea, of reference. An excess of the subjective, the ordering of the world in line with your needs, an inability to contemplate your own unimportance. In Henry’s view such reasoning belongs on a spectrum at whose far end, rearing like an abandoned temple, lies psychosis.”¹⁷⁹

¹⁷⁹ McEwan, *Saturday*, 17.

While he acknowledges that religion and faith are extremely influential in informing one's actions, he believes it is a flawed, misleading way to navigate one's identity and understand one's purpose. He considers religiosity and faith to be forms of "primitive thinking," "a problem, or an idea of reference," rather than it being a different (but just as valuable) lens in which to look at the world. He goes so far as to say that piety implies "an inability to contemplate your own unimportance" and conflates this flawed reasoning with "psychosis," which refers to a set of symptoms of mental illnesses characterized as disruptions to a person's perception that makes it difficult for them to distinguish reality from fantasy.¹⁸⁰ Coupled with his opinions suggesting that Islam is oppressive, violent, and immoral, Perowne's harsh view on religion compounds the two misconceptions that religiosity and mental illness undoubtedly and directly link to violence.

III CHALLENGING MISCONCEPTIONS

Characterization of the Terrorist

The terrorist character in this novel is divergent from the terrorists in other novels in the sense that he is not a foreign national from a different country from his opponent or captive. The terrorist character in *Saturday* is Baxter, an English citizen. Technically, Baxter is not a terrorist, but a criminal who plans to commit a terrorist act. Initially, when he deliberately hits Perowne's car to get some money and a brawl out of him, he is let off as a street thug. However, later on in the novel when he enters the house with Perowne's wife at knifepoint, his goal seems to shift from getting something out of Perowne to terrorizing him and his family. McEwan's layered and multidimensional rendering of a

¹⁸⁰ National Alliance on Mental Illness. "Early Psychosis and Psychosis." <<https://www.nami.org/earlypsychosis>>.

character who is usually depicted as static and flat speaks to his awareness of the conventional wisdoms surrounding what—or who—defines a terrorist, and in turn his literary ability to dismantle these misperceptions.

When Perowne first encounters Baxter, he is observant of his physical movements and mannerisms. For instance, he notices that “Baxter is unable to initiate or make saccades, those flickering changes of eye position from one fixation to another.”¹⁸¹ Based on his experience with his patients and his study of medicine, Perowne diagnoses Baxter:

“A textbook phrase comes to Henry in much the same way as the cantata melody—a modest rise in his adrenaline level is making him unusually associative. Or the pressures of the past week won’t release him from the habits, the intellectual game of diagnosis. The phrase is, *a false sense of superiority*. Yes, it can be down to a slight alteration in character, preceding the first tremors, somewhat short of, a little less disabling than, those other neurological conditions—grandiosity, delusions of grandeur. But he may be mis-remembering. Neurology is not his field...”¹⁸²

Not only does Perowne assume that Baxter has a mental condition, he uses this assumption to try to get himself out of the dangerous situation. Seconds before Baxter attempts to assault him, Perowne says to him, “Your father had it. Now you’ve got it too.”¹⁸³ He goes on to deduce that Baxter’s condition has to do with “chromosome four,” and that his “misfortune lies with a single gene, in an excessive repeat of a single sequence—CAG,” calling it “biological determinism in its purest form.”¹⁸⁴

This depiction of Baxter’s violence being motivated by a biological mutation or a chemical imbalance rather than rational decision-making or personal choice complicates his depiction as a terrorist. On one hand, by qualifying his behavior through

¹⁸¹ McEwan, *Saturday*, 91.

¹⁸² *Ibid.*

¹⁸³ McEwan, *Saturday*, 95.

¹⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 94.

psychological explanations using medical terminology instead of omitting any sort of explanation, McEwan does not leave the readers to think that Baxter is some sadistic fanatic who seeks violence solely because it excites him. On the other hand, this characterization affirms the conventional wisdom that people who succumb to the use of violence (therefore, terrorists) are mentally ill, which is a constraining generalization that is damaging to the understanding of terrorists.

Though there are many conventional wisdoms that are presented and that the protagonist acts upon in *Saturday*, it would be an inaccurate, sweeping generalization to say that the insights on terrorism in this novel are distortions from academic theory. Even if the readers are not exposed to the terrorists' thought processes, Henry Perowne reflects on terrorism as a phenomenon in general. There are moments when Perowne questions his own judgements and evaluates his assumptions:

Strangely, for all the violence, he almost liked Baxter. That's to put it too strongly. He was intrigued by him, by his hopeless situation, and his refusal to give up. And there was a real intelligence there, and dismay that he was living the wrong life. And he, Henry, was obliged, or forced, to abuse his own power—but he allowed himself to be placed in that position. His attitude was wrong from the start, insufficiently defensive; his manner may have seemed pompous, or disdainful. Provocative perhaps. He could have been friendlier, even made himself accept a cigarette; he should have relaxed, from a position of strength, instead of which he was indignant and combative. On the other hand, there were three of them, they wanted his cash, they were eager for violence, they were planning it before they got out of their car. The loss of a wing mirror was cover for a mugging."¹⁸⁵

Similar to Mr Verloc's reflection on Stevie in *The Secret Agent*, McEwan uses this internal reflection to humanize Baxter through Perowne, who projects sympathy onto him. Though the word "intrigued" seems to other Baxter at first, as if he were an animal

¹⁸⁵ McEwan, *Saturday*. 113-114.

Perowne was observing, this intrigue comes not so much from his condition, but his “intelligence,” his “dismay,” and his “refusal to give up.”

Individual / Personal Motivations

In the final 100 pages of *Saturday*, Baxter and one of his henchmen invade Perowne’s house, entering with Perowne’s wife, Rosalind. Perowne “instantly recognizes the clothes; the leather jacket, the woollen watch cap,” and realizes that this is the same man from the car incident in the morning.¹⁸⁶ The fact that Baxter followed Henry Perowne to his house to terrorize his family, though disturbing and uncomfortable, seems to align with the theory put forth by Corner and Gill regarding mentally ill lone-actor terrorists. One of the conclusions they drew from their study was that “lone actors with a history of mental illness are more likely associated with single issue ideologies,” rather than subscribing to religious inspired or political extremist ideologies.¹⁸⁷ In turn, this can explain the reason that lone-actors are discriminatory in selecting potential targets.¹⁸⁸ It seems that even Perowne’s character recognizes the singularity of his purpose; the narrator states that “it is, of course, logical that Baxter is here. For a few seconds, Perowne’s only thought is stupidly that: *of course*. It makes sense.”¹⁸⁹ Furthermore, they concluded that terrorists who hold a single-issue ideology “are more typically fixated upon a target that they see as wholly responsible for their grievance.”¹⁹⁰ Again, McEwan (and by extension, Perowne) recognizes that he himself “is also responsible” in the sense

¹⁸⁶ McEwan, *Saturday*, 213.

¹⁸⁷ Corner and Gill, “A False Dichotomy? Mental Illness and Lone-Actor Terrorism,” 31.

¹⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 31.

¹⁸⁹ McEwan, *Saturday*, 213.

¹⁹⁰ Corner and Gill, “A False Dichotomy? Mental Illness and Lone-Actor Terrorism,” 31.

that “he humiliated Baxter in the street in front of his sidekicks,” and as a result “Baxter [was] [there] to rescue his reputation in front of a witness.”¹⁹¹

McEwan juxtaposes Perowne’s internal thoughts on Islam, the Middle East and terrorism with a physical manifestation of terror that is more intimate and literally hits close to home. Embedded in this parallel is Simons’ argument that disenfranchised and alienated individuals who become terrorists “exist in pockets everywhere, including in our own backyard.”¹⁹²

IV RADICALIZATION AND RECRUITMENT

Mechanisms to Radicalization

Similar to the other narratives, the recruitment process is not given much attention in this book, especially because the terrorist in this novel is characterized as acting on his mental illness, and therefore operates on his own accord instead of being part of a larger system or movement. Perowne speculates that Baxter “is an intelligent man, and gives the impression that, illness apart, he’s missed his chances, made some big mistakes and ended up in the wrong company.”¹⁹³ Though not much else is said in relation to Baxter’s background, perhaps McEwan is making a point in this omission. As Emily Crenshaw had studied, foreign terrorists are depicted in a more negative light than homegrown terrorists, and part of this is because the news emphasizes the violent act of the foreign terrorist, but gives the homegrown terrorist more personal background and context.¹⁹⁴ In *Saturday*, Baxter, while he falls more into the camp of “homegrown terrorist,” receives

¹⁹¹ McEwan, *Saturday*, 218.

¹⁹² Simons and Tucker, “The misleading problem of failed states,” 400.

¹⁹³ McEwan, *Saturday*, 99.

¹⁹⁴ Emily Crenshaw, “American and foreign terrorists,” 364.

the same treatment as the “foreign terrorist,” in which his past is omitted from the narrative, and all the readers have to judge him on is his present actions.

TAKEAWAYS

A nuance that I would like to make more explicit is that even though Baxter is a local thug and not a terrorist, his characterization and Perowne’s perception of him serves as an analogy for terrorism. Through his creation of Baxter, McEwan highlights that just as the motives of a lone-wolf criminal can be broken down and understood, it is possible to understand the motivations of international terrorists from foreign organizations if we allow them the same effort to understand instead of dehumanize them. Even with Perowne’s polarizing, unforgiving political and religious perspective, he made an effort to humanize Baxter in spite of what he did.

