

The Representation of Muslim Characters in Post 9/11 Fiction

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Abstract

In the wake of September 11th, attacks, several writers seek to depict the event's impact on the country and its population. However, at the very beginning novelists seem to support the victimization of Americans and accuse the Muslims but later, many voices, including Muslim as well as non-Muslim writers, contribute through giving a voice to the 'enemy', and the American novelist Jess Walter is no exception. This analytical study, then, aims at providing evidence that Walter portrays Muslim characters in his work *The Zero* (2006) and that he does so to deconstruct the idea that Americans are totally innocent and victims while Muslims are the only entity to blame. The present paper, thus, is an attempt to pinpoint that through depicting several characters, including American and Middle Eastern ones, as reacting to the dominating 'truth', Walter seems to be giving a voice to the voiceless and providing readers with a different version of reality. Therefore, the ultimate purpose of this study is to prove that *The Zero* can be considered as a counter-discourse.

Keywords: discourse, Muslim characters, reality, Jess Walter, 9/11 fiction

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The Representation of Muslim Characters in Post 9/11 Fiction

In the wake of September 11th, 2001 attacks, many factors contributed to shaping discourse including media and politics. As a result, issues like religion, Islam in particular, and Muslims as terrorists turned to be serious threats to those in power as well as ordinary people. The latter were mainly affected as a result of the influence of media for their main function “is to shape opinions and presenting a particular version as reality” (Yusof, Hassan, & Osman, 2013, p.105). After the attacks, the only “reality” that dominated the scene was that media “negatively depict Islam by associating it with terrorism” (Yusof, Hassan, & Osman, 2013, p.105), an association that deeply affected the western view of Arabs and Muslims, seeing them as a serious threat they have to fight or get rid of.

In addition to convincing people of Islam as a religion of terror, media “played a significant role in influencing the whole world to morally support the US in protesting against terrorism” (Yusof, Hassan, & Osman, 2013, p.105), a result that proves the power of media in shaping discourse, the 9/11 one in particular. However, in spite of media’s impact on people’s way of thinking, at the beginning, they seemed to be considerate of innocent Muslims. “Similarly, it was only after Americans’ fear of terrorism subsided that they began to reassess Islam in a more negative way” (Smith, 2013, pp.1-2). Again, the change in perspective was due to media’s association of Islam with violence, alleging it as dangerous to culture, in general (Smith, 2013). Consequently, one can say that “anti-Muslim prejudice in the USA is increasingly associated with anti-Muslim media discourses” (Ahmed & Matthes, 2017, p. 231).

As a result of creating this prejudice and hate toward Muslims, a binary opposition was established between Muslim and non-Muslim groups or societies. Shortly after, Muslims were categorized as “them” and presented as a threat to “us” (Ahmed & Matthes, 2017, p. 222). The opposition between “us” and “them” was merely the creation of media and their representation of Muslims as a menace to “white values of democracy and freedom” (Ahmed & Matthes, 2017, p. 231).

However, one has to indicate that despite media’s misrepresentation of Islam and Muslims and the deep impact they caused, many scholars called for re-assessing the negative stigma given to Muslims and rethinking this group’s position as a threat to non-Muslim societies (Ahmed & Matthes, 2017).

In addition to media, politicians also played a major role in constructing Americans’ association of Muslims with terrorism. This was, partly, the result of these politicians’ reaction to the September 11th attacks. For instance, as a direct reaction, president George W. Bush announced his intention to fight terrorists and declared a “War on Terrorism” (Graauwmans, 2007, p.3), which affected many countries, geographically and politically. One of the conclusions of this policy or decision is “the United States’ invasion in Afghanistan and Iraq and the increasing U.S. military presence in Central Asia as a consequence of the war on terrorism” (Graauwmans, 2007, p.3).

