Writing Terror: Representations of Terror and Resistance in Twenty-First-Century Anglophone Fiction

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Dedication

To my father for his generosity and endless support, who taught me that my dreams are always valid

To my mother for her love, encouragement, and heartfelt kindness and care

To my brothers Omar and Mohammad for always having my back

To Hamida, my sister and best friend for always being there for me

To Mariam, the apple of my eyes, for loving me unconditionally

Sister and daughter, you have my heart…

Abstract

The 9/11 terrorist attacks on the US and the "War on Terror" issued in a new era of political violence that has had an enduring influence on power constructions between East and West in the twenty-first century. Writers have reflected on these events and explored the complexities of terrorism, producing literary fiction which not only tackles 9/11 and related events, but which some have also conceived of as a new and emerging genre. Analytical studies of this emerging field of 9/11 fiction often concentrate on US and European literature, while some scholarships aim to expand the field to cover transnational novels as well as broaden the themes, scope and cultural diversity of this field. This thesis looks at novels that have not received much critical attention within the field of 9/11 fiction (with the exception of Updike's *Terrorist*). In doing so, it identifies fertile new ground deserving of further enquiry and examination.

The aim of this research is to examine various representations of terror and means of resistance. To achieve this end, five novels that portray post-9/11 political violence are examined which are written by authors of various backgrounds: John Updike's *Terrorist,* Nadeem Aslam's *The Blind Man's Garden*, Fadia Faqir's *Willow Trees Don't Weep*, Chris Cleave's *Incendiary*, and Mohsin Hamid's *Exit West*. Using postcolonial theory as an analytical lens, the main question of interrogation concerns how these works reproduce, problematise and resist hegemonic representations of terror. The image of terrorists as non-state agents in the works of Updike, Aslam and Faqir remains central to a broader understanding of 9/11 fiction in which terrorism is depicted as an exponent of a violent East. Alternatively, other novelists – Cleave and Hamid – offer a narrative of resistance by reimagining the state as a primary source of terror.

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Introduction

This thesis examines representations of terror related to political violence in twenty-first-century Anglophone fiction within a post-9/11 context. Terror has become a central theme in literary works of fiction in the aftermath of 9/11 and the 'War on Terror'. A primary objective of this study is to interrogate the theme of terror and its association with images of victimization and resistance within the nexus of terrorism, counterterrorism, and the making of terrorists in 9/11 fiction. The 9/11 event and its aftermath highlighted and encouraged critical debates around the relationship between the East and the West in which stereotypes about the Other are either intensified, destabilised, or challenged. This thesis examines how terror is represented in Anglophone literary fiction within the context of encounters between East and West. In doing so, it also brings into question the effect of colonial history and current military endeavours in the Middle East, as well as the role of globalisation in relation to terrorism.

In their introduction to *Terror and the Postcolonial*, Elleke Boehmer and Stephen Morton ask: "How do we interpret the colonial contours we discern within the dimensions of present-day terror?"[1] They therefore establish the argument that the current discourse that surrounds 9/11 and the 'War on Terror' is associated with neo-imperialist interests and used to justify the western exploitation of developing countries. The main questions that this thesis tackles, building on Boehmer and Morton's premise, are: how does the post-9/11 novel depict acts of terrorism? What is the source of terror in terms of the tension between the colonial past and neo-colonial present? And in what ways do writers of fiction complicate hegemonic representations of terrorism while narrativizing the effects and roots of political violence?

[1] Elleke Boehmer and Stephen Morton, eds., *Terror and the Postcolonial: A Concise Companion*, *Concise Companions to Literature and Culture* (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009), 8.

This thesis focuses on novels that (re)imagine political violence within the framework of 9/11, terrorism, and the ramifications of terror. The five novels examined in this thesis share a significant characteristic, which is their depiction of terrorist attacks that take place in the twenty-first century. The novels are John Updike's *Terrorist* (2006), Nadeem Aslam's *The Blind Man's Garden* (2013), Fadia Faqir's *Willow Trees Don't Weep* (2013), Chris Cleave's *Incendiary* (2005), and Mohsin Hamid's *Exit West* (2017). While all the primary texts are originally written in the English language and were first published in the US and the UK, the writers belong to different ethnicities and backgrounds and hence their reflections on the topic of terrorism offer nuanced representations which complicate the binarism of East-West portrayals. Updike and Cleave, as American and British writers respectively, are associated with western culture and bring different insights to the representation of terrorism. For instance, Updike depicts the making of a home-grown terrorist in the US, whereas Cleave represents the aftermath of a terrorist attack upon people living in the UK. Hamid and Aslam are originally from Pakistan and Faqir from Jordan. Hamid lived in the UK and US, whereas Aslam and Faqir migrated to the UK where they currently reside. Their Middle Eastern roots and heritage give them the advantage of being well-informed about secularism and Islam, and they also have the cultural experience of both the West and the Middle East. By analysing these authors' works using postcolonialism as a central theoretical base, I argue that images of terror related to political violence between East and West expose the complexities and effects of terrorism. Some of the novels under discussion – *Terrorist*, *The Blind Man's Garden* and *Willow Trees Don't Weep* – complicate the source of terrorism and its ramifications while offering sympathetic depictions of why someone could resort to political violence. However, these novels do not fully escape the 'us' and 'them' dichotomies in which the source of terror is primarily bound up with non-state agents who belong to the Muslim World. Whereas other novels analysed in this study – *Incendiary* and *Exit West* – destabilise dominant narratives about

post-9/11 terrorism by highlighting the ways in which political violence takes place in the framework of state-terror, such as through counterterrorism, surveillance, anti-migration measures and the 'War on Terror'. The narratives of these novels resist stereotyping the Other by depicting the relationship between remaining colonial legacies and current colonial conquests when terrorist acts occur. At the same time, the novels represent nuanced images of terror during the encounter between East and West and the Other and the Self.

9/11 Fiction

Whilst writers of literary fiction struggled to write about the 9/11 moment in the early period after the attacks, this changed considerably in the years succeeding the 9/11 event. In the decade or so following the attacks on the World Trade Center and other US infrastructure on September 11 2001, fiction – including cinema, visual arts, literature and other art forms – became a significant space to reflect, explore, and problematise issues and themes that deal with the 9/11 event and its ramifications. This space has become known as the genre or subgenre of 9/11 fiction,[2] which is still in development and expansion at the time of writing this research. The research presented in this thesis falls within this category and attempts to situate its argument within the critical scholarship related to 9/11 fiction, with a prime focus on the 9/11 novel. Indeed, there is a critical debate around the emergence of 9/11 fiction as a new genre and whether it would be more appropriate to avoid the categorization altogether.[3] The question that arises here, if we are witnessing the formation of a new category in fiction, involves discerning

[2] Georgiana Banita, *Plotting Justice: Narrative Ethics and Literary Culture after 9/11* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2012), Daniel O'Gorman, *Fictions of the War on Terror: Difference and the Transnational 9/11 Novel*, (Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), and Tim Gauthier, *9/11 Fiction, Empathy, and Otherness* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2015).

[3] A genre or subgenre of 9/11 fiction could be said to exist, and because it is contested issue between literary critics, I will use the term 'genre' loosely for the purpose of identifying works of literary fiction that employ 9/11 as a major theme or obliquely allude to it.

its common themes and features. It can be argued that if 9/11 fiction is only associated with works that are directly connected to the event itself, then using the term 'genre' is problematic because this will impose limitations in terms of representations and time-period. Having said that, literary critics have aimed at the expansion of 9/11 fiction in terms of themes, scope, and characterizations and this will be discussed further in this study.

In one of the first publications in this field, Ann Keniston and Jeanne Follansbee Quinn write: "If literature expresses what remains unrepresentable about 9/11, it also raises persistent questions about how we interpret and represent 9/11".[4] Accordingly, critics have endeavoured to evaluate and scrutinise the literary production related to 9/11, as it reveals the "conflictedness"[5] within the 9/11 novel, as well as the complexities and the possibilities of literary fiction in terms of offering new insights that are related to terror and the dynamics around this topic. In his book *After the Fall*, Richard Gray, an established critic of United States literature, examines novels written in the first decade after the attack and explores how authors can challenge the notion of silence, demonstrating literature's ability to "survive" after 9/11.[6] While some post-9/11 works thrive on the concept of American exceptionalism, Gray's aim is to interrogate how literary fiction can provide resistance to nationalism and simplistic depictions of 'us' and 'them' rhetoric.[7] He notes that some writers were able to transcend the narrative of polarization, arguing that "trauma may provide an intercultural connection and, issuing from this, the possibility of social transformation".[8] Similarly to Gray, Kristiaan Versluys in *Out of the Blue* interrogates how writers of literary fiction were able to represent the traumatic ramifications of 9/11 in terms of asserting the humanity of the individual and

[4] Ann Keniston and Jeanne Follansbee Quinn, *Literature After 9/11* (New York: Routledge, 2008), 2.
[5] Arin Keeble, *The 9/11 Novel: Trauma, Politics and Identity* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, 2014), 5.
[6] Richard Gray, *After the Fall: American Literature Since 9/11*, (West Sussex: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011), 16.
[7] Gray, *After the Fall*, 16.
[8] Gray, *After the Fall*, 83.

universality of the event.[9] He writes that: "In a time of globalized witnessing and shared vicarious experience, an event like 9/11 is a rupture for everybody. As a consequence, there is a globalized need to comprehend, to explain, and to restore".[10] This notion in the studies of 9/11 fiction is an essential component of analysis in which critics often highlight the importance of resisting nationalism and endorsing universalism. And while Versluys conducted his analysis by focusing on fiction written by US writers, his perception can be expanded to works written by writers of other nationalities – one of the aims of this thesis – which has the potential to enhance the discussion around 9/11.

While some scholarship focuses more on literary fiction that is produced by US or European writers,[11] other studies extend the 9/11 genre to cover transnational texts that have a connection with the 9/11 event whether implicitly or explicitly. The expansion aims at examining the impact of this historical moment within the US and outside its borders, and how writers of fiction from various backgrounds perceive it. In her book, *Plotting Justice: Narrative Ethics and Literary Culture after 9/11*, Georgiana Banita looks at themes that are related to ethical representations and the concept of justice within 9/11 fiction, such as "race, spectatorship, profiling, torture, and mourning".[12] She points out that "so far 9/11 scholarship has focused on fiction that portrays the terrorist attacks overtly at the expense of more oblique intimations of a post-9/11 world".[13] This appears to be a narrow view of the critical studies around 9/11 fiction since several publications examined 9/11 literature from both national and transnational

[9] Kristiaan Versluys, *Out of the Blue: September 11 and the Novel* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009).
[10] Versluys, *Out of the Blue,* 4.
[11] See Birgit Dawes, *Ground Zero Fiction: History, Memory, and Representation in the American 9/11 Novel* (Heidelberg: Universitatsverlag Winter, 2011), and Versluys, *Out of the Blue*.
[12] Banita, *Plotting Justice,* 1.
[13] Banita, *Plotting Justice,* 2.

perspectives.[14] However, the notion of moving beyond prominent 9/11 novels[15] and exploring a variety of texts and themes that have received little attention is a valid critique in terms of creating a more nuanced genre that will continue to affect and be affected by such global events – 9/11 and the 'War on Terror'. Moreover, Banita's approach of questioning the role of ethical representations within 9/11 fiction broadens the critical debate within this developing field. For Banita, resisting narratives of polarization and unjust framing of the Other can be achieved through employing empathy in combination with an ethical paradigm. In this research, I attempt to take Banita's argument forward in terms of exploring the concept of ethical representations when depicting images of violence, body injuries and death. Further, the issue of torture or 'enhanced interrogation' techniques will also be considered while analysing the novels.

The concept of empathy becomes an essential component of analysis in 9/11 fiction and can be traced in several studies and theories employed to examine 9/11 novels. One of the key studies that this thesis subscribes to is Tim Gauthier's *9/11 Fiction, Empathy and Otherness.*[16] Gauthier's work explores "the extent to which 'us' and 'them' narratives proliferated after 9/11, and it also interrogates the significance of practising or withholding empathy in a political climate that encourages a polarised view of the world.[17] Gauthier examines a variety of fictional works that "cast a light on the limitations of, but also the potential for, empathetic connection".[18] This angle of analysis is of significance because it proposes empathy as a key that helps the transcending of binarism in the context of a global event such as 9/11. Such a proposition seems

[14] Gauthier (*9/11 Fiction*, 27) critiques Banita's assessment of the 9/11 fiction scholarship by referring to Gray's work (*After the Fall*) that explores national and the international themes within the 9/11 novel as a mean to understand the 9/11 crises.

[15] Novels that received considerable attention by literary critics and are primarily associated with the 9/11 event and its aftermath, such as Don DeLillo's *Falling Man* (New York: Scribner, 2007); Jonathan Safran Foer's *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close* (Massachusetts: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2005); and Ian McEwan's *Saturday* (London: Jonathan Cape, 2005).

[16] Gauthier, *9/11 Fiction*.

[17] Gauthier, *9/11 Fiction*, 1.

[18] Gauthier, *9/11 Fiction*, 3.

to be a shared value between critics and theorists who are interested in scrutinizing the post-9/11 narrative. Judith Butler's work *Precarious Life*, which Gauthier utilises in his study, is often used as a reference in 9/11 scholarship to interpret how the moment of 9/11 could inform the discussion around the concepts of loss and vulnerability and hence empathy. Daniel O'Gorman is one of the main critics who uses a similar lens to that of Gauthier in which the concept of empathy is essential to overcoming reductive representations of 9/11 and to transcend the "trend of insularity" that is present in some 9/11 novels.[19] Perhaps the fact that both books were published fourteen years after 9/11 suggests that the scholarship of 9/11 fiction is examining with greater scrutiny themes and approaches that address 9/11 as a global socio-political event that impacted humanity in the twenty-first century. This approach is essential to this research in terms of depicting the relationship between practising empathy in the novels, how it is performed, and in what way it has the potential to resist terror.

In his book *Fictions of the War on Terror*, O'Gorman examines post-9/11 novels from a broader transnational and global perspective. Hence, he explores a variety of novels where the authors are from around the globe, and in which they "either avoid or consciously subvert the genre of the 9/11 novel" and "they perform this subversion through a shared interest in difference".[20] This approach allows his research to include novels that are not directly associated with 9/11 and hence expands the genre to cover themes that celebrate the concept of 'difference' within literary fiction. It can be argued that the imprecision around the contours of 9/11 fiction, in which some critics seem to include only texts written by American writers whilst others call for exploring transnational works that might have little to do with the 9/11 attacks, is a significant feature of the field of 9/11 scholarship.

[19] O'Gorman, *Fictions of the War on Terror,* 11.
[20] O'Gorman, *Fictions of the War on Terror,* 10, 11.

The argument put forward in this thesis is that the expansion of 9/11 fiction beyond texts that discuss the 9/11 moment to include texts that 'subvert' the 'genre' is crucial for several factors. The 9/11 event is perhaps the most vital and highlighted event to take place at the start of the twenty-first century, and hence it becomes a main theme in several works published after 9/11 that attempt to analyse the event and tackle the ramifications of 9/11 political violence. However, as almost two decades have passed after this major terrorist event, critics of 9/11 fiction tend to transcend this historical moment to account for major terrorist incidents that have taken place since 11 September 2001. In other words, 9/11 means much more than the attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon, and could include the invasion of Iraq in 2003 as part of the US 'War on Terror' campaign that resulted in the collapse of the Iraqi regime, and thousands of people to have died and been displaced. In a similar vein, 9/11 might be said to include the discovery that the Iraqi regime did not possess weapons of mass-destruction. It could relate to the escalation of migration and the outbreak of violence in different parts of the world (such as the Syrian conflict and the Yemen war). It could also relate to the illegitimate detention and violation of human rights at times of war. The 2004 Abu Ghraib prison scandal, for example, poses a significant moment in twenty-first century history that stirred anger and prompted questions about the relationship between law and torture, and the function or dysfunction of democratic states with respect to suspects of terrorism detained without trials.[21] Moreover, the expansion of 9/11 fiction is not an attempt to undermine the works that are written from a domestic perspective or that focus on the crisis itself, but rather includes works that perceive political violence as a cycle and as a mutual experience. Hence, it pushes the 'genre' towards themes of healing and resistance through the practice of empathy and human

[21] See Jeffrey Meriwether, *U.S. Military Detention Operations in Post–Abu Ghraib Iraq* (London: Rowman & Littlefield, 2018).

connection, which is an endeavour to reinforce these themes as distinctive features of 9/11 fiction.

Accordingly, this research examines works that explore the association between terror and political violence with the 9/11 event. For example, this thesis examines Mohsin Hamid's *Exit West*, a novel that does not refer to the 9/11 attacks nor mentions the terms 'terrorism' or 'terrorists', as an attempt to explore images of terror beyond 9/11.[22] *Exit West* revolves around the theme of mass-migration in the twenty-first century where people from developing countries that are often torn by war or extreme poverty seek refuge in the West. The question that comes to the surface is how this novel is considered part of 9/11 fiction. The answer lies within the discussion of the severe ramifications of 9/11 that create other major moments that have a huge effect and deserve similar scope of analysis (for instance the Afghanistan invasion of 2001, the Iraq War of 2003 and the escalation of violence in the Israel-Palestinian conflict). It also lies within the impossibility of divorcing the 9/11 moment from colonial and neo-colonial effects and other forms of political violence that took place in various parts of the world. In other words, 9/11 as a theme is not the central trajectory of 9/11 fiction but rather is a point of departure from which to analyse how the East is constructed on one hand and how the West is constructed on the other hand. Furthermore, it alludes to the impact of political violence from a shared human experience where there are many forms of 9/11 in different parts of the world and at different moments in history where the ramifications are as pivotal as 9/11.

Since this study deals with an emerging genre, the analysis of terror in a post-9/11 era complicates contemporary perceptions of terrorism and terrorists. By allocating the novels discussed in this research within the framework of political violence linked with eastern and western constructions of power and representations, it creates a space for analysing terror from

[22] Mohsin Hamid, *Exit West* (Milton Keynes: Penguin Books, 2018).

various points of views, and it also complicates images related to producing and resisting terror. This opens up the discussion around topics that are essential to human interactions, such as dominance, authority, the legitimacy of state violence, and the impact of fear. At the same time, the examined novels destabilise dominant notions about the Other, whether the East's Other or the West's Other. Whilst images of resistance, empathy and human connections unfold in the narrative of some novels, these images represent humanity as the cornerstone to counter terror and create a better world. It is of importance to highlight that the five novels under scrutiny were not analysed together in previous scholarship, nor were they given especial scrutiny (apart from Updike's *Terrorist*), and by bringing these five novels together, they offer new insights to the understanding of terror and counter-terror dynamics. Each novel analysed in this work represents a different approach to terror and political violence, and the premise of placing them in a position of comparison is to explore possibilities of literary fiction in representing the complexities of political violence and how the characters deal with its ramifications.

Terror and Terrorism

Often, there is an overlap and ambiguity between terms that are related to political violence due to several factors that have to do with formations of power. When war, persecution and surveillance are implemented to counter 'terrorism' or to capture 'terrorists, it is vital to comprehend how terrorism is defined and has evolved – from a historical point of view – and how that influenced the production of literary fiction. This will provide a base to comprehend the ways and forms of 'terror' associated with 'terrorism'. In this vein, I subscribe to Said's argument that literary fiction and narratives cannot be divorced from history, society and politics.[23] The identification of political violence is associated with the perpetrator of terrorism. Therefore, how he/she is identified is an essential component of this research. Terrorism in a

[23] Edward W. Said, *Orientalism*, (London: Penguin Group, [1978] 2003), 27.

post-9/11 world is often associated with individuals and organizations, hence if the state commits violence, how can this be interpreted and perceived? These questions form an central part of this work because they trigger controversial debates in politics and academia in the twenty-first century. Indeed, these debates around the topic of terrorism were always part of the socio-political and academic discourse but we saw substantial surge following the 9/11 attacks. In this respect, the 9/11 novel has the potential to reflect on these debates, re-imagine them and provide a counter-narrative to dominant narratives that often linked with formations of power and integration of knowledge with power. As in the words of Said: "knowledge gives power, more power requires more knowledge".[24] In order to provide a critical framework for the research project, I shall provide a thorough analysis of the terms 'terror', 'terrorism' and 'state and non-state terrorism' since they are essential to the examination of the primary texts.