Upon first glance, it would seem that *Saturday* buys into the conventional wisdoms, particularly those associated with mental illness, that flatten the characterization of the terrorist. Especially with Perowne’s contempt for Saddam, as well as his judgments of the Muslim pedestrians/civilians he encounters throughout his *Saturday*, it is easy to read the narrative as one that paints the Westerner as the victim turned hero, while casting the terrorist as the undisputed evil villain. But upon a closer reading, it is evident that McEwan made some divergent decisions that pushed against these conventional wisdoms. And instead of having one character representing the conventional wisdoms and another representing their challenges, both sides of the narrative mingle and clash within Perowne’s mind. This distinctive formulation of McEwan shows that the discourse surrounding terrorism cannot be parcelled out into

binaries and sides. Rather, it is a narrative in which contradictory and incompatible assumptions and ideas coexist, adapting to the changing times and new circumstances. First, he made Baxter a British national, instead of a foreigner, showcasing that even people who look like you and live in your community can do awful, violent things. McEwan also attributed Baxter's mental instability to a biological disease, rather than religious extremism or the perverse desire for revenge. Finally, McEwan makes readers sympathize with Baxter through Perowne himself, and this internal reflection, understanding and sympathy culminates in *Saturday*'s powerful ending, where the victim performs surgery on the terrorist to save his life.

CHAPTER 6: *Terrorist*

John Updike's *Terrorist* is set in New Prospect, a small neighborhood in New Jersey, New York, and follows Ahmad Mulloy, an 18 year old Muslim American of Irish and Egyptian descent. He goes to his mosque regularly and studies the Qur'an under the supervision of his imam, Shaikh Rashid. His guidance counselor, Mr. Jack Levy, notices Ahmad for his academic excellence, and convinces him to consider attending college after graduation. Based on Shaikh Rashid's advice, Ahmad wants to become a truck driver instead. He is recommended by his imam to the Chehab's, a Lebanese family who sells furniture, and is hired to deliver furniture all over New Jersey. The son of the owner, Charlie, rides in the truck with Ahmad to help him with the deliveries. While making one delivery, Ahmad discovers that he had delivered a couch that had been stuffed with an obscene amount of American dollar bills. Upon telling Charlie what he had seen, Charlie and Ahmad develop more trust between one another. Then, Charlie recruits him for a suicide mission: to drive a truck loaded with explosives through the Lincoln Bridge in order to blow it up. Ahmad agrees to the task.

However, on the fateful day, he arrives at the checkpoint, and neither Charlie nor the other personnel are there to meet him. He walks back to the warehouse where the truck is stored, and decides to carry out the mission by himself. As Ahmad approaches the Lincoln bridge, he catches sight of Mr. Levy, waving at him from the curb. Mr. Levy runs towards the truck and gets inside. Mr. Levy tells Ahmad that Charlie has been executed, and that he was a double agent working for the CIA who infiltrated the terrorist ranks and used Ahmad to weed out the terrorists. When Ahmad asks Mr. Levy how he knows this, Mr. Levy informs him that the sister of his wife works for the Secretary of

Homeland Security, and informed Mr. Levy that Ahmad's distance from his mother and involvement in truck driving may be connected. Ahmad tells Mr. Levy to get out of the truck so he can carry on with his mission, but Mr. Levy is eventually able to convince him to not go through with it. They both drive the truck back to New Prospect.

I HISTORICAL CONTEXT

In contrast to the other novels investigated in this thesis, the act of terror in *Terrorist* is not based on any specific, real terrorist attack. However, the premise of the act in this novel—a bomb placed around a road that people pass through—is quite similar to the Boston Marathon bombing that took place on April 15, 2013. On that Monday afternoon, two bombs exploded near the finish line of the Boston Marathon, killing three people and injuring more than 100.¹⁹⁵ The next day, President Obama declares the bombings as an “act of terrorism.”¹⁹⁶ Three days later, Dzhokhar Tsarnaev is found covered in blood under the tarp of a boat and is taken into custody.¹⁹⁷ It was around a month later, on June 24, when he is formally sentenced to death and admits he is guilty, and is placed in Supermax prison in Florence, Colorado.¹⁹⁸ Dr. Alasdair Conn, the hospital's chief of emergency services of the Massachusetts General Hospital, commented that this attack was “like a bomb explosion we hear about in Baghdad or

¹⁹⁵ John Eligon and Michael Cooper. “Blasts at Boston Marathon Kill 3 and Injure 100.” *The New York Times*. April 15, 2013. <<https://www.nytimes.com/2013/04/16/us/explosions-reported-at-site-of-boston-marathon.html>>.

¹⁹⁶ CNN Library. “Boston Marathon Terror Attack Fast Facts.” *CNN*. Updated March 25, 2018. <<https://www.cnn.com/2013/06/03/us/boston-marathon-terror-attack-fast-facts/index.html>>.

¹⁹⁷ CNN Library. “Boston Marathon Terror Attack Fast Facts.” *CNN*.

¹⁹⁸ *Ibid*.

Israel or other tragic points in the world.”¹⁹⁹ So, even if Ahmad’s plan to bomb the Lincoln bridge was not based on a real attempt, the premise retains its realistic construction.

II MISCONCEPTIONS

Characterization of the Terrorist

What is unique to *Terrorist* in comparison to the other novels studied in this thesis is that the theme of religion is very heavy-handed. The first line of the book starts with Ahmad thinking to himself, “Devils... These devils seek to take away my God,” referring to his classmates.²⁰⁰ And the last line of the book ends in the same vein: “These devils... Have taken away my God,” this time referring to the terrorists who had abandoned and bailed on the mission.²⁰¹ Updike is very heavy-handed with conveying Ahmad’s religiosity, rendering him the most polarizing character amongst all our terrorists.

It seems that Ahmad, until he decides to not go through with the suicide attack, fits into the conventional wisdom that “Islamic terrorists are most often vulnerable, weak-minded... young men who are indoctrinated, groomed, brainwashed or radicalized into terrorism, often through extremist madrasas, mosques or internet sites.”²⁰² Ahmad comes from a broken household: his “deadbeat” Egyptian father left when he was around three years old, and his “hardworking Irish-Catholic” mother does not understand his faith and works as a nurses’ aid at a hospital.²⁰³ His father’s absence became a point of contention

¹⁹⁹ Eligon and Cooper. “Blasts at Boston Marathon Kill 3 and Injure 100.” *The New York Times*.

²⁰⁰ Updike, John. *Terrorist*. 2007 Ballantine Books Trade Paperback Edition (2006). New York, U.S.A.

²⁰¹ Updike, *Terrorist*, 310.

²⁰² Jackson, “Constructing Enemies: ‘Islamic Terrorism’,” 412.

²⁰³ Updike, *Terrorist*, 131.

between him and his mother, who Ahmad himself describes as having as “little talent for motherhood as a cat. Cats let the kittens suckle for a time and then treat them as enemies. I am not yet quite grown enough to be my mother’s enemy, but I am mature enough to be an object of indifference.”²⁰⁴ His precarious home situation makes readers believe he is “vulnerable” and “weak-minded,” and to an extent allows us to understand why he turns to religion. The narrator explains that Ahmad “loves prayer, the sensation of pouring the silent voice in his head into a silence waiting at his side, an invisible extension of himself into a dimension purer than the three dimensions of this world.”²⁰⁵

Objectives and Motivations

If Ahmad’s pronounced religiosity was not enough to play into the conventional wisdoms surrounding the popular and distorted terrorist characterization, his contempt and disgust for American culture and ideals (coupled with this religiosity) plays right into the distorted narrative that academic literature tries to dismantle. It reinforces the oppositional binaries of Western versus Islamic, savage versus civilized, medieval versus modern, and religious versus secular that permeate the terrorism discourse and give rise to the notion that the two sides are incompatible and irreconcilable.²⁰⁶ In a conversation with a peer from his high school, Century High, he tells her: “I look around me, and I see slaves—slaves to drugs, slaves to fads, slaves to television, slaves to sports heroes that don’t know they exist, slaves to the unholy, meaningless opinions of others.”²⁰⁷ The fortitude of Ahmad’s religious beliefs, coupled with his disdain for American culture, can

²⁰⁴ Ibid., 212-213.

²⁰⁵ Updike, *Terrorist*, 63.

²⁰⁶ Jackson, “Constructing Enemies: ‘Islamic Terrorism’,” 401.

²⁰⁷ Updike, *Terrorist*, 73.

be interpreted as an alignment with the conventional wisdom that religiosity is correlated to sentiments of hatred, and, by extension, a support for violence as an instrument in which this hatred can manifest itself.²⁰⁸

III CHALLENGING MISCONCEPTIONS

Characterization of Terrorist

Another unique element that sets *Terrorist* apart from the four other novels is that the terrorist act takes place (or was planned to take place rather) in the United States. When Mr. Levy brings Ahmad into his office and asks about his background, Ahmad explains that he is “the product of a white American mother and an Egyptian exchange student; they met while both studied at the New Prospect campus of the State University of New Jersey.”²⁰⁹ When Mr. Levy asks him if he knows a certain American expression that he uses in conversation, Ahmad replies defensively: “Of course, I am not a foreigner. I have never been abroad.”²¹⁰ Similar to Baxter, the terrorist character in *Saturday*, Ahmad represents the challenge to the notion that terrorists come from failed states, and shows the readers that terrorism can be bred in nations that are considered to be developed, stable and free.²¹¹

Even though Updike plays into the conventional wisdom that religiosity correlates with violence by citing religion as the reason Ahmad decides to carry out the suicide mission, Updike flips the script with regards to the conventional wisdom that terrorists come from failed states and non-democracies. Ahmad is an American citizen radicalized

²⁰⁸ Shapiro and Fair, “Understanding Support for Islamist Militancy in Pakistan,” 81.