Thus, one can say that media and politicians are powerful enough to shape discourse for the latter “can be both an instrument and an effect of power” (Mills, 2003, p.55). This proves that people who are not in positions of power are not able, as it is mentioned above, to create a certain “reality”. In other words, “those in positions of authority who are seen to be ‘experts’ are those who can speak the Truth. Those who make statements who are not in positions of power will be considered not to be speaking the truth” (Mills, 2003, p.58). Thus, the reality related to Muslims as terrorists affected and was believed by a huge number of non-Muslims because it was created by “those in positions of authority” (Mills, 2003, p.58). Furthermore, “[n]ot everyone is able to make statements, or to have statements taken seriously by others. Some statements are more authorized than others, in that they are more associated with those in positions of power or with institutions” (Mills, 2003, p.65). This point reinforces the same idea related to some groups’ inability to “speak the truth” (Mills, 2003, p.58) because they are not powerful enough.

In addition to affecting society, the 9/11 discourse reached also the literary sphere. As a result, several writers highlight the Americans’ innocence and victimization because of the terrorists’ attacks. For instance, the critic Martin Randall clearly mentions “that the dominant discourse has sacralized the 9/11 attacks and ... that this discourse has affected 9/11 literature” (Eikonsalo, 2017, p. 88). This indicates the extent to which the attacks are highlighted and given importance. As a result, most of post 9/11 fiction focus on trauma, be it cultural or psychological. It mainly portrays traumatized characters that face difficulties to cope with their reality as a result of the attacks. As an example, one can mention Don DeLillo’s *Falling Man* (2007). In this work, DeLillo portrays all of Keith, his wife, and their son, Justin as characters who suffer from trauma as a result of the attacks.

DeLillo’s work also captures religion in relation to terrorism and the characters’ suspicion of being religious. For example, Lianne, Keith’s wife, tries to find solace in religion but she is totally afraid of being “consumed by God” (Derosa, 2013). Furthermore, Hammad is depicted as a terrorist. By portraying some American traumatized characters and other Muslim terrorist characters, DeLillo seems to be trying to show the readers “the story of slow reconstruction (the American people slowly recovering from the events) and that of Hammad, whose purpose is inflicting destruction” (Bounar, 2018, p.69). Furthermore, by depicting Hammad as a terrorist, DeLillo seems to be relating the practice of terrorism to God and religion (Bounar, 2018).

Another interesting work that gives special attention to terrorism in relation to Islam and Muslims is John Updike’s *Terrorist* (2006). The latter deals with several Muslim characters, including Ahmad Asmawy Mulloy and his imam, Shaikh Rashid. The latter used to guide Ahmad until he finds himself included in a terrorist cell. The novel, mainly, highlights the idea that Muslim characters are not to be trusted and paints other characters as doubting their behavior and actions. Furthermore, it is always proved that their skepticism proves to be true at the end. Even the place where Muslim characters live in the novel is depicted as risky and troubling. This proves Eikonsalo’s argument when she says: “*Terrorist*, similarly to DeLillo’s *Falling Man*, emphasizes that there is evil walking among us, ready to strike if we do not keep our eyes open” (Eikonsalo, 2017, p. 84). This proves that both writers seem to highlight the fact that Muslim characters are

not to be trusted and that if non-Muslim characters do not keep their ‘eyes open’ (Eikonsalo, 2017, p.84), they can be deceived. This idea, again, proves the effect of the dominant discourse on writers’ way of thinking, believing in one version of reality and one ‘truth’ which is Muslims as bad, terrorists, and violent.

In addition to that, both of DeLillo and Updike try to dig deeper to clarify “the workings of the mind of a terrorist” (Bounar, 2018, p. 69). Thus, one can say that as an effect of 9/11 discourse on religion and terrorism, these two writers, among many others, try to reinforce the negative stigma associated with Islam and Muslims.

As it has been mentioned previously, discourse can be a tool of power but it can also act as “a hindrance, a stumbling block, a point of resistance and a starting point for an opposing strategy” (Mills, 2003, p.55). This means that if there is no discourse, there will be no “resistance”. However, resistance, in this context, does not mean that there is an “oppressor” and a “victim”. Instead, it is explained as a tool for power to be “exercised” (Mills, 2003, p.40).