Going back to the roots of these often two contested terms – 'terror' and 'terrorism' – scholars argue that western terrorism existed before the French Revolution in different forms, but that the "systematic manifestation" of the term was coined during the French Revolution (1789).[25] Grard Chaliand and Arnaud Blin point out that the French Revolution "gave birth to the term 'terror' –or what might equally be called 'state terrorism'".[26] At the end of the eighteenth century, terrorism was manifested by the revolutionary government's use of violence and oppression against the so-called enemies of the French Revolution. The aim of the revolutionary government was to transform France into a republic in which its people could build a better society. Despite the idealistic goals of the revolution, the French government resorted to a radical approach that has been called the 'Reign of Terror'. Within this historical paradigm, state terrorism manifested in the use of systematic violence by the government against its

[24] Said, *Orientalism*, 36.
[25] Grant Wardlaw, *Political Terrorism: Theory, Tactics, and Counter-Measures* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 18.
[26] Grard Chaliand and Arnaud Blin, "The Invention of Modern Terror," in *The History of Terrorism: From Antiquity to Al Qaeda*, eds. Grard Chaliand and Arnaud Blin (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007), 95.

oppositions. The 'Reign of Terror', as Bruce Hoffman explains, was "designed to consolidate the new government's power by intimidating counter-revolutionaries, subversives and all other dissidents whom the new regime regarded as 'enemies of the people'".[27] The French government, seeking to maintain the revolution, imprisoned and executed thousands of its opponents - even if they were mere suspects. The victims of this violent era were nobles, priests and ordinary people.[28] The executions were implemented in public using the guillotine, the purpose of which was to instil fear. Accordingly, it could be argued that the employment and definition of 'terrorism' rely heavily on the time-period, location, forms of sovereignty, and political outlook. For example, by the middle of the nineteenth century, terrorism began to be associated with non-state terrorism where groups of certain political ideologies used violence against the state. Walter Laqueur argues that terrorism was perceived as "a response to injustice" in which terrorists were driven by "intolerable conditions".[29] These conditions, such as oppression, were employed as a justification of violence and hence, terrorism and terrorists were not entirely vilified.[30] In the case of nineteenth and twentieth-century Irish conflict, in which the Irish Republican Army (IRA) conducted violent attacks in England seeking independence from British rule, terrorism as a term became often associated with resistance and revolution against foreign domination. The people committing those acts were described as both "Irish terrorists" and "Irish patriots" depending on the group describing them.[31]

In the first half of the twentieth century, 'terrorism' was linked once again with the state and it was "applied specifically to the authoritarian regimes that had come to power" in Italy,

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[27] Bruce Hoffman, *Inside Terrorism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006), 3.
[28] "Reign of Terror, French History," *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, accessed April 14, 2017, https://www.britannica.com/event/Reign-of-Terror.
[29] Walter Laqueur, *No End to War: Terrorism in the Twenty-First Century* (New York: Continuum, 2003), 11.
[30] The most notable political organizations of this period of time are the Anarchists in Europe and the United States who were perceived by some as champions. See Gus Martin, *Understanding Terrorism: Challenges, Perspectives, and Issues*, (Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, 2013), 20.
[31] Laqueur, *No End to War*, 12.

Germany and Russia.[32] The aim of such organised terrorist tactics was comprehensive governance of the state in which any form of disagreement was suppressed.[33] However, since the 1960s, the term terrorism has been applied by the media, academics and government representatives to "characterise the use of violence by small groups of dissidents or revolutionaries to intimidate or influence the state".[34] In this construct and according to Richard Jackson, the term has gained "a new popular meaning" that is related to radical individuals and groups who resort to political violence.[35] In contrast, the term became less associated with governments or states, despite their employment of forms of violence against their people or other nations.[36]

The contemporary use of the term in the twenty-first century, especially in popular mainstream narratives, has shifted to correlate with religious terrorism, with which Islam and Muslims are heavily implicated. The attacks of September 11th, 2001 in the US have highly influenced the association of 'terrorism' with Muslims and the Middle East in a post-9/11 era. The identification of the hijackers of the planes that flew into the World Trade Centre as Arabs and Muslims have imprinted the image of a Muslim terrorist in the minds of many westerners.[37] Hence, the image of the barbaric, dangerous and exotic Middle Eastern terrorist that existed before 9/11 within dominant western narratives took a further surge after the attacks. The West's Other is represented as a dangerous fundamentalist enemy who comes from the East to attack and intimidate the West. These images existed in media outlets, along with the film and television production that feature terrorists with Middle Eastern facial features and names. This

[32] Hoffman, *Inside Terrorism*, 14.
[33] For instance, Nazi Germany employed terrorism as part of a totalitarian rule. Refer to Randall David Law, ed. *The Routledge History of Terrorism* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2015), 162.
[34] Richard Jackson, *Writing the War on Terrorism: Language, Politics and Counter-Terrorism* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2005), 23.
[35] Jackson, 23.
[36] Richard Jackson, "Constructing Enemies: 'Islamic Terrorism' in Political and Academic Discourse," *Government and Opposition* 42, no. 3 (June 1, 2007): 23.
[37] Dona J. Stewart, *The Middle East Today: Political, Geographical and Cultural Perspectives* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2013), 182.

encouraged controversial debates around the identification and characteristics of terrorists, especially so considering that the political discourse of the 'War on Terror' and counter-terrorism supports the state's implementation of extreme measures and even 'terrorization' of people who are deemed 'dangerous'.

Bruce Hoffman explains that the term 'terrorist' has taken different forms and interpretations throughout history:

> The decision to call someone or label some organization `terrorist' becomes almost unavoidably subjective, depending largely on whether one sympathizes with or opposes the person/group/cause concerned. If one identifies with the victim of the violence, for example, then the act is terrorism. If, however, one identifies with the perpetrator, the violent act is regarded in a more sympathetic, if not positive (or, at the worst, an ambivalent) light; and it is not terrorism.[38]

Consequently, terrorism is perceived as a disputed term – it is never objective nor definite. For example, in the Palestinian Israeli conflict, the Palestinian fighters are often labelled as terrorists in Israeli (and far-right American) political rhetoric, whereas they are described as freedom-fighters by Palestinian supporters. On October 22nd 2015, an attack that took place in Israel demonstrates the subjectivity of the term and how it can be manipulated by the media and politicians: a man was shot dead by Israeli soldiers as he attacked them, and the perpetrator was immediately identified as an Arab terrorist. As soon as the identity of the perpetrator was identified as an Israeli Jew, the label 'terrorist' was officially withdrawn. Hence, terrorism as a term in this context was mainly connected with the attacker's identity and not the nature of the attack.[39]

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[38] Hoffman, *Inside Terrorism*, 23.

[39] Glenn Greenwald, "Israel Calls a Man Its Soldiers Killed a 'Terrorist' - Until They Realized He Was an Israeli Jew," *The Intercept*, October 22 2015, accessed May 15, 2017, https://theintercept.com/2015/10/22/israel-calls-a-man-its-soldiers-killed-a-terrorist-until-they-realized-he-was-an-israeli-jew/.

Because of the subjectivity of the term, scholars of terrorism studies have endeavoured to come up with an objective definition of terrorism. In one of the most cited studies that offers a comprehensive definition of terrorism, Alex Schmid and Albert Jongman define the term by focusing on victims of terrorism. For the writers, the actual purpose of terrorism is to create chronic fear and a state of terror that transcends beyond the direct victims of terrorism which are considered in this case as "symbolic victims".[40] They explain that "through previous use of violence or the credible threat of violence other members of that group or class are put in *a state of chronic fear (terror)*. This group or class, whose members' sense of security is purposefully undermined, is the *target of terror*".[41] Hence, the actual target of terrorism is the whole group or class, some of whom are already the direct victims. This eventually creates what they call an "attentive audience" who are the "object of manipulation" to achieve specific goals of a political nature.[42] Accordingly, the term terror can be a purpose and a product of terrorism. The terrorists produce terror through their violence. If they fail in producing terror for any reason (perhaps the failure of a terrorist mission), it will not eliminate their purpose of creating a state of fear.

Most scholars in the field of terrorism recognise terror as an essential part of terrorism for both the perpetrators of terrorism and for its victims. It can be argued that without the element of terror, terrorism will lose its function. Various resources have defined terrorism and terror to mean the same thing. For example, in the *Oxford English Dictionary*, one of the definitions of terror is "the use of organized repression or extreme intimidation; terrorism".[43] Similarly, the Cambridge Dictionary mentions that terrorism in some specific contexts is shortened to terror.[44] This fosters a sense of ambiguity in relation to the terms which influence the discourse

[40] Alex Peter Schmid and A. J. Jongman, *Political Terrorism: A New Guide to Actors, Authors, Concepts, Data Bases, Theories, & Literature*, (New York: Routledge, 2017), 1.
[41] Schmid and Jongman, *Political Terrorism,* 1,2, (italics in original).
[42] Schmid and Jongman, *Political Terrorism,* 2.
[43] 'Terror, n.', in *OED Online* (Oxford University Press), accessed 31 August 2020, http://0.www.oed.com/view/Entry/199606.
[44] "Terror Meaning in the Cambridge English Dictionary," accessed April 3, 2017, http://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/terror.

surrounding terrorism in a post-9/11 era. After a terrorist attack in London on 23rd March 2017, for example, some of the headlines read: "London attack: Four dead in Westminster terror attack".[45] The word 'terror', which is used in the headline, describes the aftermath of the attack which is producing terror and not the nature of the attack. One can argue that in the twenty-first century, 'terror' (as mentioned in the BBC News) is explicitly associated with the term 'terrorism'.

The same thing applies to how both these terms are used in political discourse. In the controversial war that was launched by the US, the UK and their allies after the 9/11 attack, the term 'War on Terror' emerged as a new phrase. First coined by the US president George W Bush in a speech addressing the Congress and American people after the 9/11 attacks, the 'War on Terror' came to mean 'war on terrorism'.[46] In his speech, George W Bush used the word 'terrorism' four times, whereas he used the word 'terror' six times to refer to terrorism. In political discourse, the ambiguity of using 'terror' to mean 'terrorism' becomes a powerful tool. Terror as a loose concept can be used to describe actions without a limitation, whereas terrorism, even as a contested term, is still confined within certain criteria. The 'War on Terror' is waged against a concept, which creates an indefinite and unrealistic target, and at the same time, the promise of waging 'war' and the act of 'war' generates extreme terror, especially if the targets are undeveloped countries where people struggle to maintain a decent living. Hence, the representations of terror in literary fiction have the possibility to reflect on these critical ideas around war, terror, and terrorism.

Since a primary focus of this research is to interrogate the representations of terror in 9/11 novels and how it is related to political violence from a postcolonial perspective, it is vital to

[45] Kamal Ahmed, "London Attack: Four Dead in Westminster Terror Attack," *BBC News*, March 23, 2017, sec. UK, http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-39359158.
[46] George W. Bush, "Full Text: Bush's Speech, 2003" *The Guardian*, 18 March 2003, https://www.theguardian.com/world/2003/mar/18/usa.iraq.

examine how literary critics employ the term 'terror'. Boehmer and Morton, as postcolonial critics, write in the opening of their edited book:

> Terror, postcolonial or otherwise, induces affect. […] Among the affective repercussions of acts of terror are extreme fear, galvanizing shock, vengeful anger, displacement, and, perhaps above all, paranoia – the belief that having struck once, terror will do so again, at the same place, like lightning. Or, even if it has not appeared before, the deep paranoia associated with terror is that, once conceived, once entertained in the mind, terror will inexorably arise, somewhere, and attack the body, whether national, social, or individual.[47]

Does the phrase "acts of terror" refer to acts of terrorism? And can we say that if terror is the product of terrorism, and they are associated with each other, then they mean almost the same in the context of political violence and 9/11 discourse? Terror cannot be detached from terrorism; however, if a terrorist attack failed to produce terror, this should not change the nature of the attack, which is committing violence for political motives. What is significant here, according to Boehmer and Morton, is the power attached to terror and the destructive force it holds, including the anticipation of being victimised, waiting for violence to erupt. This transforms individuals, nations, and states into potential targets and victims of terror at the same time, because when fear becomes a commodity ready to be consumed, then terror prevails.

Robert Young, in his article "Terror Effects", offers a nuanced explanation on the relationship between 'terror' and 'terrorism', and how terror is produced and duplicated:

> Terror repulses: discussions of terror move quickly away from terror to its cause. "Terror" gets conflated with "acts of terrorism," which produce the effect of terror or fear, or with "terrorists" who carry out acts of terrorism. This leaves terror itself unchallenged and unexamined. The subject of terror is not the terrorist, but those who

[47] Boehmer and Morton, *Terror and the Postcolonial,* 1.

> fear the terrorist and live in fear of him or her, in a state of terror. Like history, terror is known only by its effects, its aftermath, on the people subjected to terror.[48]

According to the above, terrorist attacks produce terror and terror generates effects. Once an act of terrorism succeeds in producing terror, the ramifications become immense, producing the fear and anticipation of other attacks, the profiling of people who belong to certain ethnicities or religions, xenophobia, and violence committed to counter terrorism. Young makes the case that terror is defined by its effects, in other words: "terror is nothing if it does not produce effects: it's designed to create them".[49] His argument is an attempt to examine what terror is, how it can be identified and how it is related to the aftermath of political violence. The analysis of the representations of terror in the five novels discussed in this thesis – using Young's argument – has the potential to remove the ambiguity around this topic, shed light on forms of power linked with terror, its effects, and ways to counter it.

As this thesis explores images related to the effects of terror, it attempts to identify the terror associated with two forms of terrorism within the 9/11 novels: non-state terrorism and state-terrorism. In the twenty-first century, and particularly after 9/11, it can be argued that terrorism is more identified with non-state agents who are usually perceived as enemies of the state. They conduct violent acts as individuals or organisations and operate outside of a legal system to create chaos and terror. This could be in the form of suicide bombing attacks, hijacking planes, mass shootings, attacking individuals and all other forms of political violence. State-terrorism, however, is political violence committed by state agents against civilians in which they either operate legally or illegally but with the state's consent. The forms of violence associated with the state are varied, such as acts of war against less privileged countries where the victims are often civilians or as anti-terrorism measures, such as persecution, torture and intimidation. This

[48] Robert Young, "Terror Effects," in *Terror and the Postcolonial*, ed. Elleke Boehmer and Stephen Morton (Malden, MA: Wiley Blackwell, 2015), 308.
[49] Robert Young, "Terror Effects," 307.

definition could be highly contested in terms of the legality of the state's violence: in a sense, if the state's acts of violence are committed without breaking the law, then they might not be labelled as 'terrorism' but rather 'state violence'. However, this research examines political violence – despite the question of its legality or perpetrators – by exploring its effects. If the state commits acts of violence while abiding with the law, and these acts generate terror, then violence whether legal or illegal has the same effect. In this sense, the images of terror illustrated in the novels within the framework of political violence are the focus of analysis as they feed into and contest dominant rhetoric about terror and terrorism.

Imagining Terror

On 29th June 2016, US police arrested an Emirati man because a hotel's clerk suspected that he was a terrorist.[50] Terror was the main component of the incident; the man was wearing traditional gulf clothes and using multiple phones and so the clerk was terrified, imagining him as a terrorist. At the same time, the Emirati was terrorised, being seized by the police under gunpoint and arrested under false claims. The main factor in this event is fear fuelled by imagination which resulted in committing state-violence against a civilian. After 9/11 and within a western context, the anticipation of future terrorist attacks created a profound fear of the Other and the unfamiliar. Fear is often transformed into a destructive force as it can distort perception. In a climate of anticipated terror, fear has the potential to magnify everyday incidents, turning innocent people into imaginary terrorists.

The uniqueness of the 9/11 event is related to several factors that are associated with imagination. Jean Baudrillard in his essay "The Spirit of Terrorism" argues that 9/11 is

[50] Associated Press, "Ambassador to UAE 'Deeply Regrets' Ohio Arrest of Man in Traditional Garb," *The Guardian*, July 4, 2016, sec. World news, https://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/jul/04/us-ambassador-uae-regrets-emirati-man-arrest.

something that we all wished for and our imagination dwelt on, even before it happened, "because no one can avoid dreaming of the destruction of any power that has become hegemonic to this degree".[51] When fictional or imaginary images become real, it has the potential to create severe panic since these images are no longer part of the imagination. Moreover, numerous images (video taped, photographed, reported) generated during the event and after it played a significant role in creating what Jackson calls "the narrative of threat and danger".[52] Post-9/11 terrorism becomes increasingly visual due to the advancement of technology and social media and has the power to produce unlimited stories and images of the actual terrorist act. Baudrillard further suggests that the essence of contemporary terrorism, manifested by the 9/11 attacks, is its fictional part:

> Reality and fiction are inextricable, and the fascination with the attack is primarily a fascination with the image (both its exultatory and its catastrophic consequences are themselves largely imaginary). In this case, then, the real is superadded to the image like a bonus of terror, like an additional *frisson*: not only is it terrifying, but, what is more, it is real. Rather than the violence of the real being there first, and the *frisson* of the image being added to it, the image is there first, and the *frisson* of the real is added. Something like an additional fiction, a fiction surpassing fiction. [53]

Baudrillard's argument illustrates the impact of the image. When such a powerful imaginary is encapsulated in the form of the falling of giant towers after they are hit with two hijacked passenger planes, people jumping form the towers before the collapse, and images of people covered with dust and horror, it creates recurrent fears and this is the ultimate purpose of terrorism. Consequently, it could be argued that if a terrorist act fails to create terror, it has largely to do with the absence of the image and the imaginary. For example, the US military dropped in 2017 – for the first time – what is called "the mother of all bombs" on Afghanistan

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[51] Jean Baudrillard, *The Spirit of Terrorism and Other Essays*, trans. Chris Turner (London: Verso, 2012), 4.
[52] Jackson, *Writing the War on Terrorism*, 92.
[53] Baudrillard, "The Spirit of Terrorism," 22.

targeting the Islamic State. The bomb is the most destructive non-nuclear weapon that was ever used, according to BBC news.[54] Nevertheless, there is little narrative around this unprecedented form of violence committed by the state and minimum media coverage. Despite the terror that is generated by such an attack in Afghanistan and on direct and indirect victims, the missing factor of the event is the media coverage (images and narratives), which ultimately impacts its terror effects. In other words, since the imagination is not an essential part of the attack, the aftermath is contained. In this context, the role of the 9/11 novel is substantial. It has the potential and the space to recreate and reimagine images of terror that are not often depicted in dominant narratives about political violence.

The imaginary component within the discourse of terrorism often incorporates fictional images that link the real world with fantasy. In their seminal book *Terror and Taboo*, Joseba Zulaika and William Douglass argue that the discourse of terrorism, which is mainly constructed by scholars of terrorism, politicians and media outlets, is embedded within the imagination.[55] Zulaika and Douglass are not undermining the horrific impact of the actual terrorist attack but they argue that "the exaggerated and conspiratorial style of terrorism rhetoric itself should be a warning that we are dealing with political pathology".[56] Accordingly, the problematic nature of this rhetoric is related to the merging between facts, feelings and imagination that influence the discourse of terrorism, which can be manipulated and used according to one's political interests. For instance, George W. Bush's choice of words serves as an example: he describes the perpetrators of the 9/11 attacks as dangerous individuals who are trained in Afghanistan in the "tactics of terror" and then "sent to hide in countries around the world to plot evil and

[54] "Mother of All Bombs: How Powerful Is US Mega-Weapon?," *BBC News*, April 13, 2017, sec. US & Canada, http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-39596333.
[55] Joseba Zulaika and William A. Douglass, *Terror and Taboo: The Follies, Fables, and Faces of Terrorism* (New York: Routledge, 1996).
[56] Zulaika and Douglass, *Terror and Taboo,* 4.

destruction".[57] The language, in this context, constructs a political discourse that is infused with symbolism and imaginary components. Terrorists are transformed from outlaws to agents of evil and hence such rhetoric plays on irrational fears of unconventional and wicked terrorists. This alters the discourse related to terrorism to a subjective one since it parallels or borrows from fiction, broadening the sphere of interpretation to realms beyond the factual.

In a post-9/11 era, predictions of future terrorist attacks, exaggerated figures and reports have transformed terrorism into an eminent danger. Walter Laqueur, one of the most renowned scholars of terrorism studies, has anticipated the death of hundreds of thousands of people by 'Jihadists' arguing that there is a great escalation of terrorism that will turn to a whole war.[58] In the process of invading Iraq in 2003, the US administration made it clear that the country was not safe because of the unprecedented terrorist threat that Saddam Hussein imposed on the West. The US administration had predicted horrendous terrorist attacks that would take place if the Iraqi regime stayed in power. In a speech that took place in the White House before the invasion of Iraq, George W. Bush described the danger of terrorism:

> The danger is clear: using chemical, biological or, one day, nuclear weapons, obtained with the help of Iraq, the terrorists could fulfil their stated ambitions and kill thousands or hundreds of thousands of innocent people in our country, or any other. The United States and other nations did nothing to deserve or invite this threat. But we will do everything to defeat it. Instead of drifting along toward tragedy, we will set a course toward safety. Before the day of horror can come, before it is too late to act, this danger will be removed.[59]

The emotive language that is used in the political discourse about terrorism such as "before the day of horror can come" puts the audience in a state of terror. This is supported by a speculated result of terrorist attacks which is the anticipated death of hundreds of thousands of people.

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[57] George W. Bush, "Text of George Bush's Speech, 2001," *The Guardian*, 21 September 2001. https://www.theguardian.com/world/2001/sep/21/september11.usa13.
[58] Laqueur, *No End to War*, 2003, 210.
[59] Bush, "Full Text: Bush's Speech, 2003".

Hence, the discourse of terrorism takes on a fictional dimension. In borrowing from the imaginary—indeed fictional—sphere, it becomes challenging at times to differentiate between what is real and what is fictional. Accordingly, Zulaika and Douglass observe that we live in a world in which "the boundaries between the real and the make-believe are increasingly blurred. We therefore question to what extent all discourse on terrorism must conform to and borrow from some form of fictionalization".[60] In this respect, the nexus between the imagination and terrorism has contributed to the proliferation of fear as a product of any terrorist act and the proliferation of violence as a strategy to counter terrorism. What is unique about terrorism in the twenty-first century is that terror and violence become anticipated, or worse accepted. The creation of Homeland Security in the US and other anti-terrorism units elsewhere, the endless 'War on Terror', illegal imprisonment and torture, and anti-immigration policies are evidence of the potent consequences of imagining terror. The complex relationship between terrorist acts and their aftermath, imagination, anticipation, and dominance within the socio-political realm can be represented through 9/11 literary fiction. By interrogating this relationship in the key texts, this research examines the notion that after 9/11, the imagination – associated with political violence – is inseparable from a colonial past, and colonial and postcolonial present.