²⁰⁹ Updike, *Terrorist*, 35.

²¹⁰ Ibid.

²¹¹ Gause III, “Can Democracy Stop Terrorism?” 66.

in one of the most urban areas in the United States. In contrast, Updike presents a foil to Ahmad in Mr. Chehab, the owner of the furniture company who Ahmad ends up working for. Upon meeting, Mr. Chehab tells Ahmad about his experience in America:

“America, I don’t understand this hatred. I came here a young man, married but my way had to be left behind, just me and my brother, and nowhere was there the hatred and shooting of my own countrymen, everybody in tribes. Christian, Jew, Arab, indifferent, black, white, in between—everybody get along. If you have something good to sell, people buy. If you have job to do, people do it. Everything is clear, on surface. Makes business easy. From the beginning, no trouble... This is honest and friendly country. We still have no problems.” (147)

In paralleling Ahmad and Mr. Chehab, we see that Updike has inverted their characterizations. The Middle Eastern foreign national has a fond view of the United States and speaks about the nation with gratitude and affection, while the half-white American citizen is the one who abhors capitalism and thinks American society to be unholy and corrupt. Charlie adds to his father’s characterization, stating that “my father is an old-fashioned immigrant, loyal to the system that took him in and let him prosper.”²¹²

Finally, Updike addresses the conventional wisdom that terrorists are mentally ill in a clever way: Charlie’s nickname for Ahmad is “Madman.”²¹³ This is ironic because Ahmad is the furthest from a madman, and is never depicted as being psychologically disturbed or abnormal. He is simply (or complexly rather) a religious, well-educated, hardworking young adult. The only time madman is not used as a term of endearment is when Mr. Levy is trying to convince Ahmad to abandon the suicide mission, telling him

²¹² Updike, *Terrorist*, 199.

²¹³ Updike, *Terrorist*, 153.

that if he dies, his mother will “not only lose [him] but she’ll become known as the mother of a monster. A madman.”²¹⁴

Individual / Personal Motivations

Although the novel places a lot of emphasis is placed on Ahmad’s piety, that does not mean that his religiosity is not conveyed in nuanced ways. There are multiple instances throughout Ahmad’s journey that he—as well as others—question and reflect on Islam, even if he ultimately agrees to carry out the suicide mission because God willed it. For instance, when Mr. Chehab tells Charlie that the prisoners in Guantanamo Bay deserved their punishment because they were fighting a war in the name of jihad, Ahmad interjects and says, “Jihad doesn’t have to mean war... It means striving, along the path of God. It can mean inner struggle.”²¹⁵ Ahmad directly speaks against the conventional wisdom that Islam is inherently violent and terroristic.

When the attacks of 9/11 are brought up in a discussion between Charlie and Ahmad, the following dialogue ensues:

“I pitied them. Especially those that jumped. How terrible, to be so trapped by crushing heat that humping to certain death is better. Think of the dizziness, looking down before you jump.”

“Those people worked in finance, furthering the interests of the American empire, the empire that sustains Israel and inflicts death every day on Palestinians and Chechnyans, Afghans and Iraqis. In war, pity has to be put on hold.”

“Many were merely guards and waitresses.”

“Serving the empire in their way.”

“Some were Muslims.”

“Ahmad, you must think of it as a war. War isn’t tidy. There is collateral damage.”²¹⁶

²¹⁴ Updike, *Terrorist*, 293.

²¹⁵ Updike, *Terrorist*, 149.

²¹⁶ Updike, *Terrorist*, 187.

Here, the readers glean Ahmad's compassion for others, which rarely manifests in the novel. Although it makes sense for Charlie to hold this view in the context of him being undercover, it is both ironic and compelling that the CIA agent would be the one dismissing the victims of the attack as simply "furthering the interests" of a violent, cruel America, while the terrorist is the one defending them. Through this dialogue, Updike shows that Ahmad disagrees with—or at least is unsettled by—the notion of collateral damage and indiscriminate violence, which is antithetical to the task and characterization of a terrorist. The most striking thing about this passage is that its renders are realistic and believable. Rather than two terrorists condemning America or reveling in the 9/11 attacks, this reads more like a casual conversation between two knowledgeable people, debating on the unaccounted costs of war. It is through his outward conversations and interactions with people that Ahmad is humanized because the readers are then presented with other people to compare him to.

The final important scene with regards to motivation is when Ahmad confides in Joryleen and tells her about what he thinks of Allah:

“When I turn to Allah and try to think of Him, it is borne in upon me how alone He is, in all the starry space He has willed into existence. In the Qur'an, He is called the Loving, the Self-Subsistent. I used to think of the love; now I'm struck by the self-subsistence, in all that emptiness. People are always thinking of themselves... Nobody thinks of God—if he suffers or not, if He likes being what He is. What does He see in the world, to take any pleasure in it? And to even think of such things, to try to make such pictures of God as a kind of human being, my master the imam would tell me was blasphemy, deserving an eternity of Hellfire.”²¹⁷

Although Ahmad's religiosity was incredible jarring at the beginning of the novel, it is at this point that the strength of his faith is broken down. What this confession shows is that

²¹⁷ Updike, *Terrorist*, 225.

perhaps Ahmad's anger and willingness to act violently does not stem from any religious ideology, but rather from loneliness and isolation. This passage demonstrates what Corner and Gill argued in that terrorist motivation has more to do with group dynamics than with individual psychology.²¹⁸

IV RADICALIZATION AND RECRUITMENT

Mechanisms of Radicalization

While Ahmad is depicted as a polarizing character, there are several instances in *Terrorist* when he is ostracized and discriminated, which makes readers engage and sympathize with him. His high school peer mentioned earlier, Joryleen, invites him to attend mass with her, and he accepts the invitation. Joryleen's boyfriend, Tylenol, then confronts Ahmad about it:

“Hear you went to church to hear Joryleen sing. How come?”

“She asked me to.”

“Shit she did. You're an Arab. You don't go there.”

“I did, though. People were friendly. One family shook my hand and gave me big smiles.”

“They didn't know about you. You was there under false pretenses.”²¹⁹

This case of bullying is more severe and sinister because it is laced with ethnic and religious prejudice. Tylenol also calls Ahmad a “dumb fuck,” a “weird queer,” a “faggot,” a “raghead” and a “shithead.”²²⁰ Even though Ahmad did not feel like he belonged in American society because it is incongruent to his religious beliefs, he never aggressively dehumanized or hostility confronted someone for not sharing his views, as Tylenol did to him.

²¹⁸ Corner and Gill, “A False Dichotomy? Mental Illness and Lone-Actor Terrorism,” 23.

²¹⁹ Updike, *Terrorist*, 97.

²²⁰ Updike, *Terrorist*, 16.

Like the two other post-9/11 novels (*Saturday* and *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*), Updike alludes to the 9/11 attacks in *Terrorist*, and talks about how Ahmad's and his family's life was affected after the attacks. When Mr. Levy shows up at the Mulloy residence, he apologizes "for invading [their] privacy" and explains that "when [he] tried the phone number on Ahmad's school records, [he] got a recording saying it had been disconnected."²²¹ Ahmad's mother, Teresa, then explains that they had to disconnect their number after 9/11 because "[they] were getting hate calls. Anti-Muslim," and that even when getting the number changed and unlisted "cost a couple dollars a month more, it's worth it."²²² Without putting a face or identity to these anonymous callers, Updike showcases how believing in conventional wisdoms can have negative effects when they are applied or voiced outward. In this particular scene, the misperception that is implicitly highlighted is that there is no possibility of negotiation, compromise or appeasement with terrorists because they are fanatical and irrational: the only response is deterrence and eradication.²²³

Recruitment Process

It is Ahmad's imam, Shaikh Rashid, who helps Ahmad secure a job after graduating high school. He tells Ahmad that "the mosque has friends, friends as powerful as they are pious," and informs him that "the head of the Chehab family, just the other day, told [him] that his prospering business has a need for a young truck driver, with no unclean habits and firmly of [their] faith." Where this novel completely diverges from the

²²¹ Updike, *Terrorist*, 79.

²²² Updike, *Terrorist*, 79.

²²³ Jackson, "Constructing Enemies: 'Islamic Terrorism'," 401.

distorted narrative and its embedded conventional wisdoms is in the recruitment process of Ahmad. Though it is not revealed until the end, Ahmad was recruited into terrorism not by a family member or a talent spotter, but by the very CIA double agent operating against the terrorists.

But more than being coworkers, Ahmad finds in Charlie a true friend: “Ahmad is grateful to Charlie for including him in the club of male friendship. Fifteen or more years older than he, and married though he doesn’t sound it, Charlie seems to assume that Ahmad knows everything he knows, or that if not he wants to know it.”²²⁴ Just like Stevie in *The Secret Agent*, Ahmad sees Charlie as a mentor who gave him a sense of belonging, which translated to being one of the main reasons that Ahmad accepted Charlie’s assignment to blow up the Lincoln Bridge.

²²⁴ Updike, *Terrorist*, 172.

CHAPTER 8: *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*

The Reluctant Fundamentalist by Moshin Hamid takes place in a single day, in which an American tourist and a Pakistani civilian are having a conversation in a cafe in Lahore, Pakistan. Over the course of the novel, the Pakistani, Changez, recounts his experiences during his time living in the United States. There are flashbacks and reflections on both his individual development (specifically his career growth and his relationships) as well as the political climate of the time (9/11, the U.S. bombing campaign in Afghanistan, and the Indo-Pakistani conflict). Through drawing parallels between his personal experiences and international political events, Changez explains to the American his motivations and reasoning for leaving America and how he grew to despise it. Although it is never explicitly revealed that he is a terrorist, the novel finishes with an open-ended scene in which a few men who are associated with Changez charge at the American tourist to either capture or harm him.