Referring back to 9/11 discourse, it is very essential to mention that discourse is also “the means of resistance” (Mills, 2003, p.55). And since it is explained as such, one has to indicate that post 9/11 fiction, as previously stated, focuses on the trauma and victimization of non-Muslim characters but still, there appears a large body of other novels that fall under the same category but they try to deconstruct the negative image given to Muslims as terrorists and Islam as a religion of violence.

The group of writers whose works can be considered as a form of resistance to the dominant discourse and as a response to the writers who seemed to be affected by 9/11 discourse try to provide readers with a different version of reality. A reality that is different from the one they used to believe. In such works, the “victim”, who the readers used to sympathize with, turns to be the “victimizer”. To mention just one example among a large body of works that fall under this category, one can mention Mohsin Hamid’s *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* (2007). In this work, “Hamid has done something extraordinary... and for those who want a different voice, a different view of the aftermath of 9/11, *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* is well worth reading” (Bounar, 2018, pp. 81-82).

Additionally, Walter’s *The Zero* apparently contributes to reacting to or resisting discourse. The novel starts with the main character, Remy Brian, who wakes up to find that he has shot himself in the head. Remy is depicted as a traumatized character who faces lots of difficulties remembering what happened to him, to whom he spoke, and whether certain events really happened or he is just imagining. Remy is a character whose main role in the novel is to do investigations about March Selios, who loses a piece of paper in the bus with a recipe written on it. Because the investigators, Remy and his colleagues, find that piece of paper, they start such investigations for they believe this may have a relation with the attacks.

The scholarship on Jess Walter’s *The Zero* has examined the novel from a variety of perspectives. Resano (2017) analyses the novel using a Bakhtinian approach focusing mainly on

his theory of “satirical carnivalization” (p.133) and dialogism. To reach this end, Resano emphasizes Walter’s use of irony and satire as a means to provide readers with his *The Zero* as a counter-discourse.

In her thesis, Olson (2016) relates the characters’ traumatic experiences to Gothicism in selected post 9/11 narratives, including Jess Walter’s *The Zero*. Relying on Cathy Caruth’s trauma theory, the researcher reassesses and challenges the idea that traumatized characters in the selected works are unable to express themselves clearly in relation to their ‘physical’ or psychological situation. Instead, she highlights the characters’ ability to recover, partly, through different ways like seeking revenge and developing unsuccessful and broken relationships with their friends, etc. She analyses these ways by referring to a psychoanalytic approach.

Derosa (2013) also sheds light on writers’ difficulty to differentiate between “otherness” (p.158) and the “fundamentalist other” (p.158) in post 9/11 works. The researcher negates the association of terrorism and fundamentalism with religion. Instead, he suggests that writers have to depict “fundamentalist others” instead of “others” in post 9/11 literature. This means that he uses Walter’s *The Zero* to prove that Americans are not supposed to blame Muslims or Arabs in general and to associate terrorism as a practice with a limited group.

Observing that there is a need for detailed studies that highlight Muslim characters in Walter’s *The Zero* and the latter being a response to 9/11 dominant discourse, the present study aims to take up the lacuna by investigating whether this work can be considered as a counter-narrative and in what ways.

This analytical study, then, aims at providing evidence that Walter portrays Muslim characters in his work *The Zero* (2006) and that he does so to deconstruct the idea that Americans are innocent and victims while Muslims are the only entity to blame. The present study, thus, is an attempt to pinpoint that through depicting several characters, including American and Middle Eastern ones (who are depicted as Muslims), as reacting to the dominating truth, Walter seems to be giving a voice to the voiceless and providing readers with a different version of reality. Therefore, the ultimate purpose of this research is to prove that *The Zero* can be considered as a counter-discourse and to come up with meaningful interpretations of this aspect; something that may enrich the meaning of this novel and add to its appreciation as a literary work.