The Narrative of Terror Post-9/11

The 9/11 moment, in the direct aftermath of the attack, became a moment of reflection and also uncertainty for writers of fiction. Martin Randall in his book *9/11 and the Literature of Terror* observes that "the terrorist attacks do pose significant and hugely complex challenges for writers of fiction".[61] There was a general mood or anticipation of the failure of language when attempting to write about this historical event. Indeed, the magnitude of the terrorist event and

[60] Zulaika and Douglass, *Terror and Taboo*, 4.
[61] Martin Randall, *9/11 and the Literature of Terror* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2011), 18.

the symbolism attached to it were unprecedented. The unfolding of the attacks on live TV where the second plane hit the World Trade Centre – after the first one did so successfully – and the shocking collapsing of the towers while many people were still trapped inside, created a great amount of terror. Such a drastic event has the potential to intimidate writers, as Baudrillard notes that while writers attempt to analyse the terrorist act, they will not find meaning in what happened. The attempt to interpret and understand 9/11 will prove futile.[62] Indeed this is applicable to the direct aftermath of 9/11, where writers were still struggling to comprehend the event and contemplate on it. At the same time, for writers of literary fiction, transcending the polarizing rhetoric that disseminated during that period was challenging. Hence, it is important to understand the impact of the 9/11 event in terms of western political discourse, terrorism studies and cultural studies.

Since this thesis is mainly concerned with a postcolonial approach and how it can facilitate the interpretation of the primary texts, it is pivotal to understand the context that shaped the ideologies of the post-9/11 era and the (re)imagination of political violence. A postcolonial methodology is vital for understanding the various dynamics that influence power constructions in terms of representations within 9/11 fiction. As this research examines the question of how writers of fiction in a post-9/11 era portray 'Us and Them' dynamics and sources of terror, I engage with Edward Said's analysis of forms of knowledge that were constructed by Orientalists during the colonial era, which often misrepresent Arabs and Muslims and portray the Middle East through a polarising and euro-centric point of view. This study is mainly based on Said's theoretical work in *Orientalism* and *Culture and Imperialism*,[63] which highlights, among other things, that Muslims and Arabs are often depicted in popular western narratives as barbaric and violent. This approach will facilitate the interrogation of whether these

[62] Baudrillard, "The Spirit of Terrorism."
[63] Edward W. Said, *Orientalism*, (London: Penguin Group, [1978] 2003), and *Culture and Imperialism*, (London: Vintage, 1994).

representations, which date back to the nineteenth century, have been transformed, challenged, or reproduced in twenty-first-century narrative fiction.

Misconceptions and stereotypes about Muslims and Arabs have been intensified in western rhetoric since the 9/11 attacks, whilst the image of the Muslim terrorist and the reimagination of non-state terrorism as a main source of violence and victimization (such as in representations of Al Qaeda and ISIS) has been reinforced. My intention is to interrogate Said's theoretical views regarding knowledge and the power of representation while examining the five novels analysed in this thesis. This will involve reading the primary texts in terms of the impact of colonial ideologies in 9/11 fiction and identifying the remaining traces of these ideologies, including how they are encountered and challenged, with the consideration that the novelists of the primary texts endeavour to complicate political violence and its perpetrators in a post-9/11 context.

And though this study is first and foremost a literary one, it is vital to comprehend how post-9/11 political and cultural discourse is infused and reflected in literary fiction – since it is all part of the human experience. In this context, I am in sympathy with Said's argument that "every domain is linked to every other one, and that nothing that goes on in our world has ever been isolated", which eventually impacts the "ideological fiction".[64] So for instance, a crucial part of this research is associated with terrorism Studies – a field that have witnessed an increase of publications after 9/11 and in which is imbued with politics and power structures. This approach will shed light on how the novels examined in this study can reflect the highly contested arguments on terrorism, terror and countering terror.

A few days after the attack, George W. Bush declared that the United States was not immune from being attacked anymore, and that the US government would use "every necessary weapon

[64] Said, *Orientalism*, xvii, xviii.

of war – to the disruption and to the defeat of the global terror network".[65] And while George W Bush abstained from defining what he called the 'global terror network', he made it clear that individuals, organizations and regimes who might be associated with terrorism will be under attack. He went as far as to urge every nation to make a decision: "either you are with us, or you are with the terrorists".[66] This radical and simplistic statement gives an insight into the polarizing political rhetoric that laid the foundation for the narrative of fear and xenophobia. It is not only the West who should be afraid of future terrorist attacks, other nations who might have 'terrorists' amongst them (according to the western state's criteria of who is a terrorist) are at risk of being attacked. This is "the spirit of terrorism" that Baudrillard refers to.[67] He writes that the spirit of terrorism is death, in which the terrorists use death and suicide to challenge the system and the system will only respond by death that will eventually destroy it. In this context, discussions and analysis of political violence and its ramifications in various countries around the globe are at the heart of post-9/11 narratives.

Loss, grief, and trauma are amongst the main themes of 9/11 literary production, as well as commemorating stories of heroism and compassion.[68] Significantly few novels depicted the actual event itself, how it unfolded, and the historical and political factors that led to the materialization of this form of political violence.[69] Nonetheless, there are several works that represent 9/11 in a nuanced way that problematised contemporary political violence. In the following, three works of literary fiction (mentioned as examples which are considered popular

[65] See Bush, "Text of George Bush's Speech, 2001".
[66] Bush, "Text of George Bush's Speech, 2001".
[67] Baudrillard, *The Spirit of Terrorism*.
[68] Such as in the works of DeLillo's *Falling Man*, Foer's *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close*, and Eric Walters' *We All Fall Down* (Toronto: Doubleday Canada, 2006).
[69] For further discussion on this topic, see Juanjo Bermúdez de Castro, "Nine-Elevenism," *L'Atelier Du Centre de Recherches Historiques. Revue Électronique Du CRH*, no. 07 (17 May 2011), https://doi.org/10.4000/acrh.3572. And Peter Morey, "'The Rules of the Game Have Changed:' Mohsin Hamid's The Reluctant Fundamentalist and Post-9/11 Fiction," *Journal of Postcolonial Writing* 47, no. 2 (1 May 2011): 135–46, https://doi.org/10.1080/17449855.2011.557184.

texts within 9/11 fiction) will be discussed to give a backdrop to 9/11 fiction and how the authors navigate writing about terror in the midst of the rhetoric of threat and danger. These works were published in the first decade after 9/11 in what some critics describe it as the first wave of 9/11 fiction writing.[70]

Martin Amis' short story "The Last Days of Muhammad Atta" (2006) was one of the first texts to fictionalise the plotting and the execution of the World Trade Center attacks. In his story, the British writer attempts to capture what happened during the day of 9/11 and how terrorists' minds work. In "The Last Days of Muhammad Atta", the terrorist "was not religious; he was not even especially political".[71] Terror is the driving force: "the core reason was, of course, all the killing - all the putting to death".[72] Amis' terrorist is someone who can pilot planes and is motivated by the killing of innocent people. Arguably, the over-simplification of the terrorist's persona (expressed through the fact that the narrative does not problematise the circumstances that lead the terrorist towards violence and mass murder) and his motivations to conduct such a complicated terrorist mission might be considered as a failure of imagination, or perhaps "the failure of language" for that matter.[73] The absence of an ideological or psychological motive behind 9/11 leaves the reader with a sense of danger. If mass murder, destruction and chaos are the sole reasons, then humanity is dealing with a different breed of terrorists and a new type of threat. In this context, these non-state agents, who come from the Middle East and are affiliated with the Islamic religion, are denied a political motivation. In other words, their humanity could be questioned in terms of their 'violent nature', 'barbaric culture' and 'fundamental religion'. In the same collection of essays, Amis comments on this new form of terror:

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[70] Michael C. Frank, *The Cultural Imaginary of Terrorism in Public Discourse, Literature, and Film: Narrating Terror* (New York: Routledge, 2017), 205.
[71] Amis, *The Second Plane: September 11: Terror and Boredom* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2008), 99.
[72] Amis, *The Second Plane,* 118.
[73] Gray, *After the Fall*, 1.

> the freshly fortified suspicion that there exists on our planet a kind of human being who will become a Muslim in order to pursue suicide-mass murder. For quite a time I have felt that Islamism was trying to poison the world; and here was a sign that the poison might take—might mutate, like bird flu.[74]

Whilst this could be perceived as more of an emotional analysis rather than a political one, it provokes Islamophobic sentiments. Amis' narrative enforces a xenophobic view of people who are categorised as "a kind of a human" and who are located in areas that are exposed to "Islamism", and through which they will grow to become Muslims. To Amis, any Muslim is a potential terrorist if he was subjected to the poison of "Islamism". Hence, if any Muslim is a potential terrorist or a suicide-mass murderer, then terror is everywhere in a global world that is marked by large-scale migration. Such a narrative is highly critical because when depriving the terrorist of their humanity, anything done to them is not cruel or objectionable. And if the Other, the Muslims, are perceived as potential terrorists who represent a threat to the existence of the West, then the 'War on Terror' is an inevitable and a legitimate war. What is problematic about Amis's writing about 9/11 is that he uses the term "Islamist" and "Islamism" when referring to terrorism without attempting to define those elastic terms. In their book *The New Atheist Novel*, Arthur Bradley and Andrew Tate note that "it is certainly odd that someone so alert to the politics of nominalism […] should deploy this charged noun [Islamism] without really troubling to define it".[75] This form of narrative that fiercely frames Islam as fundamentally violent reaffirms the ideologies of the New Atheism. According to the 'New Atheists', terrorists exist in every religion and belief system "but we are not hearing from those religions. We are hearing from Islam".[76] Bradley and Tate consider the 'New Atheists' literary works, such as Amis' *The Second Plane*,[77] as part of the post-9/11 narrative, arguing that "the

[74] Amis, *The Second Plane*, 85.
[75] Arthur Bradley and Andrew Tate., *The New Atheist Novel: Philosophy, Fiction and Polemic after 9/11* (London: Continuum, 2010), 43.
[76] Amis, *The Second Plane,* 49.
[77] Amis, *The Second Plane,* 118.

single defining political context for the New Atheism was Al-Qaeda terrorist attack" in 2001.[78] The rhetoric of the New Atheism has stirred controversial debates about the relation between Islam as a mainstream religion and terrorism as a global threat to western secularism and existence.[79]

One of the prominent literary texts in the realm of 9/11 novels is McEwan's *Saturday*, published in 2005.[80] The novel is set in London and revolves around a day in the life of the established neurosurgeon Henry Perowne – the same day of the London mass-protest (15th February 2003) against the British government's decision to join US forces in its war on Iraq. One of the main themes of *Saturday* is the threat of terrorism in a post-9/11 world, as Perowne "sees a plane coming down over the Post Office Tower, trailing a fireball from its wing".[81] This image serves as a backdrop of terror that unfolded during the 9/11 attacks and connects it with the 'War on Terror' and the controversy that it stirred. As people march the streets protesting their government's response with violence to 'counter terrorism', the plane alludes to the constant threat of global terrorism. *Saturday* was well received by many critics; however, it was criticised by others with respect to its engagement with political violence. In his book *Writing Muslim Identity*, Geoffrey Nash argues that in McEwan's novel "Islam and terrorism are conflated, Othered, and turned into enemies of the western Enlightenment world-view".[82] This contrast between logic and empathy and between ignorance and hostility is implicit in *Saturday* but remains powerful nonetheless. It also confirms Huntington's theoretical work about a

[78] Bradley and Tate, *The New Atheist Novel,* 5.
[79] For instance, contemporary popular talk-shows in the US such as "Real Time" with Bill Maher (broadcasted on BHO network) became a venue for discussing the New Atheist's ideologies, criticising Muslims and Islam in a controversial way, and supporting the rhetoric of 'War on Terror'. See HBO. "Real Time with Bill Maher," Accessed 14 February 2021. https://www.hbo.com/real-time-with-bill-maher.
[80] McEwan, *Saturday*.
[81] Tim Adams, "Observer Review: Saturday by Ian McEwan," *The Observer*, January 30, 2005, sec. Books, https://www.theguardian.com/books/2005/jan/30/fiction.bookerprize2005.
[82] Geoffrey Nash, *Writing Muslim Identity* (London: Continuum, 2012), 99.

potential "clash of civilizations"[83], which ultimately promotes a polarizing world view and cements the 'us' and 'them' dichotomies between the western world and the Islamic world. Amongst the ethical consequences of these narratives is the association of terror with the West's Other, hence shaping the political rhetoric around the *legitimacy* of the 'War on Terror' and counter-terrorism measures.

When it comes to prominent 9/11 novels that offer a counternarrative to the stereotypes that proliferated in the aftermath of 9/11, Mohsin Hamid's *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* (2007) stands out.[84] Several studies about the 9/11 novel highly praised Hamid's novel for its literary merits and its transnational approach.[85] The narrative of *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* problematises the 9/11 event, criticises the profiling of people who appear to be from the Middle East, and tackles the issue of political violence from a global perspective rather than a national one. Prescribed by the boundaries of the US, Hamid offers a different approach to terror by depicting the fundamentalism of American capitalism and the extreme measures that harm those who do not benefit from the system. *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* promotes the concept of 'humanism' and rejects 'binarism' in a post-9/11 era. This is an essential approach for the examination of the novels discussed in this research in terms of interrogating to what extent these novels were able to push to the front the notion of 'humanism' in a climate that encourages "reductive polarization",[86] while complicating the East and West representations.

It should be noted here that the 'Middle East' is diverse and consist of various cultures, religions, and languages. As a term, 'The Middle East' came to replace 'Near East' after the Second World War. Both terms, according to Louise L'Estrange Fawcett, were coined to refer

[83] Samuel P. Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order*, (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2011).
[84] Mohsin Hamid, *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 2007).
[85] Gray, *After the Fall*; O'Gorman, *Fictions of War on Terror*; Keeble, *The 9/11 Novel*.
[86] Said, *Orientalism*, xvii

to the region's relative location to Western Europe, which make them political terms.[87] The main features that identify the Middle East are the Islamic faith as the dominant religion and the shared history (for example the long-lasting Ottoman rule of a great part of the region, and later the British and French colonial interference in the Middle East after the Ottoman empire's defeat in WW1). However, scholars disagree over the precise countries that make up the Middle East. Arab states such as Jordan, Lebanon, Egypt and the Gulf countries such as Saudi Arabia, Qatar and the United Arab Emirates are generally perceived as Middle Eastern, whereas countries like Cyprus, Afghanistan and Pakistan are not always considered part of the region. This inconsistency is associated with politics and world events. For instance, after the 9/11 attacks and the 'War on Terror' Afghanistan and Pakistan became increasingly associated with the Middle East in western political discourse. This research follows this trend and considers Pakistan and Afghanistan as part of the Middle East because of their location, Islamic traditions, and their affiliation to foreign politics within this region.

It is also vital to highlight that while I use the terms 'East' and 'West' in a way that seems like a broad description, the terms are complex and inconsistent, and their usage depends on time periods, historical events, and those who employ them. Within this thesis, the 'East' is associated with the Middle East, and the 'West' refers to Western Europe and the United States. The intent of this research is to examine how these terms are represented within the primary texts, and how they are perceived by the characters of the novels. In Updike's *Terrorist*, for example, despite the author's gesture towards complicating the representation of Muslims, there is a tendency by the characters to depict a polarising relationship between a secular West and Muslim East. The Muslim protagonist's inner struggle between his Arab and American identities is manifested by his radical interpretation of religion and the way he perceives his

[87] Louise L'Estrange Fawcett, ed., *International Relations of the Middle East* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 3.

society. In contrast, in Hamid's *Exit West* the boundaries between East and West are more blurred, as the characters travel instantly using magical portals between various locations where they can interact with different cultures. As a result, the clear-cut dichotomies and stereotypes between the East and the West are challenged and complicated. Similarly, the engagement with the terms East and West within this research is intended to make connections, rather than divisions, between these two worlds.

This study is divided into four chapters with a central aim of exploring the various constructions of political violence and its impact. The first chapter examines the depiction of a homegrown terrorist and the factors that lead to his alienation from 'American society' and conversion to violence in Updike's *Terrorist*. Though this work has received much attention as one of the first novels written by an American writer about post-9/11 political violence, it is of importance to this research since Updike attempts to reimagine a major terrorist attack in the aftermath of 9/11, and to complicate the representation of terrorists and the West's Other. As the narrative takes place in the US, the country in which 9/11 occurred and where the ramifications of 9/11 terror played out powerfully following the attacks, the interrogation of forms of terror within this context will help identifying the factors that contribute to defining who a terrorist is and what amounts to terror. In Chapter Two, I study Aslam's *The Blind Man's Garden* and Faqir's *Willow Trees Don't Weep* which take the reader to the Middle East where many countries are profoundly affected by political violence, instability, and foreign military conquests. While depicting the brutality of war and violence, these two texts imagine the factors that contribute to someone becoming a terrorist. Thus, Alsam's and Faqir's novels destabilise dominant notions about the construction of a terrorist. However, the chapter also examines whether the novels represent images of resistance to the ramification of terror, or whether they reproduce images of stereotypes.

Cleave's epistolary work *Incendiary* is the focus of Chapter Three. *Incendiary* portrays London's 7/7 bombing before it happened and provides controversial depictions of how the state practises authority and dominance in the aftermath of a major terrorist attack. Written by a British author and set entirely in the UK, *Incendiary* complicates mainstream knowledge related to terrorism and the state's role in the production of violence and terror. At the same time, and despite the protagonist's tragedy and persisting traumatic events, the narrative offers hope and healing in the midst of crises. The empathy the heroines possess is essential in resisting terror effects, a concept that is also scrutinised in Chapter Four. The last chapter examines Hamid's *Exit West* that is set in the near future. In his novel, Hamid imagines a world on the verge of falling into the abyss, mass-migration, and the emergence of magical portals that transfer people instantly from one place to another. The author depicts the plight of refugees once they arrive in the West, the terror they encounter and the struggles they endure to maintain their humanity. The narrative also represents moments of solidarity, empathy and human connection as forms of resistance to terror effects. At the same time, the novel problematises stereotypes linked with the West and the East, as an endeavour to illustrate human-sameness and coexistence in a global world.

After 9/11, 'terrorism' became a scapegoat: a justification for state political violence, and a convenient and powerful reason to silence voices of opposition against the state. This exposed the vulnerability of democracy, freedom, justice, and human rights, not only in postcolonial countries, but also within Anglo-American governments. The measures to counter terrorism, in countries that sought to root out terrorism, typically involved the implementation of political violence and the moulding of "the fearsome yet faceless figure of the terrorist".[88] The 9/11 novel is a crucial form of expression that can give the terrorist a face and a voice and

[88] Boehmer and Morton, eds., *Terror and the Postcolonial* ,11.

acknowledge the humanity of the ‘enemy’, by representing what is not represented in other forms of discourse.

Chapter One

Saving the Terrorist in John Updike's *Terrorist*

It is "the 'mother' of all events," argues Jean Baudrillard in his analysis of the symbolism and ramifications of the 9/11 event.[89] The factors that make 9/11 an exceptional historical moment are contested, and this is something 9/11 novels' authors attempt to explore and complicate. Although there are a plethora of novels published after the 9/11 attacks that employ the event as a backdrop to the narrative of the novel,[90] few authors took the lead to tackle twenty-first century terrorism as a main theme in their fictional writing. John Updike's *Terrorist*,[91] published in 2006, is one of the first novels written by an American writer that narrativises terrorism and the making of a terrorist in relation to the terrorist attacks of 9/11. *Terrorist* is a much-discussed novel within the field of 9/11 fiction and situating this novel against other fictional texts that are written by writers of various cultural backgrounds opens up the analysis of how terror is represented and problematised in 9/11 fiction.

The immensely spectacular and intensively watched 9/11 event created a narrative that functions by generating terror in terms of the anticipation of future terrorist acts that frames the Other as a potential terrorist. This has led to the reinforcement of existing stereotypes about the Middle East as a place that breeds and fosters violence. It has also led to the United States' declaration of a war on 'terrorism' internally and globally that was transformed into a large-scale military mission.[92] Richard Jackson states that such a "large-scale project of political

[89] Jean Baudrillard, *The Spirit of Terrorism and Other Essays*, trans. Chris Turner (London: Verso, 2012), 3.
[90] Such as Khaled Hosseini's *The Kite Runner* (New York: Riverhead Books, 2003); Nicholas Rinaldi's *Between Two Rivers* (New York: HarperCollins 2004); and Jay McInerney's *The Good Life* (New York: Vintage, 2006).
[91] John Updike, *Terrorist* (London: Penguin, 2007).
[92] The initial declaration of the US war following the 9/11 attack was made on 20 September 2001. See Bush, "Text of George Bush's Speech," 2001.

violence – such as war or counter-terrorism – requires a significant degree of political and social consensus".[93] Accordingly, this war became "a set of institutional practices and an accompanying set of assumptions, beliefs, forms of knowledge and political and cultural narratives".[94] This alludes to the association between state-terror in a post-9/11 climate and how it is supported through "forms of knowledge" woven into western culture and politics.[95] Narrative fiction formulates part of this knowledge, contributing to post-9/11 discourse. Writers of fiction have attempted to reflect on the recent history of 9/11 and, as I argue in this thesis, complicate the simple vision of one-sided political violence, which sees the West as victim to a dangerous eastern foe.