I HISTORICAL CONTEXT

In contrast to the other novels investigated in this thesis, *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* references several terrorist incidents instead of a single one. Changez points to three attacks, in all of which the United States had a role or a stake: the 9/11 attacks on the World Trade Center in New York, the suicide raid of the Indian Parliament, and the bombing of Afghanistan. Changez brings up “the bombing of Afghanistan” in October of 2001.²²⁵ Just a month after the attack on the World Trade Center, the United States and Britain “launched a powerful barrage of cruise missiles and

²²⁵ Moshin Hamid, *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*. First Mariner Books Edition, 2008. 99.

long-range bombers against Afghanistan.”²²⁶ The two nations “struck at Al Qaeda bases and Taliban military installations near several key Afghan cities, including Kabul and Kandahar” in attempts to demolish terrorist training camps.²²⁷ Twelve days after the launch of the bombing campaign—named Operation Enduring Freedom—the first wave of conventional ground forces arrived in Afghanistan.²²⁸ The war’s early phase was comprised of U.S. airstrikes, which were assisted by “a partnership of around 1,000 U.S. special forces, the Northern Alliance, and ethnic Pashtun anti-Taliban forces.”²²⁹

Lastly, Changez also mentions that incident when “armed men had assaulted the Indian Parliament,” leading him to “[confront] the possibility that soon [his] country could be at war.”²³⁰ On December 13, 2001, a group of armed men stormed India’s parliament complex, killing at least 12 people and injuring 22.²³¹ According to witnesses, five intruders stormed the parliament after driving into the complex using a fake pass and attacking the security guards manning the entrance.²³² One of the intruders died when he detonated the explosives strapped to his body, while the other four died in a shootout with the police.²³³ The Indian government blamed Lashkar-e-Taiba for the attack, and

²²⁶ Patrick E. Tyler. “A Nation Challenged: The Attack; U.S. and Britain Strike Afghanistan, Aiming at Bases and Terrorist Camps; Bush Warns ‘Taliban Will Pay a Price’” *The New York Times*. October 8, 2001.

²²⁷ Ian Christopher McCaleb. “Bush announces opening of attacks.” CNN.com. Oct. 7, 2001.

²²⁸ Council on Foreign Relations, “The U.S. War in Afghanistan, 1999 - 2018.” Council on Foreign Relations.

²²⁹ Council on Foreign Relations, “The U.S. War in Afghanistan, 1999 - 2018.”

²³⁰ Hamid, *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*, 121.

²³¹ BBC News, “On This Day: December 13 - 2001: Suicide attack on Indian Parliament.” BBC News.

²³² Sanjeev Miglani, “12 die in Indian parliament attack,” *The Guardian*. Dec. 13, 2001.

²³³ Sanjeev Miglani, “12 die in Indian parliament attack,” December 13, 2001.

demanded that Pakistan halt the militant Islamist group's activities, imprison its leaders, and cut off its financial assets.²³⁴

II MISCONCEPTIONS

Characterization of the Terrorist

With regards to his physical appearance, Changez is ethnically Pakistani. In the opening scene of *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*, Changez assures the American he is conversing with to “not be frightened of [his] beard,” assuring him that he is “a lover of America.”²³⁵ In terms of physical appearance, the one feature that is constantly referred back to is Changez's beard. This relates to the false assumption that all jihadist terrorists are bearded, which is associated with being unkempt and unruly. He mentions it again and again, acknowledging that the American's uneasiness around him may be due to him “[drawing] certain conclusions from [his] appearance, [his] lustrous beard.”²³⁶

Changez kept his face clean-shaven while he was working in Financial Services. He only started to grow it out after his visit home to Pakistan, which was shortly after the events of 9/11, and, later, after the conflict between India and Pakistan started to escalate. He explains that the reason he decided to grow it out “was, perhaps, a form of protest on [his] part, a symbol of [his] identity, or perhaps [he] sought to remind [himself] of the reality [he] had just left behind.”²³⁷

²³⁴ Celia W. Dugger. “Group in Pakistan is Blamed by India for Suicide Raid.” *The New York Times*. Dec. 15, 2001.

²³⁵ Hamid, *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*, 1.

²³⁶ *Ibid.*, 76

²³⁷ *Ibid.*, 130

His beard elicited “verbal abuse by complete strangers” on the New York subway, and, at his firm, Underwood Samson, he felt that overnight he had become “a subject of whispers and stares.”²³⁸ It seems that Changez’ radicalization is attributed to Mechanism 1 in McCauley and Moskalenko’s pathway chart: Personal victimization. What all of these encounters and instances highlight is that in light of both the political climate and the change in Changez’s physical appearance, he was othered in a way that he never was before.

Objectives / Motivations

Changez was subject to discrimination from Americans based on conventional wisdoms and false assumptions about Pakistan and Middle Easterners in general. One of the most jarring statements came from the father of his ex-girlfriend, while Changez was having dinner in their home. When the father asked Changez “how things were” in Pakistan, he butts in as Changez is replying and goes off:

“Economy’s falling apart though, no? Corruption, dictatorship, the rich living like princes while everyone else suffers. Solid people, don’t get me wrong. I like Pakistanis. But the elite has raped that place well and good, right? And fundamentalism. You guys have got serious problems with fundamentalism.”²³⁹

The assumption here that Erica’s father holds to be true is that terrorists are born out of economic instability and social unrest. Through the father, Hamid showcases the conventional wisdom that Anna Simons addresses, which is that failed states breed terrorism. He brings up mechanisms of instability like “corruption” and “dictatorship,” and also highlights the deep disparity in wealth. He tries to dilute his judgement by inserting that he “[likes] Pakistanis,” but then follows by using a violent, vulgar word,

²³⁸ Ibid.

²³⁹ Hamid, *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*, 55.

“rape” to criticize the elite. This stance is inappropriate at the very least, particularly because this is his first time meeting Changez. Erica’s father’s tone is blunt and harsh, and the questions are not questions at all, but judgements with inflections at the end (“no?” and “right?”), which makes them all the more condescending.

III CHALLENGING MISCONCEPTIONS

Characterization of Terrorist

While Changez is of Pakistani descent, he spent most of his adult life in the United States. He “worked in New York, and before that attended college in New Jersey,” at Princeton.²⁴⁰ His opportunity to both study and work in the United States is indicative of his high class and status. He blatantly states that he is “not poor; far from it... My grandfather and father both attended university in England. Our family home sits on an acre of land in the middle of Gulberg, one of the most expensive districts of this city. We employ several servants, including a driver and a gardener—which would, in America, imply that we were a family of great wealth.”²⁴¹ Right off the bat, Hamid already breaks down two main conventional wisdoms and shows that terrorists are not always individuals who are uneducated or come from severe poverty. Not only did his family own a lot of land and have a house staff, they left their homes to study abroad. In other words, Changez is hardly fits the impoverished, uneducated foreigner that people assume a terrorist, specifically a fundamentalist terrorist, to be. Through Changez, Hamid showcases the counterargument to the poverty misperception, as his main character is consistent with the academic findings suggesting that those “with higher educational

²⁴⁰ Hamid, *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*, 3.

²⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 10.

attainment and higher living standards are more likely to participate in terrorist activity.²⁴² Changez's complexity and nuance as the terrorist or "antagonist" in this story is derived from the fact that he was, as he puts it, "the product of an American university" who "was earning a lucrative American salary" and "was infatuated with an American woman."²⁴³ He was a product of a physical, educational, and emotional immersion in American experiences, values and ideals.

Perhaps the most important and unusual element of the novel that leads to this holistic characterization of Changez is the fact that he is the narrator of this story. *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* is written in first person, and so the audience has no choice but to listen to the perspective of the "villain" or "antagonist." Because the terrorist is the narrator, the story is filtered through his own judgments, opinions, and values, allowing the reader to follow his logic and sympathize with his desires and goals rather than discard them and apply our own. What is more interesting is that the American tourist, who would have been considered the "protagonist" or the "hero" in most other stories, is not given any opportunity to speak in terms of dialogue. The only narrative we receive from the American is through Changez noticing his physical body language and facial expressions in response to their surroundings and Changez's story. This is an incredible reversal, because now it is the Westerner that is scrutinized solely based on visible actions and superficial expressions. By excluding the voice of the opposition, Hamid flips the common trope portrayed by the media and by policy and pushes the readers to invest in the story of the terrorist narrator.

²⁴² Berrebi, "Evidence about the Link Between Education, Poverty and Terrorism," 4.

²⁴³ Hamid, *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*, 73.

Individual / Personal Motivations

In the first half of the novel, Changez talks about his time in America with fondness and nostalgia. With regard to his college career at Princeton, he emphasizes the welcoming environment: “Students like me were given visas and scholarships, complete financial aid, mind you, and invited into the ranks of meritocracy. In return, we were expected to contribute our talents to your society, the society we were joining. And for the most part, we were happy to do so. I certainly was, at least at first.”²⁴⁴ However, that does not mean that he was not confronted with stark contrasts in culture and custom that made him think about his identity or his place in the United States as a Pakistani man. Even with his American education and prestigious job, Changez was othered and discriminated against.