After making a close reading to Jess Walter’s *The Zero* (2006), the researchers notice that there are several characters in the novel that seem to be influenced by the 9/11 dominant discourse, explained above, because they talk negatively about Middle Eastern characters while others appear to be countering that discourse either through their dialogue or actions. But one has to raise an essential question which is related to whether Walter’s depiction of the characters as such is purposeful.

To start with, at the very beginning of the novel, the boss clearly states: “*If we do not make a fundamental accounting of what was lost, if we do not gather up the paper and put it all back,*

then the forces aligned against us have already won. They've. Already. Won" (Walter, 2006, p.19). Here, the boss seems to be very careful not to lose the war against the enemy. The idea of gathering the paper here is symbolic as he is trying to influence ordinary people and urge them to unite and not to give the enemy the opportunity to win.

Another instance where the same character clearly emphasizes the fact that Middle Easterners are Americans' enemies is when he says:

These bastards hate our freedoms. Our way of life. ...They hate our very . . . economic well-being. This is a war we fight with wallets and purses, by making dinner reservations and going to MOMA, by having drinks at the Plaza. And we will fight back. We will fight back even if it means that every American sits through Tony and Tina's goddamn Wedding! (Walter, 2006, p.19)

This indicates this character's motivation by a deep conviction for he strongly argues that people who he considers as the "other" are jealous of the western "way of life" (Walter, 2006, p.19), "freedom" (Walter, 2006, p.19), etc.

It has been noticed that whenever the opportunity comes to the boss to talk about what he calls "the enemy", he tries, in a way or another, to reinforce the same idea and the same truth associated with the Middle East. For instance, when Remy seems to be confused and feels, to a certain extent, guilty, he strongly tries to remove these ideas from his mind by saying:

"Come on. What are you afraid of?"

"That I'm causing something bad to happen."

The Boss laughed. "That you're *causing* it? That's a little grandiose, isn't it? Look around you, Brian. We live in a divided world. You and I didn't make that up. We didn't make up the hole in the heart of this city, or the people who want to see our way of life destroyed. Whatever is happening now was going to happen whether we were involved or not. (Walter, 2006, p.298)

Through this example, the Boss emphasizes Remy's and all the Americans' innocence as he is trying badly to encourage Remy not to think of guilt.

The same character, Remy, is depicted as unable to remember what happens to him or to whom he speaks. In addition to that, the doctor, by the end of the novel, informs Remy that he cannot see well and that he has never seen such a kind of ill vision in a human being. This is metaphorical for it may symbolize some Americans' difficulty of seeing the truth, especially because Walter himself declares:

I wanted Brian Remy to be an unwilling hero, blinded in every way, to his own acts and to the motivations of others. Most of all, though, I wanted him to feel what I think most of us feel: confused and frightened, a helpless man of the very best intentions. (J.Walter, personal communication, n.d.)

The impact of the discourse shaped about the Middle Easterners as a threat is highlighted because one notices that several Middle Eastern characters received alarming letters. An example that well illustrates the situation is the case of Mahoud when he

opened the bag and showed [Remy and Markham] a note. In red block letters it read: “Go home, camel-fucker. We know where you live.” Paper-clipped to the note was a wrinkled pink triangle of skin.

“Is that a pig’s ear?” asked Markham.

“Some jerk’s idea of a big joke, yes?” Mahoud said. “Give a Muslim the ear of a pig.” He frowned bitterly at the two men. “I can’t even look at it, I get so mad. My son is in the American army. My son!” Mahoud’s eyes teared up. (Walter, 2006, p.111)

In the light of this quotation, one can conclude that Middle Eastern characters are mistreated in the novel. Although Mahoud is very serious and worried about his son because of the threats he is receiving through letters, Markham seems to ridicule him.

In relation to the same idea, it is quite essential to mention that Muslims are seen as the same whether they are American citizens or not. For instance, when Mahoud tells Remy and Markham that he

put up a sign ... that said, “I am Pakistani not Arab!” but do you know what I think? I think I should not have to do that. I think in this country I should not have to explain that I am not a terrorist. I think these things are not anyone’s business but my own. He was worked up. He wiped his mouth. (Walter, 2006, p.112)

While discussing this issue, the two investigators keep saying to him “right” (Walter, 2006, p.112), which indicates that they agree with him and see him as innocent but at the end, Markham tells him that they have to take seriously only the issues that are considered as “actual violence” (Walter, 2006, p.112). This means that they see Mahoud’s problem as trivial and he has to be hurt, maybe physically, in order to be considered as a victim.

