ATTRIBUTING TERRORISM

The Notion of Blame in Post-9/11 Literature

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September 11ᵗʰ 2001. Two hijacked planes crash into the Twin Towers in New York, a third plane hits the Pentagon, and the last, though missing its target, is aimed at Washington D.C. (*Inside 9/11*). 2,996 People die as a direct consequence of the attacks (Ball) and years later 1,140 people who work at the scene will be diagnosed with cancer due to the toxic smoke (Evans).

Most people have blamed Al-Qaeda, an islamic terrorist organisation lead by Osama bin Laden, from the very start, even though bin Laden directly denied his group's involvement in the attacks. "I stress," he said at the time, "that I have not carried out this act, which appears to be carried out by individuals with their own motivation" ("Pakistan"). However, when more footage started to appear his initial denial turned out to have been a lie ("Transcript"). Right before the U.S. presidential election of 2004, bin Laden acknowledged Al-Qaeda's responsibility for the incidents on 9/11, and said the reason behind it was that "we are free … and we want to regain freedom for our nation. As you undermine our security we undermine yours" (Michael). He also said that he himself was indeed the leader ("Al-Jazeera"). In a video found in September 2006, bin Laden is seen preparing the attacks with Ramzi bin al-Shibh and two hijackers Hamza al-Ghamdi and Wail al-Sheri ("Bin Laden"), which for most people unquestionably affirmed his connection.

The novels *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close* by Jonathan Safran Foer and *Falling Man* by Don DeLillo deal with characters influenced by the 9/11 terrorist attacks. One of the most important issues they try to deal with is who should be blamed for what happened that day. However, the notion of blame in these novels is not restricted to the actual attacks: as a consequence of them, many of the characters contemplate previously made decisions. Although several critics, whose theories will be discussed later, have looked at character's behaviour in the novels, there appears to be no previous research linking the way in which

characters attribute to psychological theories on the matter. Consistent with the theories by Harold Kelley, Miles Hewstone and Jos Jaspars, and Edward Jones and Keith Davis, blame in these novels is linked to the characters' upbringing and their environment. This essay will first explain the attribution theories mentioned before, then it will look at some previous critics' works, and next there will be an in depth analysis of the two novels, connecting the discussed theories of blame with some of the main characters.

Blame

Many psychologists have tried to wrap their minds around the notion of blame. In essence, all theories evolving from that deal with "how the social perceiver uses information to arrive at a causal explanation for events. [They examine] what information is gathered and how it is combined in causal judgement" (Fiske and Taylor). One of the pioneers in this field of psychology was Harold Kelley with his Covariation Model (Hewstone and Jaspars 663). Using interdependence as a basis, he "suggested that for many problems in social psychology, the relevant causal factors are persons (P), stimuli (S), times (T), and modalities of interaction with stimuli (M)" (Kelley and Michela 462). In his attribution theory, Kelley claims the three aspects which people consider when attributing are consistency, distinctiveness and consensus (Kelley and Michela 462).

The following story will illustrate these three terms. Imagine that in a relationship the wife, Sarah, always blames her husband, Peter, for any negative events. Acquaintances and friends, however, believe other factors are reasons for those events. Moreover, it turns out that this woman always attributes her problems to other people instead of considering whether she might be causing them. In this case, consistency is high, because Sarah always blames Peter. From Sarah's point of view, consensus is low, as most people do not agree with her opinion. Distinctiveness, a term used to "refer to whether [she] endorses a certain position only for a

particular attitude object or for other similar attitude objects as well" (Ziegler, Diehl, Zigon, and Fett 353), is low due to the fact that Sarah always blames other people as well; Peter is no exception. In order to clarify, the next situation will illustrate the exact opposite – low consistency, high distinctiveness, and high consensus. Sarah blames Peter for a certain incident, and people in her environment agree with this. Usually, Sarah never blames other people for negative events in her life.