Act of Terror

As Changez walks his American companion back to his hotel, he notices that the American is concerned about the three men following behind them. Changez comments that one of the men was their waiter from the restaurant, and at one point he “offered [Changez] a nod of recognition.”²⁴⁵ The very last line of the novel confirms the cooperation between Changez and these men, as Changez tells the American, “Yes, he is waving at me to detain you.”²⁴⁶ Although this is the closest the readers get to a confirmation that Changez is a terrorist, Hamid complicates the narrative by making him operate under an organization and a system, rather than depicting him as a lone wolf who

²⁴⁴ Hamid, *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*, 4.

²⁴⁵ Hamid, *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*, 183.

²⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 184.

decided to harm Americans out of revenge for the discrimination he faced in the United States. With regard to individual radicalization via personal victimization, McCauley and Moskalenko state that “personal grievance is unlikely to account for group sacrifice unless the personal is framed and interpreted as representative of group grievance.”²⁴⁷

In relation to the novel finishing with an open-ended cliffhanger, it is important to note that the words “terrorist” and “terrorism” never show up in this novel. The only indicate we get that Changez is a terrorist is his implicit resentment towards America, his command at the end, and the title of the novel. As Richard Jackson explains, “terms like ‘extremist’ and ‘fundamentalist’ obscure the fact that Islamist groups engage in an array of political, social and cultural activities, few of which could be described as radical.”²⁴⁸ Given how weighted the word is, its omission could be a deliberate decision of Hamid to get the readers thinking about why they consider Changez to be a terrorist and on what grounds he should be labelled as such, especially when the novel ends before we find out whether he commits a terrorist act at all.

IV RADICALIZATION AND RECRUITMENT

Mechanisms to Radicalization

While it is difficult to pinpoint the beginning of Changez’ radicalization, it is clear that it was a gradual process that came with observations of how simultaneously prestigious and advanced, yet detached and elitist America and its people are compared to their less developed counterparts. Throughout the novel, Changez juxtaposes the West and the East with regard to lifestyle, culture, and ideals. As Crenshaw states, terrorism is

²⁴⁷ McCauley and Moskalenko, “Mechanisms of Political Radicalization,” 419.

²⁴⁸ Jackson, “Constructing Enemies: ‘Islamic Terrorism’,” 413.

seen as legitimate and justified when a terrorist perceives his enemy—in this case, the United States—as unjust, morally corrupt, and violent.²⁴⁹

One of the first instances of this is when Changez talks about the attitudes of his American college peers regarding wealth. He was “annoyed” by “the ease at which they parted with money” or “their self-righteousness with dealing with those whom they had paid for a service,” all the while wondering why his peers “[conducted] themselves in the world as though they were its ruling class.”²⁵⁰ Even though Changez himself belonged to the wealthy class, he viewed the American attitude towards wealth as excessive and lavish, and an indicator of superiority. This view is attached to the United States as a country, with other nations characterizing it as having a superiority complex, especially in its role on the international stage as the hegemon and superpower.

The catalyzing event in the novel that results in the revealing of Changez’s contempt for America is the 9/11 terrorist attacks. He relays his reaction to the tragedy in all sincerity: “I started as one—and then the other—of the twin towers of New York’s World Trade Center collapsed. And then I *smiled*. Yes, despicable as it may sound, my initial reaction was to be remarkably pleased.”²⁵¹ To attach positive diction like “smiled” and “pleased” to something as terrible as the events of 9/11 seems to be completely irrational and cruel. However, Changez expands on this position and elaborates why he felt that way:

“... Please believe me when I tell you that I am no sociopath; I am not indifferent to the suffering of others... So when I tell you I was pleased at the slaughter of thousands of innocents, I do so with a profound sense of perplexity. But at that moment, my thoughts were not with the *victims* of

²⁴⁹ Martha Crenshaw, “The Causes of Terrorism,” 390.

²⁵⁰ Hamid, *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*, 21.

²⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 72.

the attack... no, I was caught up in the *symbolism* of it all, the fact that someone had so visibly brought America to her knees.”²⁵²

Changez’s confession showcases the complete disconnect between himself and the United States, a nation with which he used to so deeply identify. This goes back to Wilner and Dubouloz, and shows how the extreme societal division into different religious and cultural groups “weakens the bonds of state identity, civil association, and nationalism.”²⁵³ As time passes, and especially in Changez’ case, when international events exacerbate these cleavages in society, the alienated individual starts to characterize the broader community he/she lives in as the enemy.²⁵⁴ In this passage, Hamid italicizes *victims* to show that Changez does not see the innocent employees in the World Trade Center buildings as the victims. Rather, he considers himself the victim of America’s discrimination and xenophobia against him and people similar to him. He also comments on America’s reaction to the attacks and how they othered Changez even further:

“Your country’s flag invaded New York after the attacks; it was everywhere... They all seemed to proclaim: *We are America*—not New York, which, in my opinion, means something quite different—*the mightiest civilization the world has ever known; you have slighted us; beware our wrath.*”²⁵⁵

Emily Crenshaw points out this particular display of nationalism post 9/11 and how this exacerbated othering. She cites that after the attacks, “American television news reporters across the country wore American flag lapel pins, draped studio sets with flags and banners and repeatedly showed footage of three firefighters raising the flag over the

²⁵² Ibid., 73.

²⁵³ Wilner and Dubouloz, “Homegrown terrorism and transformative learning,” 39.

²⁵⁴ Wilner and Dubouloz, “Homegrown terrorism and transformative learning,” 39.

²⁵⁵ Hamid, *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*, 79.

Ground Zero rubble.”²⁵⁶ This saturation of patriotism and nationalism in news coverage exacerbates bias and dilutes the sociopolitical complexity of terrorism.²⁵⁷ This “nationwide reaffirmation” and “emphasis on state strength” only reifies the “Us” versus “Them” narrative.²⁵⁸ McCauley and Moskalenko point out that individuals who feel personally victimized do not move to violence unless they perceive their victimization as joined to the victimization of their ethnic or national group.²⁵⁹

At first, Changez’s contempt for America, especially after it had suffered a violent, brutal attack on its people, seems callous and heartless. But as the novel continues, Changez presents the readers with two other events—the bombings in Afghanistan and the attack on Indian parliament—in which America was no longer the victim, but, respectively, the perpetrator and the passive bystander:

“I had chanced upon a newscast with ghostly night-vision images of American troops dropping into Afghanistan for what was described as a daring raid on a Taliban command post. My reaction caught me by surprise; Afghanistan was Pakistan’s neighbor, our friend, and a fellow Muslim nation besides, and the sight of what I took to be the beginning of its invasion by your countrymen caused me to tremble with fury.”²⁶⁰

Changez characterizing America as “ghostly” troops “[raiding]” and “[invading]” while depicting Afghanistan as the “neighbor,” “friend” and “fellow Muslim nation,” he flips the narrative that readers had internalized through 9/11. The parallel that is drawn between these two events conveys important commentary in terms of *who* we consider to be terrorists, and that this identification may be grounded upon factors other than the indiscriminate use of violence. In his announcement of the bombing campaign, President

²⁵⁶ Emily Crenshaw, “American and foreign terrorists,” 365.

²⁵⁷ Ibid.

²⁵⁸ Ibid.

²⁵⁹ McCauley and Moskalenko, “Mechanisms of Political Radicalization,” 418.

²⁶⁰ Hamid, *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*, 100.

Bush alluded to the 9/11 attacks and voiced a warning to nations sponsoring terrorist organizations, stating that governments who protect “outlaws and killers of innocents” will “take that lonely path at their own peril.”²⁶¹ Changez describes that “I was a modern-day janissary, a servant of the American empire at a time when it was invading a country with a kinship to mine that was perhaps even colluding to ensure that my own country faced the threat of war.”²⁶² This goes with Tessler and Robbins finding that it is not religious involvement or negative views of Western culture that make individuals more likely to approve of terrorist acts against U.S. targets, but rather negative views about the foreign policy of the United States.²⁶³ Changez’s anger and frustration stemming from these events goes to show that his radicalization may not just stem from his personal victimization as an individual Pakistani national, but also political grievance.

Recruitment Process

Although it is not clear how Changez was recruited into his terrorist organization, one can gather some insight as to his role in the organization from the details mentioned in the novel. When Changez returns to Pakistan, he becomes a university lecturer. Martha Crenshaw argues that many terrorists come from a background of political experience in which they operated in nonviolent opposition to the state.²⁶⁴ Changez, who referred himself to a “believer in non-violence,” used his education platform to advocate for the “disengagement from [America] by [Pakistan],” as well as to “persuade [his students] of the merits of participating in demonstrations for greater independence in Pakistan’s

²⁶¹ Patrick E. Tyler, “A Nation Challenged: The Attack; U.S. and Britain Strike Afghanistan.”

²⁶² Hamid, *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*, 152.

²⁶³ Tessler and Robbins, “What Leads Some to Approve of Terrorist Acts?” 321.

²⁶⁴ Martha Crenshaw, “The Causes of Terrorism,” 390.

domestic and international affairs.”²⁶⁵ Changez would tell his students that “no country inflicts death so readily upon the inhabitants of other countries, frightens so many people so far away, as America.”²⁶⁶ He mentions that these peaceful demonstrations would later be labeled as “anti-American” by the foreign press.²⁶⁷

TAKEAWAYS

What makes *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* innovative in its unconventionality is that it gives the terrorist not only a prominent voice, but the absolute power to control the narrative. It is true that the terrorist voice is included in the academic and political realms through interviews with terrorists for the former and recruitment videos and statements from terrorist leaders for the latter. But for the academic realm, their voices are still primed and filtered by the types of questions they are asked. And for the political realm, their messaging is so curated, and is geared to play into the conventional wisdoms in order to affirm—and therefore enhance—the public’s fear. But *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* takes the time to outline who the terrorist was prior to radicalization and recruitment, exploring the shifts in his beliefs and values rather than stewing on the atrocity of his actions.