In this chapter I aim to explore the making of a terrorist in Updike's *Terrorist* and its intersection with race, identity, and a political and cultural sense of belonging. My analysis of Ahmad's character in this research is based on three components of his identity: his status as a Muslim, an Arab and an American. These three facets of his character (his religion, his father's race and his nationality) are important to the construction of Ahmad's identity, despite the fact that Updike seems primarily concerned with referring to the American aspects of Ahmad's character. Updike states in an interview that Ahmad is "an American after all".[96] However, Updike did not only write about an American character, but he also wrote about a Muslim Arab character. This begs the question: what does being 'an American' mean in the twenty-first century? To answer this question, my analysis will be informed by Natalie Masuoka's pioneering work *Multiracial Identity and Racial Politics in the United States*, which contributes to the discussion of 'identity choice'. She argues that there is "a cultural shift from viewing race as a process primarily of *assigned classification* to believing that race can be primarily a product

[93] Richard Jackson, *Writing the War on Terrorism: Language, Politics and Counter-Terrorism*, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2005), 1.
[94] Jackson, *Writing the War*, 16.
[95] Jackson, *Writing the War*, 8.
[96] John Updike, "John Updike - Charlie Rose," interview by Charlie Rose, June 14, 2006, accessed 6 February 2021, https://charlierose.com/videos/10819.

of *identification*".[97] In *Terrorist*, the political and social climate affects Ahmad's identification of his race and religious and cultural affiliations.

I will also be interrogating *Terrorist*'s engagement with the "narrative of threat and danger" that has proliferated in western rhetoric post-9/11.[98] Through the novel's depiction of a potential terrorist and the unfolding of a terrorist attack, Updike problematises reductive representations of Muslim terrorists and endeavours to destabilise Islamophobic views of Muslims in relation to terror. Nevertheless, *Terrorist* alludes to the West's vulnerability to the threat of terrorism that stems from Islam and the Middle East. The examination of *Terrorist* is informed by Edward Said's theoretical works *Orientalism*[99] and *Culture and Imperialism*[100] that highlight, among other things, the notion that we cannot read a literary text without analysing its political and cultural association. Said's work describes how political knowledge was constructed and deconstructed during the colonial era and after decolonization, and how literature can interact with and influence these forms of knowledge, especially in relation to the West's Other. Though formal imperialism has largely ceased to exist, other forms of subjugation, sovereignty and racism can be traced in the twenty-first century and are performed by the former coloniser or would-be coloniser over those from ex-colonies or territories dominated by or dependent upon western economic and political imperatives. The attacks of 9/11 and the response of the US and other western countries produced narratives of nationalism, xenophobia, and terror. At the same time, narratives of resistance emerged to question and destabilise the framing of the Orient and the Oriental as the source of violence against an innocent West.

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[97] Natalie Masuoka, *Multiracial Identity and Racial Politics in the United States* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017), 5.
[98] Richard Dean Wells Jackson, "The politics of threat and danger: Writing the war on terrorism," (2004), 2, http://hdl.handle.net/2160/1947
[99] Edward W. Said, *Orientalism*, (London: Penguin, 2003).
[100] Edward W. Said, *Culture And Imperialism*, (London: Vintage, 1994).

This makes Updike's *Terrorist* a primary text for analysis since it tackles the encounter between East and West through a homegrown potential terrorist. Updike is considered one of America's "exceptional writers" in the twentieth century, having written an abundance of fiction and non-fiction, including novels, poetry and literary criticism.[101] The winner of two Pulitzer Prizes, he is known for his realistic depiction of American society and has received numerous reviews as well as critical attention over the years. Some critics hail him as one of the greatest American writers to master the representation of middle-class US society. Bob Batchelor in his book, *John Updike: A Critical Biograph*y, refers to Updike as "perhaps the nation's most lauded freelance writer".[102] Updike's work has also received mixed reviews. While, as Wilson Kaiser argues, Updike masters the representation of the hardships of everyday life, he does not address "the broader cultural questions that would connect his work to the concerns of writers today".[103] *Terrorist*, Updike's twenty-second novel, is in many respects new territory for the author since Updike, in his previously published novels, has not represented a protagonist who is a Muslim Arab American. Moreover, the narrative includes problematic Arabic terms and verses of the Quran. This makes the novel a controversial work in which Updike attempts to interrogate the psychological terrain of a potential terrorist and reveal a hidden scheme to terrorise American civilians on a 9/11 anniversary. At the same time, it "marks a departure from the fictional representations of 9/11" that "are written from the perspective of [the] western 'victim' of terrorism".[104] The author is critical of US culture and offers realistic depictions of how the main character, a Muslim Arab American boy, is victimised and manipulated in his society. In this context, I intend to explore how forms of terror are represented in the text, whether they are

[101] Bob Batchelor, *John Updike: A Critical Biography* (California: ABC-CLIO, 2013), 7.
[102] Batchelor, *John Updike*, 7.
[103] Wilson Kaiser, "John Updike, Now and Then," *American Studies* 53, no. 2 (July 11, 2014): 141–53, https://doi.org/10.1353/ams.2014.0097.
[104] Anna Hartnell, "Violence and the Faithful in Post-9/11 America: Updike's Terrorist, Islam, and the Specter of Exceptionalism," no. 3 (2011): 478, https://doi.org/10.1353/mfs.2011.0066.

associated with state or non-state actors, and to what extent Updike has departed from stereotypical representations of the Oriental.

Representing US society and the threat of terrorism in *Terrorist* in a climate of increased national sentiments is a critical endeavour by Updike. It is evident that the event of 9/11 is unprecedented in the contemporary history of the US in terms of scale and casualties. Before 9/11, terrorism in the US or in the West more broadly was not seen as the sole preserve of Muslims or Arabs. However, with the start of the twenty-first century and the identification of the 9/11's attackers as Arabs and Muslims, "the characteristics of the terrorist 'Other' began to formulate in the discourse and responses".[105] In this context, the 9/11 event created a one-sided, hyper-critical rhetoric that presents the United States as vulnerable to an external threat posed by the 'Muslim Other'. This is manifested in hegemonic narratives that invoke polarity and fear of the Other in a post-9/11 era. Furthermore, as Richard Gray puts it: "prior to September 11, 2001, the last time the United States had been invaded, its borders significantly penetrated, was during the 1812 war with Great Britain".[106] Hence, as Gray observes, the United States was "at least, according to the national sense of things – invaded".[107] For example, the President of the United States at that time, George W. Bush, announced that the 9/11 attack was an act of war committed by "enemies of freedom".[108] What makes 9/11 more significant, besides the loss of human life, was the destruction of the World Trade Towers as an "iconic dimension" that influenced the national aspect of how 9/11 was and is perceived.[109] This notion permeated political and media rhetoric in the direct aftermath of the attack.

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[105] Maureen T. Duffy, "Discourses of the Other as a Foundational and Continuing Elements of Legal Norms in Anti-Terrorism Measures," in *Ideological Battlegrounds – Constructions of Us and Them Before and After 9/11, eds.* Anna Gonerko-Frej, Malgorrzata Sokol (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2016), 57.
[106] Richard Gray, *After the Fall: American Literature since 9/11* (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011), 4.
[107] Gray, *After the Fall*, 5.
[108] Bush, "Text of George Bush's Speech, 2001."
[109] Gray, *After the Fall*, 6.

The scholarship of 9/11 fiction tends to push the discussion and the analysis of novels toward a transnational paradigm instead of limiting it to a national one.[110] This is significant since the vast and grievous ramifications of 9/11 are of a global nature. The 'War on Terror', mass migration, victimization and chaos in countries that are either affected directly or implicitly by 9/11 (such as Iraq and Afghanistan) are part of the 9/11 aftermath. In this vein, novels that may not be directly linked with 9/11 are discussed in the field of 9/11 fiction based on the approach that 9/11 – although it created a rupture in history – is not an isolated moment in time.[111] In fact, global power dynamics remain unchallenged and even intensified in the twenty-first century. The violence that manifested on September 11, 2001 and after is associated with other forms of political violence and military and economic interventions that occurred before 9/11. However, the collapse of the Twin Towers of the World Trade Center, the number of causalities and the bold almost movie-like attacks created a fertile field for large-scale military interventions, extreme counter-terrorism measures, normalization of torture and a surge of human rights violations.

In such a climate, literary fiction's role may be uncertain, occupying different positions on the political spectrum. However, one of literary fiction's strengths is surely its ability to problematise and scrutinise simplistic and nationally confined depictions of 9/11. Nonetheless, the majority of the literary production in the direct aftermath of 9/11 focused on the impact of the event on individuals and stories of loss and grief,[112] without scrutinizing the reasons that led to this attack, why it occurred and what the effects of this event were on the globe.[113] Martin Randall explains that "the terrorist attacks do pose significant and hugely complex challenges

[110] Gauthier*, 9/11 fiction*; O'Gorman, *Fictions of the War on Terror*; Banita, *Plotting Justice.*
[111] See the Introduction Chapter for further discussion.
[112] See the Introduction Chapter.
[113] See Peter Morey, "The Rules of the Game Have Changed: Mohsin Hamid's The Reluctant Fundamentalist and Post-9/11 Fiction," *Journal of Postcolonial Writing* 47, no. 2 (1 May 2011): 135–46, https://doi.org/10.1080/17449855.2011.557184.

for writers of fiction".[114] In this light, Updike's *Terrorist*, is highly significant since it is one of the earliest American novels written about the topic of terrorism and the construction of a terrorist in a post-9/11 world, which includes a reimagining of a major terrorist attack and the factors that contribute to this form of extremism and destruction.

The Making of a Terrorist

Terrorist takes place in the state of New Jersey not long after the attacks of September 2001 at a time when the US is still healing from the crises. Updike writes about Ahmad, an eighteen-year-old boy who is born to an Irish American mother and an Egyptian father who abandons him at the age of three years old. Born and raised in America, Ahmad becomes a Muslim when he discovers his father's religion at the age of eleven by going to the area's local mosque. While Updike constructs his character as a terrorist-in-the making, he attempts to explore the reasons behind Ahmad's radicalisation and decision to commit a suicide bombing. The events of the novel reveal a secret scheme of a destructive terrorist attack that will take place after the anniversary of 9/11. *Terrorist* is written from the point of view of a third-person omniscient narrator through a 'free indirect discourse' style that intersects with the characters' thoughts and feelings throughout the novel. As the novel starts with the highly emotive and subjective sentiment "*DEVILS*, Ahmad thinks",[115] the omniscient narrator's voice soon becomes entangled with Ahmad's thoughts and contemplation on American society that follows in the subsequent paragraphs. The 'free indirect discourse' technique allows the reader to be immersed in the narrative and the character's thoughts, meaning that at some points it is difficult to distinguish the characters' inner voices from the narrator's, which "quietly slips into the

[114] Martin Randall, *9/11 and the Literature of Terror* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2011), 18.
[115] Updike, *Terrorist*, 3.

text".[116] This style of storytelling, when used skilfully, provides the author with flexibility and "fluid movement" between characters, scenes, and the narrator's external voice and the inner voice of the characters.[117]

Updike's *Terrorist* received mixed reviews. Jem Poster, for instance, hails *Terrorist* as "a work of considerable distinction", even if the "plot creaks a little".[118] Scholarship on 9/11 fiction has partly ignored *Terrorist*, despite the novel's depiction of 9/11 terrorism.[119] However, several critics have offered considerable analysis of the novel. For example, Peter Herman examines "the extraordinary intervention Updike makes—at considerable professional risk".[120] Some of these interventions are associated with Updike's ability to criticise US society and culture after 9/11, which is evident in the text.[121] He uses the voices of an Arab American schoolboy (Ahmad) and American Jewish school counsellor (Jack Levy), with each employing a different lens to judge American culture. For Ahmad, people in his society are nonbelievers: "they think safety lies in accumulation of the things of this world" [122]. Jack, too, is critical of the US consumer culture and secularism where he perceives America as a country that is "paved solid with fat and tar, a coast-to-coast tarbaby where we're all stuck".[123] The major difference between Ahmad's voice and Jack's voice is the pronouns they use to describe their society: Ahmad refers to them as "they", divorcing himself from everyone around him, whereas Jack uses "we", emphasising his association and belonging to the American people. Although Jack

[116] Bob Batchelor, "Running Toward the Apocalypse: John Updike's New America," (PhD Diss., University of *South Florida*, 2009), 97, https://scholarcommons.usf.edu/etd/1845.
[117] Daniel P. Gunn, "Free Indirect Discourse," Oxford Research Encyclopaedia of Literature, 25 June 2019, https://doi.org/10.1093/acrefore/9780190201098.013.1020.
[118] Jem Poster, "Review: Terrorist by John Updike," the Guardian, August 5, 2006, http://www.theguardian.com/books/2006/aug/05/shopping.fiction.
[119] Herman notes that many reviewers think of *Terrorist* as "a bad, even a very bad, book." "Terrorism and the Critique of American Culture," 691.
[120] Peter C. Herman, "Terrorism and the Critique of American Culture: John Updike's Terrorist," *Modern Philology* 112, no. 4 (2015): 692, https://doi.org/10.1086/679599.
[121] See Herman, "Terrorism and the Critique of American Culture".
[122] Updike, *Terrorist*, 4.
[123] Updike, *Terrorist,* 27.

heavily criticises his society, and at times loses faith in the possibility of students' reformation, he aims to help and guide the students out of genuine concern. This manifests in his determination to reach out to Ahmad and attempt to change his mind regarding his education and career choices. Comparatively, Ahmad is full of hatred and destructive ideologies towards the people around him and perceives them as sinners who deserve punishment.

The construction of Ahmad's character as a potential terrorist involves a nuanced representation of the circumstances that have altered his attitude towards terrorism. The authenticity of Ahmad's inner voice (that becomes more prominent than the narrator's voice at certain points through free indirect discourse) is a vital component in the narrative to convince the reader of the factors that lead Ahmad to his readiness to embrace martyrdom and commit mass-murder. The fact that he is depicted in the framework of a homegrown terrorist is significant in reimagining the moulding of young boys living in the US as ready to adopt violence, and also enables Updike to explore the ramifications and complexities of such a process. As Jago Morrison notes: "No visit to Afghanistan is required for Ahmad".[124] From the first few pages, the narrative sets the tone of Ahmad's fixed position on western culture. He has an immature view of modern history and politics and, at the same time, is highly opinionated. During his first meeting with the school guidance counsellor, Ahmad speaks to him bluntly using his 'imam' (religious teacher) as a reference:

> He [the imam] said the college track exposed me to corrupting influences – bad philosophy and bad literature. Western culture is Godless […] and because it has no God, it is obsessed with sex and luxury goods. Look at the television, Mr. Levy, how it's always using sex to sell you things you don't need. Look at the history the school teaches, pure colonialist. Look how Christianity committed genocide on the Native Americans and undermined Asia and Africa and now is

[124] Jago Morrison, "Jihadi Fiction: Radicalisation Narratives in the Contemporary Novel," *Textual Practice* 31, no. 3 (16 April 2017): 567–84, https://doi.org/10.1080/0950236X.2017.1294896.

> coming after Islam, with everything in Washington run by the Jews to keep themselves in Palestine.[125]

This dialogue/meeting displays the main reasons behind Ahmad's rejection of his society: sexual freedom and consumerism. The 'Godless' culture seems to serve as a justification of his hatred: in other words, he does not hate the people around him for their lack of faith, he condemns them for their behaviour because he cannot possess what they have. As a high-school boy, he is sexually repressed because of his faith, and he also cannot afford the luxury goods his culture has to offer since he comes from a working-class family. At the same time, Ahmad adds a political and historical dimension to his rejection of his society. He does not hesitate to express his condemnation of western culture through knowledgeable remarks about the history and politics of the United States. The first encounter leaves Jack Levy, a person who has the knowledge and experience to deal with a student like Ahmad, with conflicting thoughts and wondering if Ahmad knows he is a Jew and if the "boy was protecting something".[126] It is not clear if Ahmad is an inexperienced and brainwashed boy or an extremist who already renounces western culture altogether. This is one of the main factors that contribute to the implausibility of Ahmad's character. On one hand, he is represented as a confident student who expresses what he thinks with a sense of authority. On the other hand, it seems that Ahmad adopts the opinions of his religious teacher as an authoritative voice during his discussions with Jack.

The narrative of *Terrorist* gives an insight as to what is running inside Ahmad's mind and how he perceives the people he interacts with. His controversial and extremist ideologies are not thoughts that he keeps to himself. On the contrary, he often expresses what he thinks during his dialogue with other characters. His sharp opinions, that are often offensive to other people, invite enmity within his community – even if he avoids direct confrontation. In a scene where Ahmad engages in a fight with a bully at school, and the school's guidance counsellor interrupts

[125] Updike, *Terrorist*, 38.
[126] Updike, *Terrorist,* 42.

the fight, Ahmad dwells on thoughts related to his appointment with the counsellor to discuss his future career plans. Ahmad mentally recites a verse from the Quran: "*The only guidance*, says the third sura, *is the guidance of Allah*".[127] Hence, instead of being angry about being bullied and ridiculed by other students, Ahmad is thinking of a verse in the Quran – even the location of the verse – that relates to his appointment. This makes Ahmad's inner voice sound inauthentic and unconvincing. In another example, as Ahmad walks Joryleen home after he has watched her sing in a church choir upon her invitation, they engage in a discussion about Ahmad's religious ideologies, women, and 'worldly temptations'. He goes further as to recite a verse from the Quran about women's chastity:

> "as revealed by the Prophet: 'Enjoin believing women to turn their eyes away from temptation and preserve their chastity.' That's from the same sura that advises women to cover their ornaments, and to draw their veils over their bosoms, and not even to stamp their feet so their hidden ankle bracelets can be heard."
>
> "you think I show too much tit – I can tell by where your eyes go."[128]

Ahmad is preaching about his faith, giving a detailed explanation of how women should dress and act to someone who is interested to get to know him rather than to learn about his faith. In this context, he implies to Joryleen that she is being 'lustful, playful and seductive'. He continues with this conversation quoting his preacher and also bringing a political dimension to the discussion. Despite Ahmad's attraction to the girl, he dismisses his feelings and impulses using rigid, sometimes insulting, remarks. He tells Joryleen, as they reach her house, that she is "heading straight for Hell".[129] Insulting her in this manner, while she is depicted as the only student who is kind to him, could be read as a defence mechanism by Ahmad to resist her "friendliness" and control his sexual desire. However, Ahmad's character seems unconvincing

[127] Updike, *Terrorist,* 18.
[128] Updike, *Terrorist,* 70, 71.
[129] Updike, *Terrorist*, 73.

in terms of the context: he insists on walking Joryleen home, crossing the "worse neighbourhoods" where he can be "hassled",[130] lectures her about what women should or should not do in Islam, and ends up insulting her for no apparent reason.

In another scene where Ahmad dwells on thoughts about his mother and once again the third-person narrator is blurred with Ahmad's inner voice and it becomes difficult to differentiate between the two voices. The line of thoughts starts with: "Praise Allah, Ahmad never dreamed of sleeping with his mother…". This sentence is associated with Ahmad's voice as he denies having illicit thoughts regarding his mother. The sentence is followed with: "The truth, insofar as the boy allows himself to link such thoughts with the image of his mother, she is not his type".[131] Here, the narrator takes authority over the narration and reveals the truth of Ahmad's inner voice that his mother does not embody what he desires in women. Perhaps this is done because of the sensitivity of the topic, as Batchelor notes that "perhaps Updike uses a more detached voice in this section to touch on difficult topics, in some way shielding Ahmad from them".[132] It is clear that Ahmad resents his mother's sexual freedom, bringing her boyfriends to their apartment, and describes her manner of dressing as "improper and provocative".[133] Then he is immersed in self-talk about "an indecent confusion between a mother and a mate […] where Satan thrusts vileness upon the dreaming and the daydreaming".[134] To dismiss these unethical and sinful ideas, Ahmad tells himself that his mother is "not his type" as a white woman.[135] He is attracted to darker skin and black eyes, and then refers to the Quran reciting a long verse about his "taste": "what in the Quran figures as *large dark eyeballs, kept close to their pavilions*. The book promises: *And theirs shall be the dark-eyed houris, chaste as hidden*

[130] Updike, *Terrorist,* 70.
[131] Updike, *Terrorist*, 170.
[132] Batchelor, "Running toward the apocalypse," 102.
[133] Updike, *Terrorist*, 169.
[134] Updike, *Terrorist*, 170.
[135] Updike, *Terrorist*, 170.

pearls: a guerdon for their deeds".[136] In such awkward self-talk, the fact that Ahmad brings in the Quran's description of the dark-eyed virgins whilst he thinks of his mother's physical features is problematic and feels imposed. This gives the impression that religious Muslims must/should recite verses from the Quran in a caricaturing manner. In this vein, Updike is portraying a Muslim who keeps reciting Quran to other people who are not interested, and to himself in various situations, which appears to be a stereotypical feature in the narrative. Thus, the construction of Ahmad's character emerges as inauthentic, and it risks creating a narrative that is "robotic and highly implausible", as Geoffrey Nash puts it.[137]

Returning to the opening of the novel, which states "*DEVILS,* Ahmad thinks. *These devils seek to take away my God*",[138] Ahmad asserts his disassociation from his school's community and reveals his fear of losing his 'faith' or his 'God'. He thinks of the students as infidels and sexually obsessed. Likewise, the teachers, to Ahmad, are a mix of hypocrites who are "weak Christians and non-observant Jews" who teach students about virtue while they are "full of lust and fear".[139] Ahmad rejects western culture, values, and its way of life as a means to affirm his identity as a religious nonconformist student and to "protect" himself through his close association with 'God'. [140] In this construct, the terrorist-to-be functions on this disparity between good and evil by maintaining his moral and religious virtues from the 'temptations' his society has to offer. The strength of Ahmad's faith, as the narrator reveals, is founded on how he perceives others. Even his religious mentor, Shaikh Rashid, comes under scrutiny:

> He does not say, *America wants to take away my God.* He protects his God from this weary, unkempt, disbelieving old Jew, and guards as well his suspicion that Shaikh Rashid is so furiously absolute in his doctrines because God has secretly fled from behind his pale Yamani eyes, the elusive gray-blue of a kafir woman's.