Kelley stated that considering these three aspects would lead to a circumstantial attribution (Orvis, Cunningham, and Kelley 607), but some psychologists argue this is not necessarily the case. Hewstone and Jaspars conclude that when there is low consensus, people make a personal attribution, meaning attributing internally – in a sense blaming themselves. However, if they are all high, there would be a stimulus attribution which means blaming the stimulus who usually is another person. Only when the consensus is high and distinctiveness and consistency are low, is the attribution circumstantial (664-665).

Also based upon Kelley is the Correspondent Inference Theory by Jones and Davis, which,

> [The theory] suggests that the "actor and his act" form a natural cognitive unit, where the act usually reflects a corresponding disposition in the actor. … Thus upon witnessing a performance by an actor that is indicative of vast general knowledge, an observer initially may draw a favorable inference about the actor's store of knowledge. That observer, however, might also recognize that the actor's performance was facilitated by a role which specifically allowed the display of idiosyncratic knowledge of obscure fact and accordingly adjust the inference to reflect this role-conferred, self-presentation advantage. Such adjustments may typically be inadequate to reflect the full causal impact of the constraints (Johnson, Jemmott, and Pettigrew 568).

Thus, besides using distinctiveness, consistency, and consensus in the same way as Hewstone and Jaspar, it "[clarifies] the major variables involving in extracting information about dispositions from observed acts" (Jones and Harris 2).

While these theories all seem very similar, they are complementary which is why applying them will facilitate a thorough analysis of the characters' behaviour in terms of attribution. Kelley's idea provided a base, introducing the terms consistency, distinctiveness and consensus. Hewstone and Jaspars presented a more detailed method to interpret them, and Jones and Davis added a specific account of the various actors who play a role in attribution. As the theories are all relevant in all cases of blame in the novels, it can be said that they portray realistic and complex characters with genuine traits.

Microcosms or Individuals

Many critics have indulged in exploring *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close* and *Falling Man.* Especially in terms of psychology they have already been analysed quite exhaustively. The research discussed in this section concern trauma, which is closely related to blame. Most critics try to understand the characters as signifying larger entities, for example all America. This results in very general remarks and the individual is almost ignored and pushed into the background.

Kristiaan Versluys explores the point of view of *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close,* and indirectly addresses the notion of attribution. He argues that,

this book launches a strong plea for tolerance, refusing to take sides. Or, more precisely, it takes the side of the victims, irrespective of their national origin or allegiance. As such, the individualisation of pain unsettles revanchist scenarios and speaks loud and clear against the nationalist recuperation of personal tragedies. The novel opposes its indirect, quasi-poetic treatment of 9/11 to a facile, fetishistic

narrative that simplistically reduces the issues involved to a pitched battle of "us"

versus "them" or good versus evil (Versluys 82-83).

Thus, although Versluys stops short of explicitly stating so, blame is a grand theme in this

novel. He approaches it as a global issue rather than looking at how it affects individuals.

However, he talks about feelings as well, saying "The traumatized people at the center of this

novel have experienced an event so shattering that it becomes nearly impossible to put their

lives back together again" (83). While he discusses both blame and personal trauma, he does

not connect the two.

Philippe Codde looks at the novel in a similar way. Although analysing the story using

a thoroughly different approach – by comparing it to an ancient myth – he also explains how

9/11 has left its scars on the world as a whole in the society created by Foer, and looks at how,

consequently, this influences individuals. He also wonders whether the novel is an accurate

representation of "a painful past that is by definition inaccessible"(241). Perhaps, he argues,

this is more because of "the recentness … of the historical crises of 9/11, than by balanced

considerations of artistic representation" (241). People are judging the novel while the event

is so fresh in their memory that they feel the need to address its political approach. By

bringing this up, Codde also raises the idea of blame. However, in this case, it is the readers

who are attributing, and not the characters in the novel.

In her essay on several of DeLillo's texts, including *Falling Man*, Linda Kauffman

talks about how the works "describe the disconnect between America's self-image and its

image in the eyes of the world"(353). She explains that DeLillo juxtaposes America and Al-

Qaeda. Kauffman then considers what "historical and psychological factors produced young

men who willingly committed suicide" (367). She links this to dematerialisation gathering

evidence throughout *Falling Man,* and finding DeLillo uses Alzheimer's as a "metaphor for

the post-9/11 condition" (368). As a result of the terrorist attacks, people feel lost as to their

identity and place in society. However, just as Versluys in his analyses of Foer's novel, Kauffman mainly focuses on the impact it had on the entire society, and not on individual characters.