In addition to that, Mahoud’s explanation that he is not an Arab and saying: “I think in this country I should not have to explain that I am not a terrorist. I think these things are not anyone’s business but my own” (Walter, 2006, p.112) demonstrates that as an ordinary man, he will not change anything by saying that. What matters is that he himself is convinced or sure he is not a terrorist because he is not in a position of power so that what he utters will be considered as the truth. Furthermore, he is seen with suspicious eyes that is why whether to explain that he is not a terrorist or not, his efforts will be in vain.

The Americans’ deep impulse and insistence on defeating the enemy is proved again when Remy reads the following sign: “Our enemies should know this about the American people, which will not rest until Evil is defeated” (Walter, 2006, p.157). This quote confirms the fact that western characters are trying, by all means, to instill the idea of fighting in people.

Another example that delineates the same point is when Nicole says: “It’s a war, now, honey. This is about defending our values. Because they will beat you to death for a dime on the sidewalk. And the only way to deal with that kind of aggression is to beat *them* to death for a nickel” (Walter, 2006, p.184). Through this extract, it is clear that almost all the investigators support one idea which is to clean the country from the enemy’s threat.

Now, it is quite interesting to mention that although a surface reading of *The Zero* may view those characters as the effect of discourse and power, a thorough one reveals that Walter has a different purpose which is, as he clearly mentions in his conversation with the literary editor Amy Grace Loyd, the fact that the novel is a “satire about us, about the collective post-traumatic stress that we’ve suffered and the way we’ve retreated into a cocoon lined with real-estate listings and 401K updates while truly frightening measures are undertaken on our behalf” (J.Walter, personal communication, n.d.). This means that although he creates the character of Remy as a traumatized one and the whole story as revolving around investigations about 9/11, his goal is to satirize their reaction to the event.

When it comes to Muslim characters, Walter depicts some of them as innocent and others as real terrorists. When Assan, a Middle Eastern character, is asked about Bishir Madain, another Middle Eastern character, he keeps responding kindly to Markham although the latter uses some harsh words sometimes and the following example well illustrates this idea:

“my brother is in Saudi Arabia. He used to raise money for Islamic studies. He worked with Bishir on a program with exchange students.”

“I don’t care about that, Assan.” Markham got closer, until his voice was hardly more than a whisper. “I care about one question. Answer one question and it gets better. Where is Bishir?”

“I told them ...I do not know where Bishir is.”

“You haven’t told *me*, Assan.” (Walter, 2006, p. 135)

This simple example shows Assan’s kind response although the harsh words of Markham seem to be provocative. This, of course, gives readers a hint about Walter’s apparent attempt to provide us with a different picture of Muslims.

Walter’s belief in the subjectivity of reality is clear when a Middle Eastern character approaches Remy and tells him:

You’re always convincing yourselves that the world isn’t what it is, that no one’s reality matters except your own. That’s why you make such poor victims. You can’t truly know suffering if you know nothing about rage. And you can’t feel genuine rage if you won’t acknowledge loss. (Walter, 2006, p. 221)

As if this Muslim character represents Muslims in general as he is trying to tell Remy, who seems to represent the West, that they are only interested in the truth they create without taking into consideration the other's reality and that is the reason, according to him, behind victimizing people. The same character then adds:

That's what happens when a nation becomes a public relations firm. You forget the truth. Everything is the Alamo. You claim victory in every loss, life in every death. Declare war when there is no war, and when you are at war, pretend you aren't. The rest of the world wails and vows revenge and buries its dead and you turn on the television. Go to the cinema. (Walter, 2006, p. 221)

This is a very strong and daring response that Middle Eastern character is informing Remy about. As if he wants to say that they neglect the truth and keep victimizing innocent people and then, they watch these people's sufferings and funerals on TV coldly. Thus, Walter seems to be giving a voice to these silenced characters that are considered as the "other" or "them" or "the enemy" throughout the novel.