²⁶⁵ Hamid, *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*, 181-182.

²⁶⁶ Ibid., 182.

²⁶⁷ Ibid., 179.

CHAPTER 9: THE INTENTION-PERCEPTION CYCLE

After the analysis of the depiction of the individual terrorist in the novel and its comparison to academic theory, this final category will discuss how this depiction relates back to the public perception of the terrorist. The “Intention-Perception Cycle” aims to target the second part of the question this thesis addresses: what insights can we take away from this comparison? An important theme that all novels explore is how the public’s perception of terrorism compares to the true intentions of the terrorist, and how these two sides inform and affect each other.

A lot of the academic theory criticizes the media and governments alike for their dehumanization and othering of the terrorists as well as their aggressive responses to spectacle and terror. The west, particularly Britain and the United States, use the terrorism discourse (particularly Islamic terrorism) to “legitimize or sell a range of international and domestic political projects,” such as regime change in Afghanistan and Iraq, increased military presence in certain regions (Central Asia), increase in resources and power for their governments’ military arms, and the preservation of a liberal, Western-dominated international order in general.²⁶⁸ And it is exactly these distorted “narratives of fanatical, murderous, suicidal ‘Islamic terrorists’ functions to amplify rather than ally the social gear generated by terrorist actions because it reinforces the perception that the attackers are inhuman killing machines who cannot be deterred or reasoned with.”²⁶⁹

²⁶⁸ Jackson, “Constructing Enemies: ‘Islamic Terrorism’,” 422.

²⁶⁹ Ibid., 424.

However, those who are against terrorism are not the only ones at fault for pushing this distorted narrative. Terrorists capitalize on these responses, relying on their dehumanization and othering in order to be perceived as unpredictable, alien, and unknown. As Martha Crenshaw puts it, “violence and bloodshed always excite human curiosity, and the theatricality, suspense, and threat of danger inherent in terrorism enhance its attention-getting qualities.”²⁷⁰ Though terrorists are simply people with agendas and operate differently to achieve those agendas, they understand that the best way to get attention is to act monstrously, making themselves seem more terrifying, and thus obtaining more power and leverage. Consequently, this capitalization perpetuates the public’s one-dimensional, skewed perception, and the resulting cycle is what the functionality of terrorism depends on. Now, this is where the role of the novel comes in. The novelist has the power to break this cycle, to rehumanize the people who have not only been dehumanized, but who rely on this dehumanization in order to be successful in their terrorist acts.

This relationship between the public perception of the terrorist and the terrorist’s “true” characterization is less of a dichotomy, and more of a cycle or feedback loop, with the two sides fueling the other’s contempt and prejudice to the point that neither side would ever consider attempting to understand the other. The authors of these six novels are acutely aware of this dynamic and—whether it is to express their own rage or frustration or to show that people are not monstrous though their methods may be—use their writing to embark on the endeavor to rehumanize what has been so blatantly and successfully alienated and othered.

²⁷⁰ Martha Crenshaw, “Causes of Terrorism,” 386.

The Secret Agent

One of the most prominent themes Conrad highlights that link back to the intention-perception cycle is the theme of spectacular violence. He channels this theme primarily through Mr. Vladimir, who talks at length to Mr. Verloc about selecting what building/structure should be bombed to garner the most visceral, horrified reaction from the public. He muses on how the target must not any common establishment:

“A murderous attempt on a restaurant or theatre would suffer in the same way from the suggestion of non-political passion: the exasperation of a hungry man, an act of social revenge. All this is used up; it is no longer instructive as an object lesson in revolutionary anarchism. Every newspaper has ready-made phrases to explain such manifestations away.”²⁷¹

Here, Mr. Vladimir essentially renders the bombing of common establishments ineffective because the intention is left to the interpretation of the media (implied by “every newspaper”) and by extension, the public. Instead of these acts of violence being spectacular in their terror, they are now dismissed as a mere “act of social revenge” rather than being a clear, powerful message showcasing “revolutionary anarchism.” Through Mr. Vladimir, Conrad accentuates that terrorists are very much aware that their true motivations are being severely distorted by the people they target and victimize. In this excerpt Conrad also presents an explicit commentary on the oversaturation—and the resulting monotony—of spectacular violence in the public’s psyche. As more and more of these acts occur, their disarming, disturbing effect is reduced. Once they are “used up,” the public becomes desensitized to the violence, and “explain such [incidents] away” instead of actively responding to them. This numbness has a tremendous effect on the intention-perception cycle. As the target population become less reactive and more

²⁷¹ Joseph Conrad, *The Secret Agent*, 26.

apathetic, the more terrorists organizations will lean towards more barbaric, brutal acts of indiscriminate violence.

Finally, Mr. Vladimir does directly address the problem of dehumanization, but from a different angle:

“But what is one to say to an act of destructive ferocity so absurd as to be incomprehensible, inexplicable, almost unthinkable; in fact, mad? Madness alone is truly terrifying, inasmuch as you cannot placate it either by threats, persuasion, or bribes. Moreover, I am a civilised man. I would never dream of directing you to organise a mere butchery, even if I expected the best results from it. But I wouldn’t expect from a butchery the result I want. Murder is always with us. It is almost an institution. The demonstration must be against learning—science... The attack must have all the shocking senselessness of gratuitous blasphemy.” (27)

This is where Conrad speaks directly to the dehumanization of terrorists by simply labelling them as “mad” or insane. Because Mr. Verloc and Mr. Vladimir are part of a regime that is committing a terrorist act and are not terrorists themselves, the plan was for the bomb to destroy part of the Observatory, but with the intention of not harming very many people. Mr. Vladimir qualifies this intention by calling himself “civilised,” and that “a mere butchery” or indiscriminate murder of people would in turn lead the public to dismiss the gravity of the act on the grounds of the “madness” of the perpetrator. Furthermore, he explains here that science has superseded art and religion as the field that society values and looks toward to explain why the world works the way it works, and pinpoints this as evidence for his hypothesis that the public will be up in arms if the Observatory is bombed. Mr. Vladimir’s calculating reflects show that the terrorist takes the public perspective into account, and plans his actions—his targets, his weapons, his timing, and everything else—with this perspective in mind in order to get the response he

desires. I can't put it better than Mr. Vladimir: "The only thing that matters to us is the emotional state of the masses. Without emotion there is no action."²⁷²

The intention-perception cycle is also alluded to when the Professor is speaking to Ossipon about people's perception of him:

"It is character alone that makes for one's safety... Force of personality... I have the means to make myself deadly, but that by itself, you understand, is absolutely nothing in the way of protection. What is effective is the belief those people have in my will to use the means. That's their impression. It is absolute. Therefore I am deadly."²⁷³

What the Professor implies here is that the power and leverage terrorists have comes from their resolve to use brutal and indiscriminate methods of violence to promote their ideology or achieve their political objective. And this resolve is not derived from the structure of the terrorist organization, the lethality of their weapons or the tenets of their ideology, though these factors certainly strengthen it. But resolve is directly linked to character, and ultimately, this comes from the individual terrorists themselves. Ultimately, it is not "the means" that make terrorists deadly, but the belief in their "will to use the means." In the particular case of *The Secret Agent*, the bomb in itself generates fear, but it is the fact that it represents the intentions of the terrorists and their will to use harmful means that makes the weapon even more terrifying.

When Ossipon pushes back and tells the Professor that other people have that "force of personality," the Professor challenges him and argues that "it is a matter of degree," and that other people's characters are "built upon conventional morality" and

²⁷² Joseph Conrad, *The Secret Agent*, 40.

²⁷³ Conrad, *The Secret Agent*, 54.

“leans on the social order,” while his ideology “stands free from everything artificial.”²⁷⁴

As an end to the conversation, the Professor finishes by stating that while others “depend on life, which... is a historical fact surrounded by all sorts of restraints and considerations, a complex organized fact open to attack at every point,” he “[depends] on death, which knows no restraint and cannot be attacked. My superiority is evident.”²⁷⁵

This commentary again links back to terrorists using unconventional methods of violence that governments are prohibited from exercising because of the laws and constraints they are bound to (especially democratic regimes).

Mao II

DeLillo addresses the relationship between public perception and terrorist motivations in a unique way: He draws a parallel between the terrorist and the novelist.

“There’s a curious knot that binds novelists and terrorists. In the west we become famous effigies as our books lose the power to shape and influence... Years ago I used to think it was possible for a novelist to alter the inner life of the culture. Now bomb-makers and gunmen have taken that territory. They make raids on human consciousness. What writers used to do before we were all incorporated.”²⁷⁶

Through Bill Gray’s commentary, DeLillo emphasizes that terrorists and novelists are both “shapers of sensibility and thought,” but that they are competing forces, in which the terrorists’ “degree to which they influence mass consciousness is the extent of [the novelists’] decline.”

DeLillo’s rendering of this theme links back to the utility of fiction to influence public opinion by conveying relevant and topical ideas, questions, and discussions in a

²⁷⁴ Conrad, *The Secret Agent*, 54.

²⁷⁵ Conrad, *The Secret Agent*, 55.

²⁷⁶ DeLillo, *Mao II*, 41.

simultaneously accessible and innovative way. The ability of the novelist “to alter the inner life of the culture” is the premise that this thesis is founded upon, and is the reason I chose to explore the topic of terrorism through fiction in the first place. An interesting thing to note is that this opposes the argument expressed in *The Secret Agent*, when Mr. Vladimir states that “nobody minds what [artists] say.”²⁷⁷ DeLillo asserts that artists perspectives did matter, but that the spectacular and unbelievable nature of terrorism has superseded that of fiction.