While Joseph Conte says that in "*Falling Man*, DeLillo focuses his narrative on the traumatic experience and the personal restitution of one man, Keith Neudecker" (561), he does not fully put the emphasis on this character. He does, however, talk about "attribution of guilt" (563). Even though he looks at it in terms of the attacks, he, similar to the previously mentioned critics, looks at the question whether America got "what it deserved" or not (563), rather than looking at individuals.

There appears to be some critical consensus that the characters represent the entirety of society and therefore they are likely to think DeLillo and Foer portray completely different worlds as a consequence of the terrorist attacks. By contrast, the following sections will treat the characters as individuals, not symbolising anything but themselves. It will then become clear that the fact that the direct environment in the novels may be distinct, but this does not mean one of them is less lifelike. Psychological theories can generate a conclusion on the accuracy of the realistic portrayal of these characters.

Three Generations of Blame

The Novel *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close* by Jonathan Safran Foer is about a young boy, Oskar, whose father, Thomas, was killed in the 9/11 attacks. Some years after the attacks, the boy finds a key which is labelled 'Black' and Oskar tries to find both the owner of the key, and what it might have meant for his father. He assumes Black is the surname of the owner, and thus makes a list of all Blacks living in New York, and starts visiting them alphabetically. Throughout this journey, Oskar's character develops. He deals with his father's death, and eventually comes to appreciate that neither he nor his mother can be

blamed for what happened on "the worst day" (Foer 11). The side plot of the novel deals with Oskar's grandparents and their flawed relationship. It becomes clear that the boy's behaviour is much like that of his grandparents, but he is also influenced by his mother's way of dealing with her loss. Applying the theories of blame introduced before will help understand these characters' actions and the reasons why they attribute either personally or circumstantially.

Oskar's grandmother on his father's side is one of the most influential people in his life. Part of the novel is actually narrated by her, which allows readers insight into her life, as well as a different generation's perspective on the attacks. This is even more important because she used to live in Dresden at the time of the bombing of this city in 1945. She lost most of her family there, which explains part of the way she behaves as a result of losing her son. Even though when she has just found out her son may be dead she is genuinely upset, the fact that her narrative focuses on her past, indicates that that has had more impact on her. However, this is also triggered by recent events, namely the return of her husband who had left her when she was pregnant with Thomas. They have quite a complicated past, as he was first in love with her sister, Anna, who died in the bombings. Throughout the novel, the sense is created that Anna's younger sister is merely a substitute for his first love. It is clear that Oskar's grandmother is very much aware of this and therefore their relationship does not appear to be very healthy as they were living through certain rules to make life bearable and make their house "feel more of a home" (Foer 185) . Their miserable relationship, grandma believes, is her fault. Although she never explicitly says so, her compliant behaviour when he leaves her for good is evidence for it. She has a feeling he will not return, but does not try to stop him (Foer 185). However, when grandfather comes back, she says she "can forgive [him] for leaving" (Foer 274), which indicates she does blame him now, years later. This may be because she is now able to look at the situation from a distance which allows her to think about the separate aspects, P, S, T, and M, and therefore make a better circumstantial

contribution. There is no indication whatsoever of other people in their lives, none of the theories can really be applied as there is no way of saying whether there is consensus. Because her narrative almost only focusses on her relationship with grandfather, it cannot be determined whether her behaviour is consistent, either.