He carries on reacting strongly by saying:

Entertainment is the singular thing you produce now. And it is just another propaganda, the most insidious, greatest propaganda ever devised, and this is your only export now—your coffee and tobacco, your gunpowder and your wheat. And while people elsewhere die questioning the propaganda of tyrants and royals, you crave yours. You demand the propaganda of distraction and triviality, and it has become your religion, your national faith. In this faith you are grave and backward fundamentalists, not so different from the grave and backward fundamentalists you presume to battle. If they are barbarians knocking at the gates with stories of beautiful virgins in the afterlife, then aren't you barbarians too, wrapping the world in cables full of happy-ever-after stories of fleshy blondes and animated fish and talking cars? (Walter, 2006, p. 223)

This Muslim character is blatantly blaming the Americans and accusing them of creating this "propaganda" (Walter, 2006, p. 223) and of being the "fundamentalists [they] presume to battle" (Walter, 2006, p. 223). Even the verb "presume" is indicative here for he seems to accuse them of *creating* the enemy.

By giving a voice to Middle Eastern characters, Walter proves that he seems to be influenced by the postmodern thought related to "the multiplicity of truth" especially when he tells the same editor, mentioned before: "We all witnessed the same event, but we didn't see the same thing... Ask five people what they saw and they'll describe the same moment. But ask what Kennedy's death meant and you'll get five very different answers" (J.Walter, personal communication, n.d.). By referring to Kennedy, Walter means to exemplify in order to reach the same purpose, previously stated, which is to support the variety of perspectives instead of being convinced and limited by one point of view.

In addition to giving voice to Middle Eastern characters, Walter seems to be reacting by choosing several American characters to think differently. For instance, the narrator says:

What do you trust? Memory? History? No, these are just stories, and whichever ones we choose to tell ourselves—the one about our marriage, the one about the Berlin Wall—there are always gaps. There must be countless men all over the country crouched in front of barbecues, just like [Remy], wondering how their lives got to that point. (Walter, 2006, p. 160)

As if Walter is trying to undermine the belief that there is one reality. He seems to emphasize the fact that history and memory are unreliable by arguing that “these are just stories” (Walter, 2006, p. 160). This means that history is subjective to bring forth Foucault’s idea and that we can create other stories and hence, other realities.

In another situation, the narrator talks about Remy mentioning:

A life is made up of actions, and if [Remy] wanted the world to be different, then he only needed to *act* differently. Every minute of every day was an opportunity to do the right things, to make something of this mess... He didn’t need to be involved in some shady investigation that may have hurt innocent people. And he certainly didn’t have to drive around wondering what he wanted to say to his own son. (Walter, 2006, p. 212)

The verb “act” is originally italicized which means that the narrator is putting emphasis on action; and by saying that “[e]very minute...was an opportunity to do the right things” (Walter, 2006, p. 212), he seems to highlight the idea that something is wrong with the reality the dominant discourse provided. In addition to that, there is a hint that he is blaming Remy of *hurting* “innocent people” (Walter, 2006, p. 212) which indicates that he wants to say that those in authority, Remy and his colleagues, are doing something wrong by shedding light on Middle Eastern characters.

Even April, Remy’s girlfriend, seems to complain about her country by saying: “We just got so sick of America we couldn’t take it any more. At some point, a place loses enough of itself that you have no choice but to abandon it.” She leaned in as if sharing a secret. “And frankly, I think it’s gotten worse” (Walter, 2006, p. 244). As if Walter wants to say that many Americans believe in the various and numerous realities and perspectives that can be taken into account but they cannot speak louder because when she says it, “[s]he leaned in as if sharing a secret.” (Walter, 2006, p. 44)

Moreover, when the American character, Addich, talks to Remy, he seems to be reinforcing April’s idea about the country especially when he says:

I thought, ... We used to kill that many ourselves in a good year. This city, it doesn’t care about you. Or me. Or them. .. This city cares about garbage pickup. And trains. That’s the

secret . . . what the crazy assholes will never get. You *can't* tear this place apart. Not *this city*. We've been doing it ourselves for three hundred years. The goddamn thing always grows back. (Walter, 2006, pp. 302-303)

This proves this character's feeling of guilt and announcement of the fact that they used to do the same thing, as what happened the day of the attacks, in a year and that reaction, the attacks, must be expected because "The goddamn thing always grows back" (Walter, 2006,p.303).

Addich carries on discussing the same issue but he moves to explaining the meaning of the word "zero" by relating it to Arabic. He clarifies:

"It's an Arab word," the man continued. "Zero. From the word *sifr*. Means empty, like cypher. The world had no concept of zero, of nothingness, until we brought it west... But it had never occurred in the West that there could be a number before one." If you can't count nothing, you can't conceive of everything. Without zero, you can't comprehend negative numbers. So you can't see infinity. There's no sense to the universe. No negative to balance the positive, no axis on which to turn, no evil to balance the good. Without zero, every system eventually breaks down. (Walter, 2006, pp. 309-310)

By explaining the meaning and importance of the number "zero", Addich seems to symbolize a very interesting reality. That is he may mean that people of his country, especially those in power, do not accept loss and they even do not believe that there is "a number before one" (Walter, 2006, p.309). Furthermore, he is highlighting the importance of loss in creating "balance" (Walter, 2006, p.310).

Later on, it has been revealed that several Middle Eastern characters are portrayed as real terrorists in the novel. However, Walter's depiction of these characters as such seems to be purposeful. What proves that is this Muslim character's words: "These animals [meaning terrorists] killed my brother," he muttered to Remy. "I wouldn't help them, so they killed Assan. These are not Muslims. They are animals. I would do anything to stop them" (Walter, 2006, p. 293). Here we notice that a Muslim character is referring to other characters, who are Muslims too, as "animals" (Walter, 2006, p.293) because they do something against Islam and its principles. His way of speaking indicates Walter's attempt to avoid generalization. As if he wants to say that Muslims are not alike, are not the same. We always have exceptions, for this character is also hurt by people who have the same religion as his.

Jaguar, who is depicted as a terrorist, tells Remy:

"You know, it's ironic," ... "I used to tell my students that there are a hundred ninety-two mentions of Allah's compassion in the Koran. And only seventeen instances of his vengeance. And yet, it is always the vengeance that seduces. Just like here. You claim to follow a simple prophet of poverty and compassion and build temples celebrating riches

and power.”... “It occurred to me that I’ve been wrong all these years. Maybe power and vengeance ...are exactly what we should build temples to”. (Walter, 2006, p. 320)

Through the character of Jaguar and the comparison he draws, Walter seems to have a message which is related to power. As it is mentioned before, power is related to discourse and the creation of truth. That is why he emphasizes the fact that “power and vengeance...are exactly what we should build temples to” (Walter, 2006, p.320) meaning that people have to worship “power” and “vengeance” for these two concepts are playing a major role in creating history, because if power is exercised, one has to expect resistance, as Foucault argued.

Conclusion

After analyzing the representation of Muslims in Walter’s *The Zero*, one can wrap up by saying that this novel falls under the category of counter-narratives for the writer successfully depicts Muslim characters (Middle Eastern ones) as innocent and as mistreated verbally, in many cases, by Americans to deconstruct and challenge the dominant discourse. By portraying Muslim characters as such, he provides readers with a different reality than that of the aftermath of the attacks. In addition to that, Walter’s main reason behind creating such a work seems to be the way Americans responded to the event and this is proved when the writer himself says: “Our complicity begins with our country’s reaction to that attack and our failure, in my opinion, to debate the response honestly” (J. Walter, personal communication, n.d.). This quote justifies Walter’s depiction of Muslim characters as such because he clearly states that their judgement of the events was not honest.

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