One of the most unique themes that DeLillo brings up again and again in *Mao II* is the parallel between the terrorist and the novelist. This parallel is also hinted at in Ian McEwan’s *Saturday*. And it is in this parallel that we get a better grasp of the conventional wisdoms. By comparing the intentions of terrorists to those of novelists, DeLillo demonstrates how both work to incite strong, intense emotions in their audience by making the impossible and incredulous believable. When Charles and Gray discuss the hostage crisis, and frustration is expressed about the indiscriminate nature of the kidnappings, Charles responds:

“Of course he’s innocent. That’s why they took him. It’s such a simple idea. Terrorize the innocent. The more heartless they are, the better we see their rage. And isn’t it the novelist, Bill, above all people, above all writers, who understands this rage, who knows in his soul what the terrorist thinks and feels? Through history it’s the novelist who has felt the affinity for the violent man who lives in the dark. Where are your sympathies? With the colonial police, the occupier, the rich landlord, the corrupt government, the militaristic state? Or with the terrorist? And I don’t abjure that word even if it has a hundred meanings. It’s the only honest word to use.”

²⁷⁷ Conrad, *The Secret Agent*, 26.

Oversimplifying the group's cause to "[terrorizing] the innocent," and associating their intentions with words like "heartless" and "rage" plays right into the assumption that terrorists are vengeful, irrational, and inhuman.

Don DeLillo only gives the readers a window into the intention of the hostage-taking in the last scene of the book, where Brita, the photojournalist, goes to Beirut to interview Abu Rashid, the leader of the terrorist organization. The interpreter explains:

"I will tell you why we put Westerners in locked rooms. So we don't have to look at them. They remind us of the way we tried to mimic the West. The way we put up the pretense, the terrible veneer. Which you now see has exploded all around you... As long as there is a Western presence, it is a threat to self-respect, to identity... Terror is what we use to give our people their place in the world. What used to be achieved through work, we gain through terror. Terror makes the new future possible. All men one man. Men live in history as never before."²⁷⁸

Here, one can see that the terrorist has internalized the same "Us" versus "Them" binary that the West uses to antagonize terrorists.²⁷⁹ The terrorist is aware that his people were considered inferior, so inferior that they "tried to mimic the West" and aspire to its values and ideals. The anti-Western sentiment relayed in this passage not only parallels, but seems to respond to the West's distorted, negative sentiments on the Middle East in general.

In direct reference to the intention-perception cycle, Charles tells Gray that the terrorists have the monopoly not only on the narrative of fear, violence, mystery, and thus public attention:

"The way they live in the shadows, live willingly death. The way they hate many of the things you hate. Their discipline and cunning. The coherence of their lives. The way they excite, they excite admiration. In societies reduced to blur and glut, terror is the only meaningful act... Inertia-

²⁷⁸ DeLillo, *Mao II*, 235.

²⁷⁹ Emily Crenshaw, "American and foreign terrorists," 365.

hysteria. Is history possible? Is anyone serious? Who do we take seriously? Only the lethal believer, the persona who kill and dies for faith. Everything else is absorbed. The artist is absorbed, the madman in the street is absorbed and processed and incorporated. Only the terrorist stands outside. The culture hasn't figured out how to assimilate him. It's confusing when they kill the innocent. But this is precisely the language of being noticed, the only language the West understands. The way they determine how we see them. The way they dominate the rush of endless streaming images."²⁸⁰

Going back to Mr. Verloc's statement that action is nothing without emotion, Charles echoes this idea and recognizes that the terrorists "excite" the public because how they fight and what they fight for "stands outside" the normal undertakings of modern society. But even with this argument that terrorists have taken power away from the novelists, Gray still insists that he believes in the novel because "it's a democratic shout," asserting that "anybody can write a great novel... The spray of talent, the spray of ideas. One thing unlike another, one voice unlike the next. Ambiguities, contradictions, whispers, hints."²⁸¹ It seems that Gray sees the power that he has to break the intention-perception cycle.

Saturday

While the depiction of terrorism in *Saturday* takes the form of analogy, inference, and underhanded associations, McEwan does give the readers a protagonist who is acutely self-aware of his place in the intention-perception cycle, and reflects on his position as his day progresses. Throughout the novel, Perowne often thinks critically about his opinions and reflects on the biases and assumptions that his judgements harness. With regards to the crashing plane, Perowne realizes that as he anticipates more

²⁸⁰ DeLillo, *Mao II*, 157-158.

²⁸¹ DeLillo, *Mao II*, 159.

news about the incident, he subconsciously forms a narrative on his own and imagines his own reasons and consequences for the situation:

“Misunderstanding is general all over the world. How can we trust ourselves? [Perowne] sees now the details he half-ignored in order to nourish his fears: that the plan was not being driven into a public building, that it was making a regular, controlled descent, that it was on a well-used flight path—none of this fitted the general unease.”²⁸²

Perowne admits that he thinks of the worse case scenarios “in order to nourish his fears,” and this points to the intention-perception cycle in the sense that the public responds to fear more than anything else, to an extent that they even anticipate and expect terror. It seems that McEwan is implicitly asserting that to humanize a terrorist—to give their horrendous actions justification and perspective—would be divergent from the “general unease” and the current, popular narrative. But Perowne recognizes that his nascent expectation for the plane crash to be an attempt at a terrorist act rather than an engine malfunction is indeed a “misunderstanding,” and even questions whether we, as people, can “trust ourselves” with searching for the narrative that is true, even if we do not agree with it or it does not fulfill our expectations.

This questions pervades through the novel, and culminates into this final reflection before Perowne’s daughter, father-in-law and son arrive for the dinner:

“Does [Perowne] think he’s contributing to something, watching news programmes, or lying on his back on the sofa on Sunday afternoons, reading more opinion columns of ungrounded certainties, more long articles about what really lies behind this or that development, or about what is most surely going to happen next, predictions forgotten as soon as they are read, well before events disprove them? For or against the war on terror, or the war in Iraq; for the termination of an odious tyrant and his crime family, for the ultimate weapons inspection, the opening of torture prisons, locating the mass graves, the chance of liberty and prosperity, and a warning to other despots; or against the bombing of civilians, the

²⁸² McEwan, *Saturday*, 40.

inevitable refugees and famine, illegal international action, the wrath of Arab nations and the swelling of Al-Qaeda's ranks. Either way, it amounts to a consensus of a kind, an orthodoxy of attention, a mild subjugation in itself. Does he think that his ambivalence—if that's what it really is—excuses him from the general conformity?"²⁸³

The question that McEwan presents here with regards to the intention-perception cycle is whether it is enough for someone to recognize and acknowledge that the cycle exists, but do nothing to break it. Clearly Perowne is aware that he is being presented with several narratives that both support and challenge, reaffirm and undermine, expand on and contradict one another. But he wonders whether understanding that there is more than one narrative is sufficient, or whether his self-aware "ambivalence" makes him complicit in perpetuating this cycle of distortion and misunderstanding. Especially with regards to the war on terror and the war in Iraq, the government will always be offering up a narrative that leads the public to align with the administration's policy, and while public buy-in is an essential factor to successful foreign policy, this means that the government can manipulate the narrative in order to get the public on board with their policy. What Perowne ponders—and by extension what the readers are forced to confront—is if, upon recognizing this manipulation, one should speak up against it.

Something that is fascinating about *Saturday* is that McEwan, like DeLillo in *Mao II*, also addresses the role of fiction and literature in conveying the ideas, events, and conundrums of the real world. At one point, Perowne internally comments on the book recommendations given to him by his daughter:

“So far, Daisy's reading lists have persuaded him that fiction is too humanly flawed, too sprawling and hit-and-miss to inspire uncomplicated wonder at the magnificence of human ingenuity of the impossible dazzlingly achieved... Work that you cannot begin to imagine achieving

²⁸³ McEwan, *Saturday*, 185.

yourself, that displays a ruthless, nearly inhuman element of self-enclosed perfection—this is his idea of genius. This notion of Daisy’s, that people can’t “live” without stories, is simply not true. He is living proof.”²⁸⁴

Surprisingly, Perowne’s view on the effectiveness of fiction as conveyed in this passage opposes the view presented in the other novels, which highlight the value of fiction to break the intention-perception cycle by providing an alternative narrative. He considers himself an example of someone who is satisfied with the confines and “magnificence” of the real world, and does not see the utility in made-up stories or the value in imagining other worlds. What is ironic about his argument is that it is Daisy’s recitation of a poem that calms Baxter down when he invades the Perowne residence, giving Perowne and his son Theo the opportunity to work together to take him down. His perspective is based on the argument that fiction is too “humanly flawed,” but that is exactly what makes it useful: fiction not only emphasizes the vulnerabilities and flaws in the human condition, but highlights that every single existing person are subject to these same vulnerabilities in one way or another.

Terrorist

What is interesting about the exploration of the intention-perception cycle in *Terrorist* is that the conversations about this cycle are neither directed at nor actively involve the terrorist and protagonist, Ahmad, himself. Updike uses secondary characters to illustrate the cycle, specifically through conversations between Charlie and Mr. Chehab as well as discussions between the Secretary of Homeland Security and Hermione.

²⁸⁴ McEwan, *Saturday*, 67.