The parts written from the perspective of Oskar's grandfather are also focussed on blame. This character, too, blames himself for everything that has gone wrong in his life. He feels guilty for leaving his wife, despite the fact that she thinks she is to blame. Even more so, he feels guilty for ever marrying her as a replacement for Anna. Leaving, he thought, was the only option to give both her and himself a second chance at life. However, when he is talking about his life after he had left, it appears as though he regretted his choice immediately, realising his love for his wife was not contingent upon her resemblance to her sister. This becomes clearest when they discuss their love lives since they had parted. Neither of them had been able to feel attached to anyone since. It is impossible to apply theories to this situation because there is no indication of consensus. However, grandfather's narrative also focusses on other issues, mainly on him not seeing his son, about which he feels guilty too. There is thus a certain degree of consistency – he blames himself in both cases. Yet, rationally, there is nobody else to blame as he left and never contacted Thomas, even though he had written letters. When he is at the airport trying to get to New York, he explains to someone that the letters he is holding are letters to Thomas, and that he "wasn't able to send them to him while he was alive. Now he's dead" (Foer 268). He wants to go back to his wife, and make up for the lost time, although he knows he can never do so. His son will be forever gone, and he will never have met him. He cannot forgive himself for it, and thus attributes internally. Although there is no certainty, it can be expected that consensus on this issue is high, as he is the one who left his son, and although perhaps his circumstances left him no choice, there is nobody else who can be blamed.

Since his father's died, Oskar and his mother have been living alone. She grieves

quietly in order to try to remain strong for her son. It is not until the very ending of the novel

that she opens up to Oskar, explaining that she had been keeping a secret as well. She, just

like Oskar, had received a phone call from his father and never told anyone about it. While

explaining this to Oskar, she starts crying and Oskar tells the readers that this was "the first

time since Dad died that [he]'d seen her not try to stop her tears" (Foer 324). Throughout the

novel there are no indications of her attributing at all, which may be a consequence of her

introverted form of mourning. The only ways in which there is insight given into her

behaviour is through Oskar, who at points becomes quite upset because he thinks she does not

miss Dad. As this is part of Oskar's behaviour rather than that of his mother's, this will be

discussed in a later section which deals with Oskar's attribution.

When then looking at the protagonist himself, the first question which needs to be

answered is whether Oskar's behaviour has changed since 9/11. While there is only little

information about his life before the attacks, one recurring event is significant: his father

setting up scavenger hunts for Oskar to help the boy to become less socially introverted, as in

order to solve these quests, he would have to talk to strangers. Assuming this method yielded

results, having done no exploring since his father's passing has undone much of it, for in the

beginning of the novel the protagonist appears extremely shy and introverted. Moreover, a

trait which can be assumed was not part of Oskar before his father's death is his busy mind.

Whenever something reminds him of 9/11, he starts inventing things which would have

helped his father to survive. While this could have been something he had been doing all his

life considering his adventurous mind set, the specifics of the inventions, all having to do with

the attacks or its consequences, indicates this could not have occurred before 9/11. When

given only the slightest opportunity to go back to life before his father's death, he seizes the

occasion with both hands, i.e. finding the lock to which the key belongs. The minute he sets

out on this adventure, there is a change in character as the quest requires him to talk to many people, and instantly he appears to become less shy. This certainly helps Oskar process his loss, but what even more so does, is the fact that he starts talking about it. He is much more comfortable talking about personal feelings to strangers than he is to his family. This has to do with a secret he has been keeping ever since 9/11: when Oskar came home that day and nobody else was, his father had already called a number of times and left some messages and he even called once when the boy was home, but he was so scared he could not pick up. He feels he has failed his father when he needed him most (Foer 301). Oskar immediately bought an identical answering machine and hid the old one, still secretly listening to the messages every once in a while. Although until the ending of the novel, he never tells anyone about them, it is as though he is less afraid of mentioning it when talking to strangers. It would not matter much if they found out, but his mother or grandmother should never know about it. Interestingly, once he has spoken with some of the Blacks he becomes more open towards his family, although as mentioned before, the secret remains a secret. This is not necessarily beneficial to Oskar, though, as he starts blaming himself and even hurting himself for it.