[136] Updike, *Terrorist*, 170.
[137] Geoffrey Nash, *Writing Muslim Identity* (London: Continuum, 2012), 105.
[138] Updike, *Terrorist*, 2007, 3.
[139] Updike, *Terrorist*, 2007, 3,4.
[140] Updike, *Terrorist*, 39.

> Ahmad in his fatherless years with his blithely faithless mother has grown accustomed to being God's sole custodian, the one to whom God is in an invisible but palpable companion. God is ever with him.[141]

Ahmad identifies almost every person as a threat to his belief and resolute 'union' with God. Hence, he does not communicate his thoughts and feelings to others, especially to those close to him. It is the narrator who reveals the importance of God's existence in Ahmad's life. In a sense, Ahmad's God is the only 'One' he can trust on account of his abandonment by his father and intimidation by his mother's atheism and relationship with men. The construction of Ahmad's character in this respect is associated with the idea of God's existence in his life. God, in Ahmad's eyes, shields him from doubt and this theme runs throughout the narrative. Becoming a suicide bomber is portrayed in the novel as a manifestation of Ahmad's faith, whereby through a single absolute act he can prove to others and himself as well as God that he is a true believer.

In an interview with Charlie Rose on *Terrorist*, Updike was asked about the doubts he encountered getting "inside of an 18-year-old Arab of high school age, who was influenced by a radical cleric and moved - pushed into a plot to blow up a tunnel". He responded:

> I thought, this is an American after all. He's the product of an Egyptian father and an Irish American mother, and he's been raised entirely in this country. It's not like he is a Syrian or a Saudi. I wouldn't handle either of those, because there's just too much you don't know… I thought, I could imagine a young American with his background and with his deficits -- the father disappeared -- becoming very actively and radically Islamic, to the point that he might exceed to a plot that involves him.[142]

Updike's response alludes to the importance of Ahmad's American identity in imagining his character. Ahmad does not belong to the mainstream identification of being an American who

[141] Updike, *Terrorist*, 39.
[142] Updike, interview by Rose.

is predominantly "white middle class".[143] Ahmad's hybrid racial identity as Arab-American and his conversion to Islam at a young age complicate who he is. The narrative depicts the complexities of Ahmad's national identity, in a manner that his rejection of the consumerist and sensuous components of western culture does not drive towards the rejection of the United States as a whole. In this way, dominant US culture has influenced the construction of his personality, and his rejection of assimilation, or 'alienated' American identity becomes part of his American experience.

During his school years, Ahmad is merely perceived as an Arab and a Muslim. He stands out in the crowd, and this identification as an outsider provokes rebuke from others. A black student tells Ahmad: "Don't talk to me of foolish – you so foolish nobody give you shit, Arab […] Black Muslims I don't diss, but you not black, you not anything but a poor shithead. You no raghead, you a *shit*head".[144] Updike brings to the forefront the racist bullying that a student of Arab and Muslim background might endure. In the novel, Ahmad is abused verbally and then is insulted in front of his peers on the school grounds. He is not only abused on account of his ethnicity and religion, but also demeaned by stereotypes linked to Arab sexuality:

> "A flying fuck is when you do it to yourself, like all you Arabs do. You all faggots, man." The little audience around them laughs, and Ahmad knows from the heat on his face that he is blushing. This infuriates him to the point that when he blindly pushes through the muscular bodies through the doors to the locker room, late now for his shower, late for his lesson, no one moves to stop him. Instead, there are whistles and hoots behind him, as if he is a white girl with pretty legs.[145]

[143] Larry L. Naylor, *American Culture: Myth and Reality of a Culture of Diversity* (Connecticut: Bergin & Gravey, 1998), 51.
[144] Updike, *Terrorist*, 16.
[145] Updike, *Terrorist*, 98.

The use of the word "faggots" by the bully during this direct confrontation in front of other students is deeply insulting. This is a term that often alludes to 'gay men',[146] and this is specifically humiliating since it is expressed by Joryleen's boyfriend, and it also refers to his sexual repression. Although Ahmad endeavours to maintain a low profile and to stay away from trouble, he cannot protect himself from both verbal and physical abuse. He is discriminated against by a black person, a member of another minority that suffers from racial discrimination. These scenes are of significance in the narrative as they illustrate the nature of discrimination Arab Muslims may encounter in the US. Ahmad's tendency to reject others within his school community and criticise dominant American culture make him more vulnerable. Moreover, his Arabic name and Middle Eastern facial features contribute to his community's identification of him as an Arab, even though he does not speak Arabic, nor has he lived outside of the US. This is a form of discrimination, Updike suggests, that Muslims and Arabs are subjected to after 9/11. They are targets of hate speech and profiling which has the potential to affect their mental health negatively. *Terrorist* sheds light on how xenophobia is practised in school premises with potentially dangerous consequences. In Ahmad's case, this increases the gulf even further between himself and his community.

Significantly, Jack Levy questions Ahmad's identity as an American. To him, Ahmad's "ethnic mix, is kind of a minority's minority" which rings true with comparison to other minorities such as African-Americans and Hispanic-Americans who exist in his school in large groups.[147] During Ahmad's first counselling session with Jack Levy, he presumes that Ahmad does not know the meaning of a certain American expression and asks him about it. Ahmad replies: "I am not a foreigner. I have never been abroad".[148] Ahmad's statement that he is not a foreigner

[146] "Definition of Faggot, Dictionary.Com," www.dictionary.com, accessed 27 December 2020, https://www.dictionary.com/browse/faggot.
[147] Updike, *Terrorist*, 84.
[148] Updike, *Terrorist*, 35.

implies that he is an American, but at the same time, he refers to the president of the US while speaking with Joryleen as "your president", disassociating himself from a political national affiliation to the United States. This problematises Ahmad's Americanness and his personal identification as an American. The concept of Americanness is related to the majority of the White population in the US: Thierry Devos and Hafsa Mohamed argue that "many Americans continue to display, at the implicit level, an ethnocultural conception of the American identity aligned with the domination of White Americans".[149] They explain that:

> To a large extent, everyday images of prominent Americans – political and social leaders, celebrities, and a majority of the population – reinforce associations of America as White. As a result, the American identity might be associated with the ethnic identity of being White – so much so that even deliberate, conscious rejection cannot alter this association.[150]

Alternatively, Americanness includes hyphenated and minority identities, and it is an ever-changing concept that transcends beyond a single race, culture or religion. Ahmad can be an Arab American, a Muslim and an individual who opposes American capitalism and consumerism and still be part of the American society. He practises what Natalie Masuoka calls "an identity choice" or "the expression of race as a reflection of personal identity".[151] Ahmad chooses to adopt Islam and a Middle Eastern family-name and hence the narrative asserts Ahmad's personal choice to identify himself through his Arab Muslim father. At the same time, Ahmad is identified by society as both a Muslim and an Arab, whilst his mother's nationality as an Irish American seems as a minor identification of his race. People around him in school solely refer to him as an Arab Muslim – no one mentions Ahmad's multiracial ethnicity – and as a result he is discriminated against. This could be one of the reasons that Ahmad chooses his

[149] Thierry Devos and Hafsa Mohamed, "Shades of American Identity: Implicit Relations between Ethnic and National Identities," *Social and Personality Psychology Compass* 8, no. 12 (November 1, 2014): 739–54, https://doi.org/10.1111/spc3.12149.
[150] Devos and Mohamed, "Shades of American Identity," 7.
[151] Masuoka, *Multiracial Identity,* 4.

father's nationality and religion as a cultural identification, because even if he is constructed as a "product of his Egyptian father and Irish American mother" (as Updike mentions in an interview),[152] his mother's race seems detached from his identity in terms of physical features and ideologies/faith. However, Ahmad represents what Americanness is in contemporary America: instead of rejecting or resisting being American, he manoeuvres to define who he is.

Indeed, Arabs' Americanness is questioned in a post-9/11 era in which "dominant representations of Arab Americans as un-American have only been exacerbated".[153] National identification is not granted for this group of people who have to prove their national allegiance to the US. In *Terrorist*, the Secretary of Homeland Security advises his assistant to tell her sister that she should leave New Prospect because "it is full of Arabs – Arab-Americans, so-called. The old mills brought them in and then slowly folded".[154] He does not consider them Americans – to him they are more Arab than American, and their existence makes the city unsafe to other citizens. Updike presents the state's perception of Arab Americans and migrants from the Middle East and the danger they pose. Indeed, the author attempts to problematise this simplistic stereotypical manner of how the state perceives Arab Americans. Nonetheless, as the narrative alludes to the state's employment of the politics of fear and counter-terrorism, Arab Americans as individuals or a community are represented as a high risk for national security. Ultimately, 'New Prospect', in Updike's novel, becomes a main target for a massive terrorist attack.

The rhetoric in the direct aftermath of 9/11 is fundamentally polarising and as a result Updike's endeavour to give a potential terrorist a voice and scrutinise his character is of significance. It can be argued that Updike's representation of the contributing factors behind Ahmad's

[152] Updike, interview by Rose.
[153] Amaney A. Jamal, "Conclusion: Arab American Racialization," in *Race and Arab Americans Before and After 9/11: From Invisible Citizens to Visible Subjects,* eds. Amaney A. Jamal, Nadine Naber, (New York: Syracuse University Press, 2008), 320.
[154] Updike, *Terrorist*, 260.

radicalization is in itself an act of sympathy to the terrorist-to-be protagonist. Abandoned by his father and raised solely by his mother, Ahmad longs for an absent father and a male figure during his adolescent years. This is a central factor that leads Ahmad at the age of eleven to search for a trace of his father and his culture as an Arab and a Muslim inside the walls of a small mosque. When Jack asks Ahmad: "how do you like to be called?",[155] as he is not sure if to refer Ahmad using his mother's family name (Mulloy) or his father's (Ashmawy), Ahmad's responds with a thorough explanation, stating: "when I am out of school and independent I will become Ahmad Ashmawy".[156] Instead of providing a simple answer to Jack's question, Ahmad explains when he will change his family name and how. He links his Arabic family name to independence and confirmation of his Arabic ethnicity. In doing so, he rejects the part of his upbringing that belongs to western culture and life, as he seeks to claim his father's heritage and religion. The narrator depicts Ahmad's anger at his atheist free-spirited mother, as she personifies all that he denounces in US society. The potential terrorist is displaced both at home, living with an "embarrassing mother" as Ahmad's thoughts conveys to the reader, and he is also alienated at school where he has no friends and becomes vulnerable to bullying by other students.[157] Therefore, Ahmad's usage of the word "devils" to describe people around him does not stem from his interpretation of religion alone, but also from the frustration, alienation, and fear he feels as a young boy.

The potential terrorist is highly influenced by a father who no longer exists and is attached to intimate memories of him. He recalls him as a "warm" person with a "sweet smell", and he draws similarities between himself and his father in character and physical features. It seems that this Arab parent plays a major role in forming Ahmad's identity through him being out of the picture and remaining as a "shadow" in the boy's mind. Hence, his conversion to Islam at

[155] Updike, *Terrorist*, 36.
[156] Updike, *Terrorist*, 37
[157] Updike, *Terrorist*, 94.

an early age is an attempt to connect with his father and to define his identity accordingly. Despite not expressing anger or resentment towards his absentee father, Ahmad's broken family has impacted his psychological and social wellbeing. He refuses to join an Arab community and commits himself to weekly religious and Arabic lessons at the local mosque, in which he finds consolation and support. The narrator gives an insight into Ahmad's thoughts on his way to the mosque:

> [Ahmad's] exploration of his Islamic identity ends at the mosque. The mosque took him in as a child of eleven; it let him be born again. […] Narrow stairs lead upward to *al-masjid al-jami`*, the place of prostration. The green door and the windowless long flight of stairs frightened him the first time he came here, searching for something he had heard about in the chatter of his black classmates concerning their mosques, their preachers who "didn't take none of the man's shit." Other boys his age became choir boys or joined the Club Scouts. He thought he might find in this religion a trace of the handsome father who had receded at the moment his memories were beginning.[158]

Ahmad's journey of self-discovery through his father's heritage leads him towards an extreme interpretation of Islam in the confined space of *al-masjid al-jami`*. While this mosque might appear as a specific example The mosque in the novel is represented as an isolated hidden space where the inside is alienated from the exterior. It has no windows which suggests secrecy and danger and, as we learn, it is the place that manufactures terrorists without the knowledge of US intelligence. Shaikh Rashid, the imam of the mosque, is the first to introduce Ahmad to Islam. The imam takes on the role of a mentor during Ahmad's teenage years and becomes the man determining Ahmad's future after graduation. Early in the narrative, the influence of the imam upon the boy is illustrated. Ahmad refers to him as "my teacher", allows him to interfere in his life decisions and adopts most of his ideologies about western culture.[159] Despite his good

[158] Updike, *Terrorist*, 99.
[159] Updike, *Terrorist*, 37.

academic performance, he refrains from going to college because the imam wants to protect Ahmad from the corruption of western culture. Ironically, instead of joining the college because of its 'bad influence', [160] Ahmad is exposed to a destructive ideology by the imam for the purpose of preparing him for a suicidal terrorist mission. In other words, the imam's mentorship since Ahmad was eleven years old, their close relationship, weekly lessons and discussions are for the sole purpose of preparing Ahmad to become a suicide bomber. In this way, the novel exposes a rift between a secular materialistic culture that celebrates life and a radical religious ideology that seeks death and decay. Furthermore, the novel suggests that multiculturalism and the state's lenience towards the Muslim minority and tolerance of their freedom of worship might have fatal ramifications. In a post-9/11 era, attacks on mosques have, and continue to be, reported as well as discriminatory profiling of people who regularly attend the mosques.[161] While the portrayal of *al-masjid al-jami* mosque might appear as a representation of a single mosque, it is the only mosque that appears in Updike's novel; therefore, it becomes the dominant mosque in Updike's fiction. In this respect, the narrative of *Terrorist* brings into question the innocence of Islamic centres/mosques, presenting them as potential cradles of terrorism.

However, Updike's approach when characterising the potential terrorist is to humanise him and make him less of an outsider. This sympathetic depiction is evident through Updike's efforts to provide an insight into Ahmad's thoughts and feelings and complicating his persona. In *Terrorist*, Updike imagines the aspects of Ahmad's vulnerability that cause him to adopt radical

[160] Updike, *Terrorist*, 38.

[161] After the 9/11 event, mosques became one of the targets of discriminatory violence, see "Combating Post-9/11 Discriminatory Backlash," 6 August 2015, https://www.justice.gov/crt/combating-post-911-discriminatory-backlash-6.

behaviour. This is mainly attributed to his family's circumstances and his ethnic background. Updike explains in an interview with Alden Mudge that he "portrays Ahmad with empathy":[162]

> I think there are enough people complaining about the Arab menace that I can be allowed to try to show this young man as sympathetically as I can, Updike says. He's my hero. I tried to understand him and to dramatize his world. Besides it's not just young Muslims who are killing themselves. We have all these American high school students, steeped in Protestantism and Judaism, who bring guns to school and shoot up the cafeteria knowing they're going to die at the end of this rush. There are a lot of teenagers who are going to take big chances.[163]

According to Updike, writing *Terrorist* is an endeavour to complicate the dominant rhetoric about Arabs as dangerous, in which instead of 'complaining', he tries to approach the Other in a sympathetic manner through his fiction. Notably, what had started as an idea of a novel about a Christian 'would-be priest' became a novel about a Muslim would-be terrorist, who criticises US culture and struggles to fight its temptations. The author's intention is to write about Ahmad's Islamist radicalization and contempt for American society as he would write about extreme and violent students of other faiths. Ahmad is Updike's 'hero', which seems to mean that the character's religion and mixed-race do not make him different from other protagonists of his fiction. However, the issue of Islamist radicalism and violence associated with Muslims were placed under the spotlight after 9/11. Thus, it is significantly challenging to portray a character like Ahmad without being influenced by the socio-political rhetoric on terrorism associated with a radical interpretation of Islam.

Indeed, the novel attempts to complicate the good and evil binaries that disseminated after 9/11. The potential terrorist is not an evil person who seeks destruction for the sake of harming others. He is a smart student with good grades who does not respond to bullying with violence. The

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[162] John Updike, "John Updike, Holy Terror," interview by Alden Mudge, *BookPage*, June 2006, https://bookpage.com/interviews/8355-john-updike.
[163] Updike, interview by Mudge.

narrative represents how Ahmad's moral compass is distorted and how his radicalization and polarised view of religion have fuelled hatred and contempt towards the 'unfaithful'. To him, they are immersed in materialism and sexual freedom. Hence, his attraction to Joryleen, a girl at his school, stirs mixed emotions and desires within him that make him more troubled and anguished:

> Women are animals easily led, Ahmad has been warned by Shaikh Rashid, and he can see for himself that the high school and the world beyond it are full of nuzzling – blind animals in a herd bumping against one another, looking for a scent that will comfort them. But the Qur'an says there is no comfort but for those who believe in the unseen Paradise … Joryleen persists in still standing there, too near him. Her perfume cloys in his nostrils; the crease between her breasts bothers him.[164]

Ahmad's mentor impels him to reject any grey area in his view of life. He perceives women as one entity and even Ahmad's mother is not excluded. Thus, his encounters with Joryleen confuse him since he rarely interacts with other students and because she is nice to him. These conflicting emotions and ideologies, that shape the would-be terrorist's mentality, make the world a difficult place "*because devils are busy in it, confusing things and making the straight crooked*".[165] The issue of sexual frustration keeps appearing in the narrative in a manner that links male Muslims' sexuality with anger and violence. The potential terrorist is tormented by his desire towards Joryleen, hence he is forced to imagine her body – perhaps as a defence mechanism – "roasting in that vault of flames and being scorched into blisters; he experiences a shiver of pity, since she is trying to be nice to him".[166] In this instance, Ahmad is full of resentment not because of concrete rational reasons, but rather because he cannot practise physical intimacy while everyone around him is able to. Gilbert Caluya makes the argument

[164] Updike, *Terrorist*, 10.
[165] Updike, *Terrorist*, 11.
[166] Updike, *Terrorist*, 9.

that there is a western narrative that associates Muslim men's repressed sexual desires and international terrorism, stating that: "This linking of sexual frustration with violent rebellion provided fertile grounds for the coupling of Muslim terrorists with sexual frustration".[167] *Terrorist* is consistent with this argument, as seen especially when Joryleen (who turns to prostitution after school) is illustrated as a reward to Ahmad before his terrorist mission. This creates an image that stereotypes Muslims' masculinity within the framework of terror and presents women as sexual incentives to commit violence.

Significantly, Jack, who suffers from depression and drinking problems, expresses sentiments that are similar to Ahmad's view of American society. He resents the students' ways of life as "they refuse to grasp how bad off they are".[168] He also tells his wife, while discussing the possibility of the terror-threat level being elevated, that "this whole neighbourhood could do with a good bomb".[169] Hartnell argues that "Updike rejects the temptation to consolidate the presumption of American unity and innocence that has formed the popular horizon for understanding the 2001 attacks".[170] This rejection creates a space that offers a complex representation of a post-9/11 US, in that, as Batchelor contends, the novel represents a country "that gets back on its feet after 9/11 [and] retains its hyperfocus on popular culture and its addiction to consumerism".[171] Updike's critical depiction of American society is present in his popular works, such as his celebrated tetralogy *Rabbit*,[172] in which the American male protagonist Harry Angstrom (Rabbit) who longs for "meaning and perfection"[173] has a

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[167] Gilbert Caluya, "Sexual Geopolitics: The 'Blue Balls' Theory of Terrorism," *Continuum* 27, no. 1 (1 February 2013): 57, https://doi.org/10.1080/10304312.2013.737193.
[168] Updike, *Terrorist*, 136, 137.
[169] Updike, *Terrorist*, 32.
[170] Hartnell, "Violence and the Faithful," 478.
[171] Bob Batchelor, "Literary Lions Tackle 9/11: Updike and DeLillo Depicting History through the Novel," *Radical History Review* 2011, no. 111 (1 September 2011): 1 Updike, *Terrorist* 81, https://doi.org/10.1215/01636545-1268785.
[172] These are some of the most significant literary fictional works by Updike that were published in the course of four decades: *Rabbit, Run* (1960); *Rabbit Redux* (1971); *Rabbit Is Rich* (1981); and *Rabbit at Rest* (1990); and *Rabbit Remembered* (2001).
[173] Batchelor, *John Updike: A Critical Biography*, xii.

resemblance to Ahmad's character who is looking for the same thing through his 'devotion' to God.

Although Jack and Ahmad share similar views of American society, Jack is depicted as the modern hero, who has various downfalls (for instance, cheating on his wife). Nonetheless, he cares about his students' best interests, and he risks his life to save Ahmad and his community. While Ahmad is represented as a victim, he is also an imminent danger to the West. He cannot see the goodness and innocence of the people he is about to murder. In this vein, the novel evokes the Orientalist narratives of western heroism as saviours of the Other from a self-destructive path illustrates the influence of forms of knowledge and representations about the Other that were acquired during an era of colonialism. Further, it presents a barbaric image of Arabs and Muslims as a threat to the West. As Freeman puts it "Ahmad and the East still represent the threatening penetration and potential destruction of Western space".[174] It also reinforces a problematic rhetoric around immigration from the Middle East with regards to national security. In this way, Updike's novel is a nexus that suggests that there are many like Ahmad who can be as vulnerable to the manipulation of real terrorists who are willing and capable of brainwashing innocent and non-criminal boys to execute terrorist attacks.