In one scene, Mr. Chehab argues with Charlie about how imprisonment and punishment in America is nothing compared to the rest of the world, to which Charlie disagrees. Within this argument, Charlie brings up the terrorist suspects that are held in Guantanamo Bay: “What about our little concentration camp down at Guantanamo Bay? Those poor bastards can’t even have lawyers. They can’t even get imams who aren’t snitches.”²⁸⁵ Charlie alludes to the dehumanization of terrorists under the custody of counterterrorist forces like the United States government, and how this punishment strips terrorists of their rights and liberties as human beings. To this, Mr. Chehab responds:

“They are enemy soldiers... They are dangerous men. They wish to destroy America. That is what they say to reporters, even though they are better fed by us than ever by the Taliban. They think Nine-Eleven was a great joke. It is war for them. It is jihad. That is what they say to themselves. What they expect, Americans to lie down flat under feet and make no self-defense? Even bin Laden, he expects being fought back.”²⁸⁶

Mr. Chehab’s response highlights that one’s ethnicity, nationality and religion has no relation or connection to one’s opinion on using violence or supporting terrorism. Mr. Chehab is a Muslim who grew up in Lebanon before moving to America, but has the same view—albeit a distorted one—of terrorists that is prominent in America’s zeitgeist. Even though he shares the same religion as the prisoners, he sees them as the “enemy,” branding them as “dangerous men” who essentially asked for this dehumanizing treatment because of the atrocious acts they committed. In short, Mr. Chehab argues that the cruelty and indignity that comes with imprisonment is expected because the terrorists are the ones who waged “war” as their duty to “jihad.” It seems that Updike swaps the perspectives of these two characters: the undercover American CIA agent is defending

²⁸⁵ Updike, *Terrorist*, 149.

²⁸⁶ *Ibid.*

the terrorists, while the Muslim foreign national denounces them. Ahmad is present when this conversation takes place, although neither he nor the narrator (and by extension, Updike himself) aligns with one side over the other. Perhaps Updike is shedding light on the idea that the two sides of the intention-perception cycle are not separated by the identity binaries that have been assumed to apply to the terrorism discourse in general.

While it is not integral to the main plot, there is one small scene between the Secretary of Homeland Security and Hermione that directly speaks to the intention-perception cycle. They have been discussing how the department should deal with a terrorist threat, and the Secretary says: “My trouble is... I love this damn country so much I can’t imagine why anybody would want to bring it down. What do these people have to offer instead? More Taliban—more oppression of women, more blowing up statues of Buddha.”²⁸⁷ The Secretary embodies the perspective of the public (the American public in this particular case), baffled by the notion that terrorists—anybody for that matter—would want to destroy the United States and everything that it stands for, especially when the societies that terrorists would build if they had the chance to would be much worse of than American society. He puts terrorists on a lower, more inferior level, arguing that all they are good for is oppressing women, blowing up statues, and killing their own children. This primitive, barbaric depiction of terrorists shows the dehumanization that occurs on the side of the public. In response to this, Hermione presents the other side of the argument: “They fear losing something, something precious to them... So precious they will sacrifice their own children to it. It happens in this country too. The marginal sects, where some charismatic leader seals them off from

²⁸⁷ Updike, *Terrorist*, 258.

common sense.”²⁸⁸ What Hermione highlights is that even though terrorists have different goals and different means of achieving those goals, they operate on the same desire to preserve (and fight) for the things that matter to them, emphasizing that the United States also uses extreme means to achieve its objectives.

A final comment made in *Terrorist* that addresses the intention-perception cycle is when Charlie talks to Ahmad about the foreign policy of the U.S. administration under President George W. Bush:

“War is cruel, but not the men who wage it necessarily... That was Georgie. He learned to take what came, to fight guerrilla-style: hit and hide, hit and hide. He retreated but he never gave up. He was the Ho Chi Minh of his day. We were like Hamas. We were Al Qaida... He showed the world what can be done against the odds, against a superpower. He showed—and this is where Vietnam and Iraq come in—that in a war between an imperialist occupier and the people who actually live there, the people will eventually prevail.”²⁸⁹

Similar to what Updike does with the inversion of Charlie’s and Mr. Chehab’s perspective, Charlie flips the narrative of the terrorist versus the terrorized/counterterrorist. He likens the United States to Hamas and Al Qaeda in the sense that it has invaded, disrupted and destroyed communities it had no business being in, referencing U.S. involvement in Vietnam and Iraq, both of which are considered to be two of America’s biggest foreign policy failures. Perhaps the most profound part of this excerpt is the first line: “war is cruel, but not the men who wage it necessarily.” Using Charlie, Updike shows the readers that if a U.S. President can be afforded humanity and understanding despite making decisions that have led to an obscene amount of violence

²⁸⁸ Updike, *Terrorist*, 258.

²⁸⁹ Updike, *Terrorist*, 181.

and destruction, than why can't terrorists be afforded the same humanity and understanding?

The Reluctant Fundamentalist

Hamid presents the other face of the intention-perception cycle: the perception of individuals who see the brutality and violence inflicted by Western superpowers, which in turn radicalizes them to join terrorist organizations. In the matter of the U.S.-Britain bombing campaign in Afghanistan, Changez “[avoided] the evening news, preferring not to watch the partisan and sports-event-like coverage given to the mismatch between the American bombers with their twenty-first-century weaponry and the ill-equipped and ill-fed Afghan tribesmen below.”²⁹⁰ In his mind, these conflicts are so asymmetrical on the side of the United States that it is inhumane and disproportionate, which is what led Changez to the conclusion that the only way to get these great powers to step down is through unconventional force. The dehumanization of one side directly results in the dehumanization of the other as a response, which then fuels the motivations—and colors the narratives—of both sides to eliminate one another. Changez explains this in more depth in talking about the role of America on the international stage:

“As a society, you were unwilling to reflect upon the shared pain that united you with those who attacked you. You retreated into myths of your own difference, assumptions of your own superiority. And you acted out these beliefs on the stage of the world, so that the entire planet was rocked by the repercussions of your tantrums... Such an America had to be stopped in the interests not only of the rest of humanity, but also in your own.”²⁹¹

²⁹⁰ Hamid, *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*, 99.

²⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 168.

Here, Changez explicitly calls out the United States (comprised of the government, the public, and the press/media) for subscribing to “myths” and “assumptions” that are then fed back into the “stage of the world.” He also brings the belief of American “difference” and “superiority” to attention, which is a significant contributing factor to the dehumanization of the opposition.

Like DeLillo in *Mao II*, Hamid also highlights the power of storytelling as a device to humanize what has been dehumanized. In *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*, there is a scene where Changez is explaining to the American how he was someone mumbled “fucking Arab” to him while he was walking down the streets of New York, to which he responds with “Say it to my face, coward, not as you run and hide,” even though Changez is not Arab.²⁹² It is implied that the American asked what the man looked like, and Changez tells him that he “cannot now recall the man’s particulars,” but “surely it is the gist that matters... it is the thrust of one’s narrative that counts, not the accuracy of one’s details.”²⁹³ In other words, Changez was signaling to the American that he was focusing on the wrong parts of the story; he was so concerned about the physicality the man who insulting Changez that he disregarded the fact that he had said something that was not only rude and inappropriate, but also completely false.

Even if Hamid did not mean for this to be a parallel, the distinction between the “accuracy of [the] details” and the “thrust of [the] narrative” is comparable to the distinction between the function of academia and the function of fiction. On one hand, academia grounds itself in the details: the theories to explain patterns and trends in the world, the data to empirically display that the theory applies to the real world, and the

²⁹² Hamid, *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*, 118.

²⁹³ Ibid.

analysis to understand the implications of this theory. But while these details are incredibly important to understanding complex and nuanced concepts like terrorism, it does little in the way of language or style to actively engage and move the reader. On the other hand, this is what fiction does best: to make the reader feel and reflect on things they would not otherwise think about through an evocative story with a plot, a setting, and characters that operate within it. Although fiction may forego the application of theory and omit indicative facts or data, it still captures the *gist* that Hamid is talking about, and that is where the power lies. And this power, which harnesses people's creativity, empathy, and receptiveness, is what allows us to see and accept each other for what makes us the same, instead of what makes us "other."

CONCLUSION

Even though fiction, by definition, is a distortion of reality, it can present a more nuanced and complex depiction of terrorism through relaying a narrative using a more intimate, emotional, and individual lens. This is not to diminish the incredible value and significance of academic theories and explanations, as they work to showcase the variations of characterizations and pathways of the terrorist profile. What the best novels do is take these multi-dimensional explanations and put them in the context of a story, enabling the reader not just to engage with these ideas, but to empathize with, relate to, and truly understand the perspective and journey of the terrorist. As Jackson puts it, “discourses are never completely hegemonic; there is always room for counter-hegemonic struggle and subversive forms of knowledge.”²⁹⁴ The novel can be one of such subversive forms. As a caveat, I say “best” novels because the novels that were selected for my thesis were based on recommendations from academics. This means that they were vetted and chosen for their complexity, nuance and insight. I am certain that there are plenty of fiction novels that do subscribe to the one-dimensional.

To be clear, though I am arguing that it is important to be able to be open to understanding the mental, psychological and emotional motivations of individuals who become terrorists, I am not arguing that the violent acts they commit are morally permissible. Like all human beings who inflict harm on others for their self-interest, terrorists should be subject to the consequences of their horrible actions, but casting them in an animalistic, barbaric, subhuman light is not going to help with that process. Nevertheless, it is important to rehumanize terrorists because terrorism functions on

²⁹⁴ Jackson, “Constructing Enemies; ‘Islamic Terrorism’,” 425.

people, not organizational structures or territory or weapons. It is the individuals that create the bombs and harness the fear, and if we cannot understand what motivates the way they think and operate, then we do not have chance at trying to prevent or protect against terrorism.

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