The fact that he does not share his feelings results in this self-attribution, as there is no one to tell him that in this situation nobody is to be blamed. Oskar however, feels there is, and as there is nobody else in the scenario, he can but blame himself which can be explained when looking at Kelley's system. As mentioned in the introduction, this theory says a certain amount of causal factors should be present in order to make a considered attribution. However, no other persons or stimuli are involved and because he is so young and does not truly understand the situation, especially not in the moment itself, he cannot interpret the events well enough to fill in the blanks – i.e. P, S, T and M (Kelley 462). Consequently, he makes a personal attribution. Whether Jaspar's and Hewstone's theory of internal attribution is applicable depends on consensus, but as nobody else is even aware of what Oskar is

feeling, there are no other people who can share their opinion which means that consensus cannot be determined. Discarding this aspect of their theory leads to the conclusion that indeed the boy would have made an internal attribution, for consistency is high - it is typical of Oskar's behaviour, and consequently distinctiveness is low. As Jones' and Davis' ideas depend on copying other people's behaviour, this cannot be applied in this particular case, since Oskar is keeping it a secret. If there had been more background information about his parent's behaviour, there might have been a parallel in the response.

Research has shown that since 9/11 there has been an increase of racism towards Muslims and other ethnic groups in the United States (Kampf and Sen; Wise). Applying all the theories used in this paper, racism can easily be explained. First off, consensus is high: many people blame the Islamic culture. It depends on each individual whether consistency and distinctiveness are low or high, meaning their opinion is not merely circumstantial for these aspects have to do with their own personality. As said before, the Correspondent Inference Theory says that if many people around someone are racist, the latter will be very susceptible to it as well. Nowhere throughout the novel, is there a clear indication that any character who influences Oskar is racist, which would, according Kelley, mean he is not racist, and this is consistent with the first impression people will have. Oskar himself also stresses this, and even makes a rule that he can never be racist (Foer 87). However, when he lists things that make him feel panicky since 9/11, these include "Arab people on the subway … [and] Arab people in restaurants, coffee shops and other public places" (Foer 36). He then again stresses the fact that he is not racist, but by generalising the ethnic group, he is discriminating against. When he then adds "people with moustaches … [and] turbans" (Foer 36) to the list, he does not feel the need to apologise even though these add to the stereotype of the terrorist. The question is whether this can be seen as true racism, as he is scared of anything that has to do with the attacks. Not only the terrorists themselves and places which

would be "obvious target[s]" (Foer 194) frighten the boy, but also activities or things that seem more arbitrary such as "taking showers …, getting into elevators … suspension bridges, germs, airplanes, fireworks, scaffolding, sewers [and] shoes", which means overcoming anything which he relates to September 11th, is a difficult step to take. He understands who has committed the crime, even though in the beginning of the novel his arbitrary blaming, aggressive fits, and inventions will, by many readers, be attributed to the fact that he is so young he cannot possibly understand what is going on.

His inventions, too, seem naïve. He thinks how a skyscraper of which the floors move, and the elevator stays in its place would be convenient, for then, "if you're on the ninety-fifth floor, and a plane hits below you, the building could take you to the ground, and everyone would be safe" (Foer 3). Oskar thinks of numerous other things which would have allowed his father to have survived the day. The term "inventing" even becomes the generic wording for thinking about what happened to his father. "I need to know how he died," he tells his grandfather, "…[s]o I can stop inventing how he died. I'm always inventing" (Foer 256). He continues explaining that this form of inventing also entails looking at pictures and videos of falling men, trying to identify his father. His designs having nothing to do with the actual cause of the attacks, would lead many readers to believe he does not know what really happened. However, when one of the Blacks Oskar visits tells him he can relate in his own way, because he once had a dog who ran away, Oskar is offended and says that his "dad didn't run away … he was killed in a terrorist attack" (Foer 149). A similar incident happens when he meets a Mr Black who makes cards on which he writes the name of people whom he thinks are important, "and a one-word biography" (Foer 157). The boy finds out there is a card for Mohammed Atta, who was said to have flown the first plane (Fouda) and was likely to have coordinated the attacks (Bernstein), but none for his father, and he becomes angry. This all indicates Oskar thus knows the attacks were in fact the terrorist's fault, but he feels

the need to blame someone physically, which is why he sometimes reacts angrily and upset towards people who in fact did nothing wrong, especially his mother.