It is a central endeavour in the novel that Updike seeks to establish a sympathetic portrayal of Ahmad. At the same time, the narrative asserts Ahmad's otherness and his transformation from victimhood to a state of victimization. Ahmad's involvement in a terrorist scheme problematises any sort of allegiances he has to his society. The destruction and mass-murder of innocent people goes against humanity let alone the United States. According to the narrative, while Ahmad drives the bomb-loaded truck, his inability to identify with the humanity of the black children looking at him from their car's window and all the other potential victims near

[174] Bradley M. Freeman, "Threatening 'the Good Order': West Meets East in Cecil B. DeMille's the Cheat and John Updike's Terrorist," *Journal of Transnational American Studies* 3, no. 2 (01 2011): 13.

his truck is what creates a major rift between Ahmad's Americanness and his allegiance to 'his God'. His last thoughts after aborting the terrorist mission – and significantly the last sentence in the text – is: "these devils… have taken away my God".[175] While Ahmad finally acknowledges the humanity of his attack's potential victims, this acknowledgement disrupts his religious beliefs and ideologies.[176] This can be read as a sign of Ahmad's troubled psychology, but – as Hartnell puts it – "we are left with the potentially problematic situation in which the intervention of Ahmad's individual conscience has deprived him of Islam".[177] And since the ending of a story – presumably – "tells everything" as it holds the answer, *Terrorist'*s ending is highly controversial.[178] It narrates that Ahmad – in his moment of illumination – cannot see himself as a committed Muslim without the binary lens that he uses to judge his society and his willingness to become a *shahid* by committing mass-murder. Thus, Updike's endeavour to represent a grounded version of a 'home-grown terrorist' conforms to mainstream representations of Arabs and Muslims in post-9/11 discourse that has been disseminated in the US. In his book *Islamophobia and the Novel*, Peter Morey concludes in his analysis of Updike's novel that "we may not have learned much about Islamist extremism, but we have understood something about the other fairytales by which the West seeks to comfort itself".[179] Morey argues that *Terrorist* is an attempt to reconstruct 9/11 but with a positive outcome: it is an optimistic reflection of the 9/11 event. Despite the terrorist attack's failure and the loss of life averted, however, there is a heavy feeling of apprehension. The fortunate happy ending is distorted and flawed with Ahmad's unknown fate and the terrorists' disappearance in the city.

[175] Updike, *Terrorist*, 2007, 310.
[176] Updike, *Terrorist*, 307.
[177] Anna Hartnell, "Violence and the Faithful," 487.
[178] Andrew Bennett and Nicholas Royle, *An Introduction to Literature, Criticism and Theory* (Harlow, U.K.; New York: Routledge, 2009), 57.
[179] Peter Morey, *Islamophobia and the Novel* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2018), 64.

The Narrative of Terror and Otherness

The narrative of *Terrorist* positions Arabs and Muslims as a major threat to the United States. The planning of a catastrophic terrorist attack through an unidentified organization that has the means and resources to recruit Arab Americans and Muslim immigrants provokes terror and fear of terrorism in a post-9/11 era. These organizations, as *Terrorist* depicts, have access to mosques and places of worship in which youth are brainwashed and made receptive to extreme ideologies and violent acts. In this representation, these spaces create holes in the fabric of western countries where seeds of terror are planted by religious teachers to preach fundamentalist and violent interpretations of Islam. Although Ahmad's story is constructed as an individual tale, the whole design of the attack, how it unfolds, its near-execution and the people involved, give the novel a broader perspective on imagining post-9/11 terrorism risks, inducing "the manufactured clash of civilizations".[180] In this vein, violence becomes the product of Muslims and Arabs who have the financial means, and the required skills and resources to plan and almost-successfully accomplish their terrorist mission on US soil. Their ability to produce terror is also associated with the CIA's failure to prevent such an attack as the terrorists disrupt US intelligence and mislead them.

A day before the planned 'jihadi' mission, the Imam (Ahmad's mentor) shaves his beard and dresses in western clothes to blend in. Charlie, the undercover CIA agent, is murdered or, more precisely, tortured before he is "beheaded" with a note attached to his body in Arabic.[181] It is true that images and scenes of beheading were disseminated after the 9/11 attacks and "became standardized during President George W. Bush's Global War on Terror".[182] However, the novel's re-imagination of the terrorists' ability to discover traitors amongst them and resort to

[180] Said, *Orientalism*, xxii.
[181] Updike, *Terrorist*, 290.
[182] Jonathan Matusitz, *Symbolism in Terrorism: Motivation, Communication, and Behavior* (London: Rowman & Littlefield, 2014), 215.

controversial methods of killing conform to extreme brutal presentations of the Other in post-9/11 narratives. While decapitations on TV took place in the Middle East, torture and beheading in *Terrorist* take place within US borders and against a CIA agent. Further, the imam has "vanished" and the other terrorists are "gone underground and scattered".[183] Hence, the masterminds of the attack and the people who financed it have disappeared. They become phantoms and ticking bombs that are ready to explode at any moment in time and in any place. The reader is left with the notion that the US is not immune from danger and the risk of future attacks is relatively high since the 'real terrorists' are out there. Based on this, Jago Morrison writes: "The seeds of jihadi violence, we are invited to infer, may be everywhere. Under the noses of his mother and the staff at his school, Ahmad's radicalization has been in progress for some time".[184] Morrison's contention is that the West's vulnerability to the threat of terrorism is expected in a post-9/11 era.

Despite the sympathetic representation of Ahmad as a victim of his circumstances and his own fear "that the world he inhabits is eating away at the very core of his belief and his self,"[185] Updike's novel reflects the political and media rhetoric in regard to the threat the Other imposes. There is a double threat within *Terrorist*: global terrorism and homegrown terrorists. This is cemented in the novel's portrayal of dangerous Muslims and Arabs who are a constant menace to western security and liberty. Furthermore, they have the potential to cause great damage to the United States and European countries because their objective of causing terror is not random nor immature. It is plotted cunningly and steadily. In this light, the enemy of the West is inflated, cannot be contained by borders, or attacked using traditional means of combat. This enemy, as Peter Morey and Amina Yaqin put it, is present in western narratives and images before 9/11:

[183] Updike, *Terrorist*, 300, 291.
[184] Morrison, "Jihadi Fiction," 576.
[185] Richard Gray, "Open Doors, Closed Minds: American Prose Writing at a Time of Crisis," *American Literary History* 21, no. 1 (2009): 136.

> The bearded Muslim Fanatic, the oppressed, veiled woman, the duplicitous terrorist who lives among "us" the better to bring about our destruction: all these stereotypes have emerged with renewed force since 9/11… behaviour, the body, and dress are treated not as cultural markers but as kind of a moral index, confirming non – Muslim viewers of these images in their sense of superiority and cementing the threatening strangeness of the Muslim Other. [186]

Ahmad is not a typical violent Muslim. Yet he embodies the Muslim Other despite Updike attempting otherwise. What is unique about *Terrorist* is the author's endeavour to represent a fundamentalist Muslim character as an American – at least within Updike's imaginary. In a sense, other aspects of his persona and the hardships he encounters are not entirely different from other American youths who either fall prey to their challenging circumstances or become brainwashed. Joryleen and her boyfriend belong to the African-American community. Upon their graduation Joryleen becomes a prostitute, her boyfriend a pimp. Hence, Joryleen who is described as an intelligent and goodhearted teenager is victimised and conditioned to be part of a demeaning industry. Both Ahmad and Joryleen are victimised, however: Ahmad's indoctrination cannot be separated from his community since his vulnerability with regards to adopting violence impacts the entire society. Hence, his faith and his father's culture, not his circumstances, construct his threatening.

The employment of specific religious and cultural identifications of the Muslim Other within *Terrorist* (such as the Muslim's holy book and the Arabic language) are highly problematic because they are associated with terror first and foremost. In the novel, Ahmad is reminded by his religious teacher the night before his suicidal terrorist attack that the most important thing is "the Holy Qur'an. If your spirit were to weaken in the long night ahead of you, open it, and let the only God speak to you through His last, perfect prophet."[187] Ahmad's God is his anchor to commit to and execute the attack. Updike uses verses from the Qur'an that assure Ahmad of

[186] Morey and Yaqin, *Framing Muslims*, 2,3.
[187] Updike, *Terrorist*, 272.

the righteousness of his mission in killing hundreds of innocent people: "who says unbelief is innocent? Unbelievers say that. God says, in the Qur'an, Be ruthless to unbelievers. Burn them, crush them, because they have forgotten God."[188] Updike's interpretation of how Islamist terrorists perceive the West is primarily tackled through the character of the fundamentalist Muslim preacher, who stereotypes the West, mirroring the pervasive western stereotypes of the East. The intensity of misconceptions, anger and resentment between the West and East encounter are not represented in a nuanced manner. The same thing can be applied to the narrative's engagement with Qur'anic verses and Islamic rituals that echo western hegemonic rhetoric, asserting not only the otherness of Muslims but also the level of harm they can inflict on others.

Terrorist includes several Arabic terms and verses of the Quran transliterated into English.[189] This can be perceived as an attempt to understand how religious extremists think since Islamic terminology is part of the Arabic discourse. In one of Updike's interviews, the author talks about his fascination with the Arabic language, though his knowledge of it is limited, as he states: "Arabic is very twisting, very beautiful".[190] The author admits that he was concerned about using Arabic transliteration in the text since he is using words he "can't pronounce".[191] It can be observed that the Arabic language, specifically after 9/11, gained the distinctive feature of being perceived by some as a dangerous language (particularly in the US); it is the language spoken by 9/11 terrorists and by Osama bin Laden in several video-recorded messages that were broadcast around the world. Although there are no studies that show the ramifications of

[188] Updike, 294.
[189] While "translation" is converting the meaning of a text form one language into another, "transliteration", as defined in the Oxford dictionary, is about writing a word or a text "using the closest corresponding letters of a different alphabet or language". For example, Updike uses the word "kafir" to represent the same letters of the Arabic word that generally refers to "unbelievers".
[190] John Updike, "In 'Terrorist,' a Cautious Novelist Takes On a New Fear," interview by Charles McGrath. *The New York Times*, June 2006. Accessed 13 July 2018. https://www.nytimes.com/2006/05/31/books/31updi.html.
[191] Updike, interview by McGrath.

speaking Arabic publicly in the West, several incidents were reported in news media in which Arabic was judged as a threat in public spaces.[192] In the US on 6 April 2016, almost fifteen years after the 9/11 attacks, an Iraqi student was removed from a Southwest flight from Los Angeles international airport after a passenger heard him using an Arabic word during a phone call and suspected that he was a terrorist.[193] In the controversial document "The 9/11 Commission Report",[194] the Arabic language appears to be inseparable from the terror committed on that day: "Atta and his group became ever more extreme and secretive, speaking only in Arabic to conceal the content of their conversations".[195] This notion of singling out a foreign language in the West produced a climate of fear, in which "speaking Arabic or even reading an Arabic document in public is likely to draw unwelcome attention",[196] especially in airports and aeroplanes where people could be suspected of terrorism.

In *Terrorist*, the potential terrorist uses specific Arabic terms throughout the narrative despite his incompetence in speaking the language of his absent father. At the same time, all the other characters that are linked to terrorism speak it fluently, including his religious mentor who is a Yamani immigrant. The narrative gives an insight into the context of these Arabic terms. 'Kafir' is one of the words that occurs nine times in the narrative by Ahmad and by his religious mentor Sheikh Rashid, who has an essential role in transforming Ahmad to become a terrorist. 'Kafir' or 'kāfir' as defined by the *Oxford English Dictionary* is an "insulting term used by some Muslims for non-Muslims".[197] The usage of the term to describe others generally suggests that

[192] See Khaled Beydoun, "Speaking Arabic While Flying," *Aviation News, Al Jazeera*, 20 April 2016. Accessed 23 December 2020. https://www.aljazeera.com/opinions/2016/4/20/speaking-arabic-while-flying.
[193] Oliver Milman, "Southwest Airlines Draws Outrage over Man Removed for Speaking Arabic," the Guardian, April 16, 2016, http://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2016/apr/16/southwest-airlines-man-removed-flight-arabic.
[194] It is the official report by the US government-appointed about the terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001.
[195] National Commission on Terrorist Attacks upon the United States, *The 9/11 Commission Report: Final Report of the National Commission on Terrorist Attacks Upon the United States* (New York: Norton, 2004), 165.
[196] Edward Said, *From Oslo to Iraq and the Road Map: Essays* (New York: Vintage, 2005), 154.
[197] "Kaffir, Definition of Kaffir in English by Oxford Dictionaries," Oxford Dictionaries, English, accessed March 18, 2018, https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/kaffir.

these people are less worthy and ignorant of true Islam and it emphasises the 'kāfir''s otherness. In Arabic, it literally means 'to cover up', but the term generally refers to unbelievers. Nonetheless, "modern Muslim scholars largely discourage the use of the term for individuals because of its theological implications".[198] The term is linked with the ideology of *takfir* which is adopted by terrorist organizations in the Muslim world to accuse others of being *kuffār* (the plural form of *kafir*).[199] This ideology is an essential part of religious terrorist organizations (such as Al Qaeda and ISIS) since it allows them to execute people if they fall into the category of *kuffar*. Accordingly, followers of all or no religions could be all legitimate targets of a terrorist attack according to the terrorists' theological beliefs. In *Terrorist*, Ahmad perceives everyone in his community who are not Muslims as *kuffār*:

> It was she [Joryleen] who brought up religion, inviting him so saucily to her church to sit with kinky-haired kafirs, the singe of Hellfire on them like the brown skin on barbecued drumsticks. It gets his devils to murmuring inside him, the way Allah allows so many grotesquely mistaken and corrupt religions to lure millions down to Hell forever when in a single flash of light the All-Powerful could show them the way, the Straight Path.[200]

Ahmad thinks that all non-Muslims are doomed in 'Hell', but that they could be saved if they can see the 'Straight Path'. Ahmad questions God's punishment and the validity of people going to hell "forever", since 'He' (God) has the power to show these millions of people the true God.[201] Ahmad struggles with such doubts as the omniscient narrator informs the narrative. However, the term "kafir", that he applies blindly to both adults and children, appears to be dominant. Whenever Ahmad uses the term 'kāfir', he implies his disassociation from other people in his society: he believes in God, he is a true believer, and he is going to heaven because

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[198] Max Farrar, eds., *Islam in the West: Key Issues in Multiculturalism* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), xxiii.
[199] Ahmad Moussalli, "Wahhabism, Salafism and Islamism: Who Is the enemy," In *A Conflict Forum Monograph*, Vol. 1, Pp. 1-39. 2009.
[200] Updike, *Terrorist*, 17.
[201] Updike, *Terrorist*, 17.

he is on the right path, while they (*kuffār*) foolishly and blindly think that they are on the right path. Notably, in the scene inside the church, the Muslim teenager attends the congregation, feels drawn to it and recognises the similarities between his faith and 'their' faith. As Ahmad sits next to a black Christian family, the narrator describes the situation: "the little girls glance up, showing moon crescents of eye white. All of this kafir friendliness Ahmad doesn't know how to repel it".[202] In this scene, Ahmad is eventually able to repel the "kafir friendliness", perhaps because the words 'kafir' and 'friendliness' cannot come together. He tells Joryleen outside the church as she thanks him for showing up: "it is helpful, up to a point, to know the enemy", and that "the prophet said that eventually all unbelievers must be destroyed".[203] Consequently, 'kafir' does not only mean unbelievers: it holds a disturbing connotation with an enemy that deserves destruction and this applies to everyone. It can be argued that if Ahmad had recognised the innocence of the black girls inside the church (before he becomes a terrorist), he would have aborted the terrorist attack once he had seen the black children riding in a car in front of Ahmad's truck during his suicidal mission to blow up his vehicle. Yet, the Arabic word 'kafir' becomes an intolerant and terrorizing word that the terrorists are constantly employing in the narrative.

The controversial Arabic term 'jihad' is mentioned several times in the narrative, a term that is widely used in western discourse about terrorism post-9/11. During Ahmad's job interview at the Chehabs' home furniture establishment, the Lebanese owners, Charlie and his father, engage in a conversation about the US. Charlie argues against his father that the US is an imperialistic state: "Papa, what about our little concentration camp down at Guantánamo Bay? Those bastards can't even have lawyers".[204] The father brings up the term "jihad", as he thinks

[202] Updike, 51.
[203] Updike, 68.
[204] Updike, 149.

that the prisoners at Guantanamo Bay are controlled by war ideologies.[205] Ahmad, before being manipulated by his two 'mentors' (Shiekh Rashid and Charlie) to become a *martyr*, thinks differently about 'jihad'. He tells his future employers that "Jihad doesn't have to mean war… it means striving, along the path of God. It can mean inner struggle".[206] Ahmad's definition of 'jihad' is consistent with the literal definition of the word in Arabic "to struggle" [207] and his interpretation of 'jihad' echoes that in mainstream Islam.

In this way, the narrative deviates from equating 'jihad' with religious violence and it challenges the popular perception of the term in the West, where 'jihad' is associated with terrorism perpetrated by Muslims. However, as the events of the novel proceed towards Ahmad's conversion into terrorism, the word 'jihad' comes to mean "war for God" waged by terrorists or martyrs.[208] The terrorist-to-be quotes a verse from the Quran to describe 'jihad': "*Mohammad is Allah's apostle. Those who follow him are ruthless to the unbelievers…*".[209] The suicidal mission is referred to as "jihad" and Ahmad believes that he is on a 'jihadi' mission and thus a brave soldier of God.[210] For terrorists, this might be part of their solid beliefs. Nonetheless, it raises questions as to how these individuals and organizations justify their acts and if their religious ideologies are the main driving force of the terrorist attacks. Sheikh Rashid informs Ahmad – in case he does not want to go ahead with the mission – that "there are many others eager for a glorious name and the assurance of eternal bliss. The jihad is overwhelmed by volunteers, even in this homeland of evil and irreligion".[211] This intimate association between extreme violence, Islam, and the making of terrorists within the US reflects the

[205] Updike, 149.
[206] Updike, 149.
[207] John L. Esposito, *What Everyone Needs to Know about Islam* (Oxford ; New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 117.
[208] Updike, 234.
[209] Updike, 183.
[210] Updike, 233.
[211] Updike, 237.

potential shortfalls of national intelligence in countering terror. *Terrorist* depicts homegrown terrorists as part of the American fabric, and if Ahmad is not up to the mission, he can be easily replaced. The preacher's manipulation is penetrating, since for Ahmad to belong and stay true to his faith, he has to offer his life as sacrifice, and in return the preacher is sacrificing Ahmad to 'his' God. In a post-9/11 climate, such a depiction of Muslims who live in the US is problematic because it alludes to the politics of fear and it prompts Islamophobic sentiments.

In *Terrorist*, this highly controversial word – 'jihad' – is weaved into the Arabic language as introduced in the narrative. For instance, as Ahmad delivers a piece of furniture to some Arab men, he overhears the words "*fulus*", meaning money in the Egyptian dialect and "*kafir*", and then is asked if he speaks Arabic: "*Enta btehki 'arabi?*".[212] Ahmad interprets what he hears and sees during the delivery as 'jihad' as he discovers a huge amount of cash hidden in this piece of furniture.[213] Accordingly, Arabic transliteration, Arab characters and the term 'jihad' appear in the same context during the planning of a major terrorist attack. In this construct, the controversy of Updike's novel, narrativizing non-state terrorists, lies in its evocation of an invisible threat produced by Arabic-speaking agents that involves radical preachers, members of terrorist organizations, and those vulnerable to radicalization. This might lead to the justification or, worse, normalization of the state-radical-measures to counter terrorism. This is a silenced part of the narrative in which Ahmad is assured, after aborting the mission, that he is "a victim" being "set up by a CIA operative".[214] While his potential detention, interrogation and fate are not part of the story, Ahmad's continued willingness to commit violence is explicit at the end of the narrative since he still perceives the people of the city as "devils".[215]

[212] Updike, 192.
[213] Updike, 198.
[214] Updike, 309.
[215] Updike, 310.