When Oskar misses his dad greatly and believes his mother does not at all, he shouts out that if he "could have chosen, [he] would have chosen [her]!" (Foer 171). Although he immediately realises how much he has hurt his mother and wants to take it back, she replies that "[y]ou can't take something like that back" (Foer 172). Even though he regrets what he had just said, when he finds out his mother has seen his bruises and she has not asked about them, he writes:

> I DON'T PUT THEM THERE FOR HER, BUT I STILL WANT HER TO ASK ME
> HOW I GOT THEM (EVEN THOUGH SHE PROBABLY KNOWS) AND TO FEEL
> SORRY FOR ME (BECAUSE SHE SHOULD REALISE HOW HARD THINGS
> ARE FOR ME), AND TO FEEL TERRIBLE (BECAUSE AT LEAST SOME OF IT
> IS HER FAULT), AND TO PROMISE ME THAT SHE WON'T DIE AND LEAVE
> ME ALONE. BUT SHE DIDN'T SAY ANYTHING (Foer 172-3).

While this appears to be full of hatred, under close inspection it turns out it is in fact a desperate cry out of love and fear . First of all, he says he does not want to be left alone; he wants her to love him and stay with him forever. This note thus seems an exclamation of fear rather than anger: Oskar does not want his mother to suddenly disappear, like his father did. The way Oskar attributes here, is difficult to explain with the theories mentioned in this paper, for he both blames himself and his mother, whereas he knows neither of them is really to blame for what happened. Kelley's theory comes closest to this, as his theory is based on more factors, being stimuli, times and modalities of interaction with stimuli. It appears that in Oskar's mind, these are not as separated as they should be, consequently confusing the boy: he is not able to confront the person who is to blame, but he needs to blame someone, and usually this is himself. However, his mother behaving oddly puts another person, stimulus and

interaction with this stimulus in the equation, which for once changes his consistency in blaming himself.

Oskar changes greatly in the novel, and in the end he starts realising the facts about his father's death – he had nothing to do with it, and his mother perhaps liking somebody else did not change his death either, nor her grief. He even says that he would like for his mother to fall in love again, for her to be happy again (Foer 324-5). Moreover, when he tells the renter the story about the answering machine, he asks the man whether he forgives him, to which he replies he does (Foer 302). Even though this means he still blames himself, this helps him deal with the pain and his loss. Kelley's theory, that one needs to ponder about every aspect of blame, starts falling into place here, because Oskar indeed starts realising that there are more facets to the events.

It is clear that the characters mostly attribute internally, but for each character the reasons why are different. Oskar does so because he cannot share his feelings and therefore has nobody to help him learn the consensus. Moreover, even though he knows who actually committed the crime, he feels he has to be able to blame someone physically, which is why he sometimes blames his mother. This is in accordance with Kelley's theory, which explains best that blaming is a process of combining certain factors. Because Oskar is still young and does not fully understand the situation, he appears to be confusing the factors. All theories are very dependent on consistency. Oskar constantly blames himself, only breaking this when his mother's behaviour becomes strange to him, thus consistency is high. This, along with a low consensus would make people attribute internally, which is true for Oskar, assuming that when the consensus is unknown to the character himself would mean it is low. For Oskar's grandparents it is harder to determine what the cause of their internal attribution is, because too little is known about their lives. One interesting aspect is grandmother's switch to circumstantial attribution when she has grown older, believing it was not her fault her

husband left her. Kelley's theory is applicable here because he argues one should look at the bigger picture, which she was able to do when she grew older. However, it cannot be said that she fully believes she is not to be blamed because she forgives grandfather for leaving. Considering the Covariation Model again, this is easily explained because even though, indeed, he is the one who left, he did have justifiable reasons for it and filling in the model fully has helped her realise this. Even though Oskar is smart and knowledgeable, his way of attributing still has some traces of naivety which are mostly due to unprocessed grief. A comparison between the young generation to the elderly people in the novel, yields the conclusion that they attribute differently although both starting out in the same place of innocence, which in turn gives hope for Oskar, who in the end of the novel is not entirely cured of internal attribution but will be, if he follows in his grandmother's footsteps.

All-Americans, Muslim Americans & Terrorists

Falling Man by Don DeLillo sets out directly after the 9/11 attacks in New York as a man is wandering through the chaotic city. It becomes clear that this man, Keith, was in one of the towers when the plane hit it and only just got to escape. The rest of this novel follows him and his family trying to re-establish their relationship. Keith turns his life around after the attacks, but it does not appear as if they affected him negatively. His wife Lianne, however, has since become quite offensive towards members of foreign ethnic groups. Their son and his friends, clearly not fully aware of what the attacks entail, deal differently with 9/11, playing games which revolve around the day and terrorists' leader Bill Lawton – which is what they think Bin Laden is called. Theories of attribution are very applicable in this novel, because of the way society seems to be thinking, namely quite consistently that the entire Muslim society is to blame for the attacks.

While the attacks are not truly the main focus of the plot, the novel's themes are greatly influenced by this. One of the main themes is seeing racism as a consequence of the attacks. This is justifiable with the theories of attribution mentioned before, as the consensus towards blaming the Muslim society is high. Characters would thus copy those surrounding them, only adding to the consensus. One significant example of racism in the novel is when Lianne goes to her neighbours to complain about loud Arabic music. While the neighbour, Elena, is just listening to it because she likes it, Lianne claims that they should keep in mind the "circumstances" (DeLillo 150). They start arguing and eventually Lianne starts abusing Elena who tries to hit back but misses (DeLillo 151). When later in the novel Lianne is called for jury duty, she is "excused from serving on the basis of her written response" (DeLillo 276). Considering the trial concerned a Muslim man it can be assumed that her response was prejudiced against him. As the novel does not imply that Lianne's way of thinking is different from or unaccepted by other Americans, readers get the sense that this behaviour is the consensus.

This novel is offers insight into several sorts of people. Not only the all-Americans are allowed to speak their minds about Muslims, Muslims are also allowed to talk on their behalf. Firstly, there is Omar, who is a member of the support group Lianne attends. He explains that he "was afraid to go out in the street the days after. They were looking at him, he thought" (DeLillo 76). A few chapters of the novel are even focussed on the terrorists themselves, who also express a great sense of racism, but towards Americans. "Islam is the struggle against the enemy, near enemy and far, Jews first, for all things unjust and hateful, and then the Americans" (DeLillo 100). Because the Islamic characters featured in this section of the book are all radicals and appear to live in an environment in which they are taught only their people are good virtuous, and infidels are inferior, this can be linked to the theories as consensus is high in their society. Consistency is very high, too, as they do not distinguish very much,

except for the idea of us and them. However, Hammad, whose perspective is taken in those chapters, highly doubts this at one point: "There was the statement that death made the strongest claim of all, the highest jihad. But does a man have to kill himself in order to accomplish something in the world?" (DeLillo 222).

Some characters in *Falling Man* wonder what God's influence was, and when Lianne and her support group write down their thoughts about the attacks, many entries deal with how God could let it happen (DeLillo 76). They "can't forgive God for what he did" (DeLillo 79), someone says, while someone else goes further saying he has lost all respect for God (DeLillo 77). Other people do not believe that God had anything to do with it, comparing it to other arbitrary things in life: "If God let this happen, with the planes, then did God make me cut my finger when I was slicing bread this morning?" (DeLillo 77). A woman in the group explains that she is "closer to God than ever …. This is the devil. This is hell. All that fire and pain. Never mind God. This is hell" (DeLillo 76). In no instance in this part of the novel, are the true culprits, the terrorists, named. Nonetheless, it becomes clear that Lianne actually did want to hear other people's thoughts on the Islam and their influence with regard to the attacks, but "waited, not certain what it was she wanted to hear" (DeLillo 80). Consensus appears relatively low, as there are people who blame God, opposed to people who do not. In the support group, however, consensus is high because people merely look at the aspect of God, rather than other people who may have had something to do with the attacks. This may also have to do with consistency, as it is very likely that the people who turn to God now do so in most situations, although this cannot be proven with content of the novel. Lianne is much influenced by the consensus within the group as she is afraid to bring up what she believes. Seemingly, her consistency is low, adapting her way of attribution to the people she is around. This, however, is only appearance because, as mentioned before, she is in general very clear about whom she thinks are to blame, namely the Muslims, and not a God.