Notably, according to the novel, once Ahmad has agreed to conduct the terrorist mission, he becomes a martyr or a *shahīd* and his death is referred to as *istishhād*, meaning martyrdom. Both Arabic words literarily mean to 'witness': they appear in the Quran in the same context and hence *shahīd* is a person who witnesses.[216] However, the term gradually expanded to mean a 'martyr': a person who dies for his or her faith, and it is argued by Muslim scholars that "it is the highest form of witness to God".[217] Terrorists consider their willingness to die a form of 'martyrdom/ *istishhād'* and their terrorist attacks a form of 'jihad'. In *Terrorist*, Ahmad meets Shiekh Rashid at the mosque to study the scripture – as Ahmad thought – but it turns out to be a meeting about Ahmad's willingness to become a *shahīd*:

> "I will die," he confirms, after silence, "if it is the will of God."
>
> "There is a way," his master cautiously begins, "in which a mighty blow can be delivered against His enemies".
>
> "A plot?" Ahmad asks.
>
> "A way," Shaikh Rashid repeats, fastidiously. "It would involve a *shahīd* whose love of God is unqualified, and who Impatiently thirsts for the glory of Paradise. Are you such a one Ahmad?" […]
>
> After a life of barely belonging, he is on the shaky verge of a radiant centrality. "I believe I am," the boy tells his teacher. […]
>
> "When," Ahmad asks after letting these words sink into a silence, "will my *istishhād* take place?" His self-sacrifice: it is becoming a part of him, a live, helpless thing like his heart, his stomach, his pancreas gnawing away chemicals and enzymes.[218]

It becomes clear that once Ahmad accepts that he will 'sacrifice himself' in the terrorist scheme planned by other terrorists, he is instantly transformed to a *shahīd*: "it is becoming a part of

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[216] "Shahīd, Encyclopedia.Com," accessed 13 November 2020, https://www.encyclopedia.com/religion/dictionaries-thesauruses-pictures-and-press-releases/shahid.
[217] Esposito, *What Everyone Needs to Know about Islam*, 132.
[218] Updike, *Terrorist*, 149.

him".[219] His desperation to belong is achieved through being at the centre of this terrorist mission and its most important cornerstone as an executor or as a *shahīd.* He spends his time reading the Quran and studying the pamphlets "readily available from overseas sources, composed and printed to prepare a *shahid* …".[220] Accepting the role of *shahid* alters Ahmad's state of mind. Now, his ideas revolve around life after death and not around the terrorist attack and its impact, even though not long ago he used to enjoy his job, meeting different people and earning good money. It can be argued that the term itself makes Ahmad another person and it grants him a strong power in which his thoughts are captivated by a commitment to the mission.

The implication that the Arabic language is associated with controversial ideologies can be traced back to the nineteenth century where, as perceived by some Orientalists, "Arabic as a language is a dangerous ideology", and thus the language itself has a psychological influence on Arabs.[221] This problematic association between people and their language is portrayed throughout *Terrorist*, and although Updike resists illustrating a simplistic representation of a terrorist, he nevertheless introduces Arabic terms through their association with dangerous ideologies. Consequently, readers could infer that Arabic words and terror overlap. This portrayal explores the effect of past imperial ideologies on twenty-first-century's forms of knowledge. Furthermore, as Ahmad is depicted in the text, the Arabic language plays a role in the radicalization of Muslims, even for those who do not speak it. In this respect, Hartnell argues that Updike's usage of religious terms in *Terrorist* "threaten[s] to reinstate, rather than transcend, the myth of hermetically sealed and timelessly opposed cultures".[222] In other words, these terms evoke radical versions of Islam and the Middle East that confirm their otherness. The version of Arabic that we hear in *Terrorist* is reduced into few terms with mostly negative

[219] Updike, *Terrorist*, 149.
[220] Updike, *Terrorist*, 251.
[221] Said, *Orientalism*, 320.
[222] Hartnell, "Violence and the Faithful," 484.

connotations, and often allude to terror, intolerance and extremism. In effect, this limited and controversial representation of the Arabic language undermines Updike's attempt to represent Arab Americans in an unbiased light.

Despite the fact that *Terrorist* deals with post-9/11 political violence, the narrative does not provide political and historical depth to the 9/11 event and its global aftermath. There is a reference to the 'War on Terror' that is merely depicted within the framework of dominant political and media discourses. The school's counsellor suggests that Ahmad should join the Army since it would help him in terms of education and skills. To Ahmad, joining the Army is a form of betrayal:

> "If you have no job prospects, think about the Army. It is not everybody's sweetheart any more, but still offers a pretty good deal – teaches you some skills, and helps with an education afterwards. It helped me. If you have any Arabic, they'd love you."
>
> Ahmad's expression stiffens. "The Army would send me to fight my brothers."
>
> "Or to fight *for* your brothers, it could be. Not all Iraqis are insurgents, you know. Most aren't. They just want to get on with business. Civilization started there. They had an up-and-coming little country until Saddam." [223]

Jack, who works with students from a variety of backgrounds, raises a provocative subject without considering the sensitivity of such a topic to Ahmad as a Muslim Arab American. His attempt to reform Ahmad's perception, by suggesting that he will fight "for" his brothers and not against them, shows ignorance of the East-and-West encounter and a lack of political insight. The validity of the war on Iraq launched by the United Sates and coalition forces in 2003 which Jack refers to is highly contested.[224] Notably, Ahmad - who is presented as a smart

[223] Updike, *Terrorist*, 41.

[224] On 15th February 2003 there were mass protests in various parts of the world opposing an act of war on Iraq, mainly in western cities such as London and New York. See Jutta Brunnée and Stephen J. Toope, *Legitimacy and Legality in International Law: An Interactional Account* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010).

and knowledgeable person - does not offer a counter-argument to Jack's point of view, he only frowns and "stands up to leave".[225] In this encounter, discussions around the legitimacy of the US army intervention in Iraq and the atrocities of war committed (for instance the 'Abu Ghraib prison' scandal that received a great amount of attention when photographs of prisoners' torture and humiliation were made public in April 2004)[226] are subverted in the narrative. Whether Updike silences these debates in *Terrorist* to avoid getting into political controversy or to keep a safe distance from themes that are bound up with nationalism and heroism, he asserts the inevitability of the war against terrorism since terrorists are inside the borders of the US as homegrown terrorists and migrants.

While *Terrorist* portrays violence plotted by Muslims and Arabs in the United States, it lacks representations of terror perpetrated against Muslims and Arabs (except for Ahmad's bullying incidents at school). Jack expresses the state's narrative that perceives the war on Iraq as an intervention that will liberate the Iraqis from oppression and install democracy. A few years after 9/11, George W. Bush announced that the US was coming to Iraq "for its citizens, for their great civilisation and for the religious faiths they practise".[227] George W. Bush's paternalistic vision implies that the Iraqis need governance, and the US will supply that through military intervention. In this respect, Said has argued that imperial tactics is often "impelled by impressive ideological formations that include notions that certain territories and people require and beseech domination". [228] Accordingly, in *Terrorist*, Updike alludes to imperial ideologies that give the West the right to decide the fate of other nations and countries, with a certainty

[225] Updike, *Terrorist,* 41.
[226] "The Images That Shamed America," *The Guardian*, May 2004. Accessed 11 February 2018. https://www.theguardian.com/gall/0,8542,1211872,00.html
[227] "Full Text: George Bush's Address on the Start of War," *The Guardian*, March 20, 2003, https://www.theguardian.com/world/2003/mar/20/iraq.georgebush.
[228] Said, *Culture and Imperialism*, 8.

that they know what is best for them. These notions manifest biased images and rhetoric about international military attacks and East and West relations.

In *Terrorist*, one of the most disturbing moments is when Ahmad says 'yes' to the 'jihadi' mission. When his imam asks him if he is willing to be a *shahīd*, he responds: "I believe I am".[229] He does not only say 'yes' to blowing himself up along with other civilians, but also does not display any moment of uncertainty in doing so, until the last moment when he decides against pushing the button to detonate the explosives. This happens, as the narrative reveals, at a time when Ahmad starts to have a good stable income and enjoys his job and the people he gets to know through delivering furniture to different parts of his city. While the sequence of events represent Ahmad as a victim of a broken family and racial discrimination, as well as being brainwashed by his radical 'Islamic' teacher and his employer as a secret CIA agent, his religion appears to be a major influence on him becoming a terrorist. Accordingly, Updike explores terrorism in the novel as an expression of cultural or religious differences and not as a political action/reaction. In this vein, Bhabha writes that "once we see terrorism as an organized political action, rather than the expression of cultural or civilizational 'difference', we can both fight it and look towards the future".[230] This is particularly true when imagining an event that resembles the 9/11 attacks because there is a tendency in popular twenty-first-century narratives to submerge a history of political violence that produced various forms of terror and oppression during the colonial era. Furthermore, *Terrorist*'s depiction of Arab Americans is problematic, presenting this group as a minority which threatens US security and US citizens' way of life.

Politics cannot be separated from any work of literature that deals with the issues of 9/11, terrorism and the making of a terrorist. At the same time, it is challenging to define Updike's *Terrorist* as a political work since it is difficult to pin down the political novel as a literary

[229] Updike, *Terrorist*, 234.
[230] Homi K. Bhabha, "Terror and after..." Parallax 8, No. 1 (2002): 3-4, 4, DOI: 10.1080/13534640110119579.

genre. As Irving Howe argues in *Politics and the Novel*, when literary critics "employ such loose terms as the political" to label a literary work they – at most – refer to "a dominant emphasis, a significant stress in the writer's subject or in his attitude toward it".[231] Updike's treatment of the issue of terrorism and raising the question of why or how someone could become a terrorist is mainly woven through religious ideologies and cultural affiliations. Although, as the narrative depicts, there are other psychosocial circumstances that play a role in the protagonist's radicalism, Ahmad's interpretation of Islam, his religious teacher and the mosque are the major elements that provide Ahmad with the moral justification to conduct the terrorist mission.

Terrorist contributes to a discourse that seeks to understand the Other and to represent this Other sympathetically in relation to political violence in a post-9/11era. The author strives to provide a nuanced image of a radical Muslim that the reader can sympathise with and therefore gives the terrorist a voice and constructs his character as fully human. Nonetheless, despite Updike's best efforts, the novel is influenced by traces of Orientalism and colonial ideologies. With this in mind, Updike's *Terrorist* is a thought-provoking work of literature as it illustrates what "lingers" of imperial representations about the Other in relation to 9/11 and the 'War on Terror'.

[231] Irving Howe, *Politics and the Novel* (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 2002), 16.

Chapter Two

Terror in Nadeem Aslam's *The Blind Man's Garden* and Fadia Faqir's *Willow Trees Don't Weep*

In his study *Muslim Narratives and the Discourse of English* Amin Malak writes: "gone are the days when the representation in English of Muslims and their cultures was dominated by others".[232] Writers of Middle Eastern heritage have the space to tackle the topic of political violence in the twenty-first century and contribute to western narratives about terror and the East-West encounter. This raises the question of how political violence is depicted within 'insider' narratives in relation to the hegemonic representations of Muslims and terror in a post-9/11 era. To answer this, I will examine Nadeem Aslam's *The Blind Man's Garden*[233] and Fadia Faqir's *Willow Trees Don't Weep*,[234] both of which use the English language as their medium of literary expression. Both novels depict the topic of terrorism in the aftermath of 9/11 as a central theme and provide critical representations of Muslim societies and terror. The hybrid identity of the writers is of significance in analysing their fictional narratives as they were both born and raised in Muslim countries and later immigrated to Britain. Faqir was born in Jordan to a Muslim family and moved to Britain in her twenties, while Aslam was born in Pakistan to a communist father and immigrated to Britain at the age of fourteen. The predominant setting of *The Blind Man's Garden* and *Willow Trees Don't Weep* is the Middle East, and the main characters derive from Muslim societies that are affected by state and non-state terror.[235] It can

[232] Amin Malak, *Muslim Narratives and the Discourse of English* (New York: State University of New York Press, 2005), 7.
[233] Nadeem Aslam, *The Blind Man's Garden* (London: Faber & Faber, 2013).
[234] Fadia Faqir, *Willow Trees Don't Weep* (London: Heron Books, 2014).
[235] The countries that make the Middle East are contested between scholars. In this research, Pakistan and Afghanistan are considered part of the Middle East because of their locations and histories. See the Introduction Chapter (p. 35, 56) for further discussion.

be argued that Aslam and Faqir have the insider's advantage of their hybrid identity and have distinct perspectives on so-called Islamist terrorism and the 'War on Terror' which are informed by their identity.

In his book *The Location of Culture* Homi Bhabha proposes that the issue of hybridity is a positive one, presenting the concept of the 'Third Space' as a mode of production to account for this. The Third Space is a space of innovative representation that has "productive capacities" which "may open the way to conceptualising an international culture" based on the "inscription and articulation of culture's hybridity".[236] Bhabha argues that the conflicting cultures that one belongs to grant the opportunity to produce something new that transcends binarism and that "by exploring this Third Space, we may elude the politics of polarity."[237] At the same time, other scholars argue, authors who are identified by their mixed heritage are at risk of reproducing the same stereotypes or, as Geoffrey Nash puts it, "employing recycled Orientalist tropes cast in the insider's voice".[238] Faqir's and Aslam's novels allow for the examination of Bhabha's 'Third Space', as well as stereotypical representations of the Self and the Other.

The argument I put forward in this chapter is that Aslam in *The Blind Man's Garden* and Faqir in *Willow Trees Don't Weep* complicate images of victimhood, torture and the making of terrorists in a post-9/11 East/West context.[239] In doing so, Aslam and Faqir explore various representations of political violence that are associated with the impact of colonialism, postcolonialism and post-9/11 military intervention within the Middle East. At the same time, however, these images are confined by the taint of neo-imperialist constructions of the Other and so Aslam and Faqir reproduce stereotypes of Muslims and the East-West relationship in their novels. Lucienne Loh argues that after 9/11, "British literature that seeks to address the

[236] Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London: Routledge, 2007), 56.
[237] Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, 56.
[238] Geoffrey Nash, *Writing Muslim Identity* (London: Continuum, 2012), 26.
[239] For more details about the usage of the terms 'East' and 'West', refer to the Introduction Chapter, 36, 37.

transnational threat of Islamist terror must necessarily be considered in a postcolonial light since this more recent form of terror reflects long-standing colonial legacies and their attendant discourses".[240] In this respect, a postcolonial reading of Aslam's and Faqir's novels is essential in interpreting the images of terror and the writers' contribution in reforming the representation of Muslims.

Discussions of the colonial and the postcolonial must stem from the "recognition that global power structures have not materially shifted since the end of the imperial era".[241] Where colonialism ceased to exist in its typical form, many countries that gained political independence lacked economic freedom, and they were and continue to be dominated or exploited by western capitalism. This is often referred to as 'neo-imperialism' and it is associated with the continuous sovereignty of postcolonial countries "where large states dominate weaker independent ones, through economic and indirect political means".[242] The discourse of post-9/11 terrorism plays a vital part in justifying and even legitimizing military and neo-imperial interventions in the Middle East, especially when the people who live in these postcolonial countries are stigmatised as being barbarous and violent.[243] In this context, Dag Tuastad explains that "the imaginaries of 'terrorism' and 'Arab mind' backwardness are closely connected. The latter explains the former as irrational—violence thus becomes the product of a backward culture".[244] This relates to discussions of the term neo-Orientalism, whose proponents argue that global terrorism targeting the West and political violence within the

[240] Lucienne Loh, *"*Postcolonial and Diasporic Voices: Contemporary British Fiction in an Age of Transnational Terror," In *The 2000s: A Decade of Contemporary British Fiction*, ed. Nick Bentley, Nick Hubble, Leigh Wilson (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2015), 117.

[241] Robert J. C. Young, *Postcolonialism: An Historical Introduction*, Anniversary edition (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2016), 8.

[242] Henry Dsouza, *The Age of Neo-Imperialism* (Bloomington: Author House, 2014), 83.

[243] See Dag Tuastad, "Neo-Orientalism and the New Barbarism Thesis: Aspects of Symbolic Violence in the Middle East Conflict(s)," *Third World Quarterly* 24, no. 4 (2003).

[244] Tuastad, "Neo-Orientalism," 592.

Middle East cannot be separated from the culture and nature of Arabs and Muslims.[245] Indeed, the consequences of neo-imperialism and its discourses are catastrophic, resulting in poverty, corruption, civil-war and ultimately the victimization of civilians – even in the absence of a full military dominance over a country. According to Mubarak Altaiji:

> The 9/11 attacks and the so-called "War on Terror" brought the Middle East and the classic Orientalist discourse, with its binary division of "us" and "them" into focus once more. Therefore, representations of Arab Muslims become more prevalent in post-9/11 politics, and terrorism becomes the most available term for labelling this group of people.[246]

Post-9/11fiction reflects and problematises the discourse of neo-Orientalism. This analysis of *The Blind Man's Garden* and *Willow Trees Don't Weep* is an endeavour to explore how images of barbarism within the Muslim East are portrayed in the novels and how these images contribute to the imaginary of twenty-first century political violence. The interrogation of colonial and postcolonial depictions will shed light on the authors' attempts to either challenge or reinforce reductive images and stereotypes about the West's Other.

Aslam and Faqir gained academic and literary recognition for their writings and were recognised for making significant contributions to Anglophone literary fiction. An award-winning writer with five novels published so far, Aslam is acclaimed for his "ravishing poetry and poise".[247] Both of his novels *The Wasted Vigil* and *The Blind Man's Garden* revolve around the ramifications of 9/11 and the 'War on Terror' in Pakistan and Afghanistan. *The Blind Man's Garden* is praised as an "impressive accomplishment; a gripping and moving piece of

[245] See Samiei Mohammad, "Neo-Orientalism? The Relationship between the West and Islam in Our Globalised World," *Third World Quarterly* 31, no. 7 (1 January 2010): 1145–60, https://doi.org/10.1080/01436597.2010.518749.
[246] Mubarak Altwaiji, "Neo-Orientalism and the Neo-Imperialism Thesis: Post-9/11 US and Arab World Relationship," *Arab Studies Quarterly* 36, no. 4 (1 October 2014): 314, https://doi.org/10.13169/arabstudquar.36.4.0313.
[247] Nadeem Aslam, "Nadeem Aslam: A Life in Writing," interview by Maya Jaggi. *The Guardian*, 26 January 2013. http://www.theguardian.com/culture/2013/jan/26/nadeem-aslam-life-in-writing.

storytelling".[248] It reflects Aslam's perception of the corruption, terror, and victimhood that are inflicted upon Middle Eastern societies by providing vivid and intimate details of the region and its people. He also portrays images of hope and reconciliation in the midst of fear and retaliation. A writer and a novelist, Faqir has received several awards for her literary production. She is amongst the few Arab British women writers to publish in English. Her close affiliation with the Arab and western cultures gives her an advantage in tackling critical issues related to Muslim and Arab women, patriarchy, and migration. In her work *Willow Trees Don't Weep*, Faqir ventures into the realm of political violence, the making of terrorists in Afghanistan and the 7/7 London bombings. *Willow Trees Don't Weep* complicates the representation of a terrorist in the making, especially when compared, for example, to Updike's *Terrorist*. Just as writing about the 9/11 crisis in the direct aftermath of the attacks was challenging for many western writers,[249] the same notion can be applied to writing about the 'War on Terror' from the point of view of people of Middle Eastern heritage. For this reason, Aslam's and Faqir's novels are useful, as they offer alternative, hybrid perspectives within the field of 9/11 fiction.

Terror in the Middle East

The severe consequences of neo-imperialism are a daily living reality for people who belong to so-called Third World countries. The 'War on Terror' waged against al-Qaeda by the United States arguably masked a US foreign policy driven by neo-imperialist aims and objectives. Ania Loomba explains that with the presence of American neo-imperialism, which "wields enormous military and economic power across the globe but without direct political control",[250] it is harder

[248] James Lasdun, "The Blind Man's Garden by Nadeem Aslam – Review," *The Guardian*, 31 January 2013. Books. https://www.theguardian.com/books/2013/jan/31/the-blind-mans-garden-review.
[249] Richard Gray, *After the Fall: American Literature Since 9/11*, (West Sussex: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011), 1.
[250] Ania Loomba, *Colonialism/Postcolonialism*, (London ; New York: Routledge, 2005), 11.

than ever to see our world as simply 'postcolonial'.[251] Western discourse after the 9/11 event, Greg Bankoff describes, is "a discourse whose condition of danger for Westerners and their interests has been used to justify interference and intervention in another's affairs".[252] In this light, Aslam's and Faqir's attempts to shift the setting of post-9/11 narratives from the West to the Middle East are of significance as they are able to depict the horrors of war and effects of neo-imperialism on individuals and societies.

Aslam's novel *The Blind Man's Garden* takes place in Pakistan and Afghanistan in the direct aftermath of the 9/11 attacks, when the United States government had pledged to eradicate terrorism and take revenge on al-Qaeda in Afghanistan. The real historical events which mark the start of new military conquests in the region are represented through Rohan's family, who reside in the fictional city of Heer. The narrative depicts the lives of ordinary people from a small city in Pakistan and the effect of war and extreme religious radicalization on their society. Through a love triangle where two brothers, Joe (Rohan's biological son) and Mikal (the adopted son), are in love with the same woman, Naheed, the novel follows Mikal's journey to return to his beloved after war tears them apart and causes the death of his brother.