An intriguing aspect of this novel is the way in which the children's innocence is compromised. They are playing around, but their game is greatly impacted by the 9/11 attacks. They're waiting for the planes to strike again and they are also talking in monosyllables - just like Bill Lawton (DeLillo 127). They believe they are in on a secret, knowing this name, and make it their mission to keep it quiet from their parents. However, they still appear extremely naïve in terms of knowing what exactly happened – Keith's and Lianne's son even says the towers never collapsed. This highlights their childishness, despite the violent nature of their game. It seems that they are not actually being racist, and are in fact still untouched by what people around them have said and thus also by consensus. The theories of blame are thus inapplicable to these characters, as they do not feel the need to attribute anything to anyone.

Most of the novel deals with the direct moments after 9/11, but part three starts out depicting life three years after. What is most remarkable is how Keith's life has changed for the better since the attacks. There have been some missteps such as an unwise affair, but it seems as though his experience has not traumatised him at all. As his ex-wife realised it would have been terrible to live without him, she has given him another chance and their life seems to only have improved since. Forgiveness is an important subtheme in this section of *Falling Man*, which is also reflected on the entirety of society, as people are buying the Koran, in order to understand what happened (DeLillo 294). Although it appears Lianne has moved on too, she criticises people who are reading the Koran, and the aforementioned jury duty highlights the fact that Lianne has not changed her views since. The idea of forgiveness ties in with Kelley's Covariation model, as it means people have been thinking about the event, and realise who really are to blame. However, consensus still is that the Islamic culture has much to do with it, resulting in people's unchanged view. At first sight, it seems as if Lianne's behaviour cannot be explained by any of the attribution theories because she seems

uninfluenced by people who surround her. Lianne's conduct shows readers that, although blaming the same group of people as those around her do, she is not yet ready to forgive.

Consensus in this novel is high as most people have resolved to racism as a consequence of 9/11. This is mainly reflected via Lianne, but the impact of this becomes clear when Omar's views are expressed. Racism also seems to be the reason why the attacks took place in the first time, as the sections written from the terrorist's point of view clarify the grudge their group held against the Americans. There appears to be a change in this when characters discuss the influence of God, but in this part, too, consensus is high. People adapting their view to that of others only reinforces this. All theories are thus applicable, as they all depend on high consensus, which means that indeed, people are highly influenced by their environment.

The Importance of the World

Both *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close* and *Falling Man* are historical novels which deal with the consequences of the 9/11 attacks. The contrasting environments the authors created results in different characters who attribute in their own ways. While in *Falling Man* the characters resolve to racism, in Foer's novel they mostly blame themselves. However, this does not mean that one of them is unrealistic in any way, as in both the theories of attribution can be applied.

What should be noted about *Falling Man* is the fact that the main plot is not much concerned with 9/11. Consequently, the insight given into characters thoughts on the attacks is limited. DeLillo focusses on racism but this does not necessarily mean that in the world he created this is the only effect of the attacks. A similar problem is created in *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close*. Although here the attacks are a central theme, the group of people whose thoughts are presented is small and contained within one family. Therefore, although

the novel may give realistic representations of individual characters with regard to attribution, the question remains whether it is an accurate portrayal of the world. Where earlier in this paper it was argued that perhaps previous critics should have focussed more on individuals, it now becomes clear that in order to state the novels are truthful depictions of reality both are important.

Moreover, the field of psychology focussed on in combination with only looking at 9/11, restricts the conclusion which can be drawn thoroughly. Further research could thus be done on whether other traits of the characters are genuine, and it could also examined to what extend the outside world in these novels is realistic. Only if those subjects are established, it can be concluded that either the novelists indeed wrote about a world true to life or not. However, what can be said is that, as the theories of blame are applicable to the characters in the novel, the way in which they attribute is faithful to the way actual people do.

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