Written from the perspective of an omniscient narrator who knows the thoughts and feelings of the characters, the narrative moves between the characters to engage the reader with intimate feelings about the Self and the Other. Though there are some moments in the narrative that appear to be "overmediated"[253] (such as the story of horses that belong to Rohan's grandfather), which "interrupt" the narrator's present tense, Aslam's writing techniques are exceptionally powerful, immersing the reader within the events of the novel in a way that focuses on the dilemmas of the individual characters and then zooming out to reflect on the broader situation

[251] Loomba, *Colonialism/Postcolonialism*, 213.
[252] Greg Bankoff, "Regions of Risk: Western Discourses on Terrorism and the Significance of Islam," *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* 26, no. 6 (1 November 2003): 414, https://doi.org/10.1080/10576100390242929.
[253] Michele Levy, "The Blind Man's Garden. New York. Knopf. 2013. Isbn 9780307961716 Nadeem Aslam," *World Literature Today* 88, no. 3–4 (1 August 2014): 99–100, https://doi.org/10.7588/worllitetoda.88.3-4.0099.

in Pakistan and Afghanistan. The novel starts with Rohan's thoughts on the US war in the neighbouring country of Afghanistan: "The logic is that there are no innocent people in a guilty nation".[254] This refers to the rationale behind military operations that target terrorists, during which the death of innocent people are perceived as collateral damage. The question Rohan raises, however, is how innocent are they, and who has the right to declare their innocence? Throughout the narrative, the innocence of the people is problematised. The symbolism of the story told by the bird pardoner, who puts bird snares in Rohan's garden, revolves around the concept of innocence and guilt.[255] The bird pardoner explains to Rohan:

> 'The freed bird says a prayer on behalf of the one who has bought its freedom. And God never ignores the prayers of the weak.' […] To him [Rohan] the stranger's idea had seemed anything but simple, its reasoning flawed. If a bird will say a prayer for the person who has bought its freedom, wouldn't it call down retribution on the one who trapped and imprisoned it? And the one who facilitated the entrapment? [256]

Rohan's questions are rhetorical: those involved in the entrapment of these birds are not innocent. Even the people who free them bear guilt because they ultimately contribute to the whole process of birds' captivity. If no one buys them, the bird pardoner no longer has a reason to capture the birds. This may apply to all sorts of unjust treatment, where suffering, torture and the imprisonment of the innocent is essentially flawed and cannot be justified. At the same time, the bird pardoner makes a living out of this, a fact which conveys the level of poverty that he must endure to seek such a business. The novel reveals that his son, a "fourteen-years-old boy [who] had run away to fight in Afghanistan", is captured and tortured by an Afghani warlord.[257] This forces the bird pardoner to set more snares to earn more money in an attempt to free his son. In this way, the circle of terror and victimhood is endless. In order to free one from

[254] Aslam, *The Blind Man's Garden*, 6.
[255] Aslam, *The Blind Man's Garden,*7.
[256] Aslam, *The Blind Man's Garden,* 7.
[257] Aslam, *The Blind Man's Garden*, 131.

captivity, one must torture and victimise others. The captured and tormented birds are in the heart of the novel and through this Aslam represents the complexity of innocence, guilt, and most importantly the moral dynamics of the 'War on Terror'. Though these stories are dominated by symbolism, the unreal might seem real for readers who do not belong to the culture. Magical realism is often used by postcolonial writers to present narratives from a less western perspective. However, the intersection between history and contemporary politics with magical realism creates a narrative where the magical element seems to be true, confirming the strangeness of the Orient and Oriental.

In Aslam's novel, political violence is problematised at the points where right and wrong and the victim and the victimiser intersect. When Rohan's son Joe decides to travel to Afghanistan with his foster brother Mikal to help the wounded, Rohan, a religious and educated man, states that if he were in the US during 9/11 "he would have done all he could to save the blameless from dying".[258] Yet if he were younger, he would not resist going to Afghanistan and "he would have fought and defended with his arms".[259] The narrator in this instance problematises political violence, demonstrating that one cannot justify and explain terrorism and counterterrorism using a black-and-white lens. Rohan's view represents the ethics that surround violence which state that civilians, despite their nationality and affiliation, should not be targeted. Hence, both acts are essentially corrupt: the attacks of 9/11 and the attacks on Afghanistan. What remains is the suffering of the masses, the poor and the unprivileged. In the words of the bird pardoner grieving the imprisonment of his son following the 9/11 attacks: "I am sorry that they happened in my lifetime. They have destroyed me. And I live far from where they took place. What does Heer know about New York, or New York about Heer?"[260] This contemplation represents the devastating aftermath of 9/11, the effect of patriotism and radicalism on the young, and how a

[258] Aslam, *The Blind Man's Garden,* 30.
[259] Aslam, *The Blind Man's Garden,* 30.
[260] Aslam, *The Blind Man's Garden*, 132, 133.

person who lives in a tiny village can suffer the consequences of something that takes place in a different continent. The bird pardoner's presence as a representative of the impact of war on less privileged people, including the victimization of his own family and the plight of the birds he sets traps for, is highly symbolic because it gives a voice to the voiceless. In this way, Aslam's novel represents the uniqueness of 9/11 fiction by means of "the profoundly ethical anxiety it communicates" and "in questioning established opposites and newer dichotomies".[261] The problematisation of clear-cut dichotomies related to the Orient is therefore constantly evoked in *The Blind Man's Garden*.

In her novel *Willow Trees Don't Weep*, the Jordanian British writer Fadia Faqir writes about war, al-Qaeda and terrorism by depicting the journey of Najwa who is on a mission to find her father who disappears when she is a child. *Willow Trees Don't Weep* includes six parts written from the point-of-view of two narrators: Najwa and her father Omar Rahman. Najwa, who is a young woman, narrates what it is like to grow up in a conservative society without a father and the hardships she has to go through in order to find him after her mother's death. While Najwa's narrative is set in the present moment during her adulthood, Omar's narrative offers insights into the past at the time when Najwa is a small child. He writes about his life's journey up until he is reunited with his daughter in the UK. Omar is represented as an ordinary man who is subjected to radical ideas in Jordan, becomes a *mujahid* in Afghanistan and then is sent to the UK as a terrorist to successfully transform other 'Muslims' into terrorists. Hence, his narration fills the gaps of Najwa's story by revealing what happens to him and his friend Hani during the years of his absence from his family. What distinguishes Omar's first-person narration is that it is written in the form of a memoir, with dates and names of places listed in every 'diary entry'. It could be argued that this narrative technique does not only give Omar, 'the terrorist', a voice,

[261] Georgiana Banita, *Plotting Justice: Narrative Ethics and Literary Culture after 9/11* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2012), 16.

but also, according to Philippe Lejeune's 'autobiographical pact', an authentic, genuine voice. In this 'pact', the writer promises truthfulness to the reader.[262] Therefore, Omar's depiction of the terror around him, especially in Afghanistan, becomes a vivid and personalised narrative, and the author's voice becomes concealed by Omar's voice.

In an interview, Faqir explains that once she finished writing the story from the daughter's point of view, she realised that there was a missing part in the book which is "the story of the father from his perspective" and so she has created a "diary of a fighter".[263] In this respect, *Willow Trees Don't Weep* becomes a space of narrating stories using the voice of 'the terrorist' about post-9/11 political violence that are almost absent in the West's narratives. Faqir attempts to problematise terror by examining the question of why someone could adopt terrorist ideologies and become a terrorist through a close depiction of a person's transformation from an ordinary, relatively secular father to a terrorist.

Omar's first-person narrative and his description and reflection of events that take place in Jordan, Afghanistan and London serve as an exploration of the issue of violent radicalization. His diary speaks of two images of terror that resemble each other despite the different settings and persecutors. In Afghanistan, Omar struggles to save his friend Hani during the US military operations after 9/11. It seems, as the narrative reveals, that Hani is involved in a crucial battle, or 'rebellion', between Taliban prisoners and their captors that leads to heavy bombardment and disastrous results.[264] At the prison's location, Omar searches for his friend among six hundred bodies and then finds him in a basement "*dangling from the ceiling, with his hand tied behind his back. The slit in his belly is too neat for a bullet, grenade or explosion. So, he was killed, then hanged. I cut the rope, pressed his stomach and intestines in*".[265] The scene refers

[262] Philippe Lejeune, *On Autobiography*, ed. Paul John Eakin (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1989).
[263] Fadia Faqir, "Fadia Faqir Introduces Willow Trees Don't Weep," *Quercus Books*, 16 February 2014, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tK4K1V8SreA.
[264] Faqir, *Willow Trees*, 155.
[265] Faqir, *Willow Trees*, 156. All of Omar's narrative/diary intervals are written in italics.

to the events which took place in Qala-i-Jangi in 2001 during the US and UK military campaign in Afghanistan that led to accusations that the coalition forces broke the Geneva Convention.[266] Though there was no conclusive evidence, nor has an official investigation been made, "some reports indicated that hundreds of the dead had their hands tied behind their backs".[267] The vagueness and controversy about what happened in Qala-i-Jangi, and whether it was a battle, uprising or a massacre is reflected in *Willow Trees Don't Weep*. This reflection is represented in the aftermath of events. Faqir does not impose one interpretation of the course of actions that occurred in Qala-i-Jangi fortress (made into a prison to detain Taliban fighters). However, the author reimagines the aftermath of the battle as Omar describes what he sees and smells: "*The stench was unbearable in the yard. Bodies were piled up as if they were sacks of flour […] what was shocking was that most hands had been tied, presumably behind their backs*".[268] Hence, though Omar does not know exactly what occurred inside the fortress, the scene suggests a possible massacre and crimes of torture and murder against the Taliban fighters. This is illustrated in Omar's depiction of his friend's body and what he witnesses in Qala-i-Jangi. This incident leaves Omar mentally distressed and he suffers from provisional numbness during which he "*couldn't eat, sleep or speak*".[269] In this context, Faqir's novel is critical of the state's political violence in the aftermath of 9/11, its impact on people, and the potential for war-crimes. When violence erupts, and when "smart bombs that were not so smart" are fired, victimhood and terror prevail. [270]

In the midst of the diary entry describing the horrific death of his friend, Omar recalls another incident that takes place in Jordan which changes the course of Omar and Hani's lives from ordinary students to members of al-Qaeda. Hani reveals to Omar that he was unjustly taken by

[266] "Fatal Errors That Led to Massacre," World News, The Guardian, 1 December 2001, accessed 16 November 2020, https://www.theguardian.com/world/2001/dec/01/afghanistan.richardnortontaylor.
[267] Rahul Mahajan, *The New Crusade: America's War on Terrorism* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2002), 52.
[268] Faqir, *Willow Trees*, 156.
[269] Faqir, *Willow Trees*, 247.
[270] Faqir, *Willow Trees*, 154.

the secret police while he was at a study circle as "*he didn't realise that the study group was run by a banned Islamic party*".[271] During Hani's confinement, he is subjected to torture: "*The interrogation began in the presence of a foreign officer… Hands and legs tied up to the ceiling… At night, two men came in, broke a bottle and stuck it up my anus, tearing the blastopore and intestines.* "*He is crying like a woman.*'"[272] Hani is hanged from the ceiling and is tortured in both depictions, representing a cycle of terror and victimization. With this in mind, Faqir is critical of the role authoritarian governments in the Arab and Muslim world play in people's adoption of radicalism. The inhuman treatment that Hani is subjected to in his home country – in the form of physical torture and humiliation – is one of the main reasons that lead him and Omar to join al-Qaeda in Afghanistan: "*We decided to leave – fight the injustice in our countries, starting here*."[273] Faqir illustrates that victims of terror and torture could resort to extreme ideologies and become open to radicalization by Islamists. Adopting radical measures and terrorism become a means to restore justice or seek vengeance against those who abused them.

The practice of persecution and terror by states in the Middle East is often inherited from colonial structures. After the end of the colonial rule in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, scholars have argued that imperialism is exercised over the newly 'independent' countries through different channels, such as military dependence, which is perceived as "one of the most visible aspects of neo-colonialism".[274] In a similar vein, dictatorships in the Middle East have been supported by western authorities "in the name of maintaining stability and safeguarding the West's geopolitical and economic interests".[275] Faqir's representation of state-terror and the power-dynamics involved is of significance as it complicates the making of a

[271] Faqir, *Willow Trees,* 156.
[272] Faqir, *Willow Trees*, 157.
[273] Faqir, *Willow Trees*, 157.
[274] Brian Clive Smith, *Understanding Third World Politics: Theories of Political Change and Development* (Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 60.
[275] Tariq Ramadan, *The Arab Awakening: Islam and the New Middle East* (London: Allen Lane, 2012), 13.

terrorist. It could be argued that the narrative exposes stories that are often submerged in the West's narrative on the 'War on Terror' and political violence. Omar and Hani are not essentially violent, but oppression, vengeance, and indoctrination have led to them joining a terrorist organization. Furthermore, Omar's decision to be part of 'global jihad' is bound up with his friend's horrific death. Hence, *Willow Trees Don't Weep* offers a counternarrative to dominant stereotypical representations of Middle Eastern terrorists.

In *The Blind Man's Garden*, Aslam explores the same issue of terrorism and its true motivations. This is most evident in the depiction of the school siege – the main terrorist attack in the novel – from its initial stages to its execution and aftermath. The terrorists' political cause and their distorted religious ideologies seem to be their main motivation behind besieging the school. The terrorist characters in the novel claim that by conducting such an operation they will ultimately be able to transform their country and government and also disrupt the world order. The author endeavours to depict the terrorists' mindsets and unravel the psychological aspects of their behaviours. In doing so, Aslam's narrative uncovers other factors behind the school siege. One of these factors – similar to those informing Faqir's narrative – is the cycle of violence that is closely associated with revenge. One of the masterminds behind the school siege is burdened with helplessness and anger as a result of being "the brother of someone who had gone to Afghanistan in October and is now believed to be in US custody".[276] Ahmad, the leader of the attack and the main person behind the school's massacre, is deeply disturbed as his mind dwells on a memory that resembles the magnitude of terror at times of war. He recalls this memory during the school siege:

> …his mind entering the nightmare of the battlefield yet again, in Afghanistan last autumn, the place where he'd learned what two hundred corpses look like. He had had to dig his way out from under them after the guns and rockets and missiles had fallen silent, emerging into the light that revealed the bodies full of

[276] Aslam, *The Blind Man's Garden*, 192.

> insect scribble, the mouths that would ignite their red lament for him in the sunrise every morning from then on […] they lay all around him then, slain, slaughtered, stinking, cleansed at last of the burden of being who they were on earth, the souls pulled clean out of them, the arms twisted, the heads severed, the feet separated from legs that had been separated from torsos. [277]

Aslam's vivid and poetic description of violence and how it can transform a person's very nature is evident in Ahmad's endless nightmare of the horrors of war. Ahmad's *resurrection* from death, dismembered bodies and the abyss, Aslam skilfully illustrates, put him in a state of constant torture. He has to relive this horrific moment "every morning" and consequently questions God's justice and endures the feeling of being "enraged at the peace that reigned at that very moment on other parts of the planet". [278] In this instance, the narrator alludes to how terror and destruction can be a persistent experience to people who live in areas of conflict and war. This sense of universal injustice is another factor that fuels a desire for revenge.

The mental instability of these terrorists who are traumatised by the US invasion of Afghanistan is another major aspect behind the capability to commit terror. In *The Blind Man's Garden*, Aslam has highly problematised the school siege, over which the sanity of the leading terrorist figures is questioned by other terrorists who oppose the attack of an inhabited school building. When a terrorist woman compares the children's potential deaths to Ibrahim's sacrifice of his son, a "doubtful" woman replies: "you are comparing yourself to a prophet? Do you think you are sane enough to make these big decisions? You are half mad because of what you saw in Afghanistan, because your companions were captured or slaughtered".[279] In this way, the brutality of the terrorists' leading figures is connected to the terror they are subjected to during war and what happened to their loved ones. The cycle of terror and nightmare has continued

[277] Aslam, *The Blind Man's Garden,* 296.
[278] Aslam, *The Blind Man's Garden*, 297.
[279] Aslam, *The Blind Man's Garden*, 323,324.

through the terrorists' "madness",[280] which made them bring the battlefield to a school building with a firm belief in the justification of their actions. In this way, the narrative projects trauma as a destructive force for the terrorists in which faith, reason and humanity are at risk.

Those scenes are symbolic as they suggest that political violence will breed more terror, not only in the Middle East, but everywhere. In other words, the 'War on Terror' and terrorism are two sides of the same coin as both perpetuate terror and death. *The Blind Man's Garden* and *Willow Trees Don't Weep* represent terrorists and soldiers who fight to 'eliminate' terrorism as perpetrators of terror, and both sides inflict destruction upon each other and the innocent people who are caught in the crossfire. In Aslam's novel, Rohan "dreams of an American soldier and a jihadi warrior digging the same grave".[281] This symbolic scene dwells on the idea of self-destruction and the cycle of death: while the US army is on a mission to protect their country, fight terrorism and 'liberate' Afghanistan from the dominance of terrorist organizations, they are evoking and committing terror. The same concept applies to 'jihadi warriors' who are committing terrorist attacks against civilians, deluding themselves over the legitimacy of their goals.

The Question of (In)humanity and the Narrative of Terror

Judith Butler asks in her book *Precarious Life* "who counts as human? Whose lives count as lives? and, finally, *what makes for a grievable life?*"[282] These questions are raised to form a theoretical framework of grief, violence and the value of human life in light of the US political and military response to the 9/11 attacks. Butler suggests that some lives cannot be mourned because they are not perceived as lives in the first place, and if the humanity of certain groups

[280] Aslam, *The Blind Man's Garden,* 297.
[281] Aslam, *The Blind Man's Garden*, 92.
[282] Judith Butler, *Precarious Life: The Powers of Mourning and Violence* (London: Verso, 2004), 20, (italics in the original).

of people is questioned then their lives are of no value. In other words, their existence and non-existence are equivalent. Scrutinising the aftermath of 9/11 in light of Butler's theoretical perspective on the perception of the value of human life and the concept of inhumanity raises several concerns regarding the narrative of the 'War on Terror' and its representations. Certain narratives on terrorism in the West tend to portray suspected terrorists as barbaric driven by an urge to kill instead of having a political motivation (for example, Martin Amis' *The Second Plane*).[283] These portrayals are connected with stereotypical representations of a backward violent East that overlap with former colonial stereotypes that question the humanity of the Other. The following analysis will interrogate representations of people's (in)humanity in Aslam's and Faqir's novels and explore whether the novelists challenge or recreate stereotypical images of the Orient and the Occident.

The narrative in *The Blind Man's Garden* portrays Muslims as brutal and savage both as terrorists and victims of terrorism. In a single scene, where a truck carries Taliban members through the narrow streets of a village in Afghanistan, the narrator describes several disturbing images and acts. One of them includes the remnants of a shooting incident that occurs with "blood remaining in bursts on walls. One of these is at the height of a child's head".[284] A Taliban soldier hits a dog that "yaps at the truck", then "shoots it dead". The driver of the truck attacks the women on the street and "whips this mass of dirty blue fabrics several times" using a "leather whip with dozens of coins stitched along its length". At the same time, "the other soldier tears open the head of the man who dares to intervene".[285] The Taliban members in Aslam's novel are brutal to men, women, children and even animals. The way they hit women collectively using a 'whip' confirms their barbaric nature and inferior treatment of women. The above could be perceived as an attempt by the novelist to portray the horrific treatment of people

[283] See the Introduction Chapter, 32, 33, 34.
[284] Aslam, *The Blind Man's Garden,* 64.
[285] Aslam, *The Blind Man's Garden*, 64.

who live under the Taliban regime and the violent practises they implement to safeguard their sovereignty. At the same time, it reproduces images of a savage Orient who are behaving in an inhuman manner. This brings to the surface the rhetoric of the 'War on Terror', which promises democracy, freedom, the eradication of terrorism and also liberation for women.

The association of savagery with the Orient becomes more problematic in the depiction of Joe's murder by a woman whose husband is killed by the Taliban. Joe is forced to go to the Taliban fort and since he was present during the first US army strike inside the Taliban's headquarters, the woman thinks he is a member of the Taliban and hence, from her perspective, he is the victimiser. In this way, the narrative projects the woman's transformation from a victim of the Taliban to a brutal victimiser who can commit a hideous murder:

> The corridor outside is filled with dense smoke and the young woman who comes rushing out of it towards Joe wears a look of wildness on her face, her eyes crazed with radiant power. When was the last time he saw a woman? The tip of the foot-long dagger enters Joe's face through the left cheek – going through the gap between the lower and upper jaw. The sharp metal cuts through the roof of the mouth and reaches under the brain. The blade grates against the bone of the skull that splinters, and it grated again immediately afterwards when she pulls it out. He hears both sounds – from the inside, between the ears. The pain is something he could not have imagined. 'This is for what your people did to my man,' she says, armed with love's vengeance.[286]

While cruelty and violence are associated with terrorists from the Middle East, in Joe's murder scene the narrative introduces another form of terror perpetrated by the victimised. The reader is left questioning how this woman, who is not part of the Taliban, can possess such brutality and the capability to commit this horrific murder against someone she sees for the first time. The argument that could be presented is that Joe, to her, encapsulates the horror of living under the Taliban regime (including the murder of her husband) and hence he

[286] Aslam, *The Blind Man's Garden*, 75.

deserves punishment. In another argument, Gen'ichiro Itakura contends that these images are precisely horrifying "because of the suggestion of the normality of pain" as they "attest to the ongoing turmoil on the Pakistan–Afghanistan border".[287] While Itakura raises a valid point by referring to the pain Joe is experiencing during his slaughter, the identity of the perpetrator is highly critical. The woman as the attacker is transformed into a wild creature with "crazed" eyes and has a "wild" look on her face holding a "foot-long dagger" that she used to cut his jaw. When both the terrorists and their victims from the village can create the same amount of pain, intolerance and destruction, the description of Joe's death becomes more about the normality of violence than pain, thereby reimagining the victim and the terrorist as equivalent in their brutality. Readers of the novel might accept the brutality of the terrorists, but this becomes problematic when terrorists are not the only producers of terror in a place like Afghanistan.[288]

Joe's murderer and the black-veiled women in the narrative exhibit similar characteristics when it comes to brutality. The terrorist women attack people if they do not abide by their rules. In an evocative scene in the graveyard, they savagely beat men and women because, according to their radical interpretation of religion, women are not allowed in the graveyard even to mourn their deceased loved ones. These women are described by the narrator as "black-clad women", "cloaked figures", "their heads tied with green bands", and are wearing black gloves and contact lenses.[289] They are shouting while beating men and women, saying: "it is because of people like you […] that Allah is punishing the entire Muslim world these days".[290] Their intolerance and unreasoning attitude drive them to hit old women with metal-tipped canes without showing mercy. In this scene, the women's bizarre attire along with their horrifying actions create an

[287] Gen'ichiro Itakura, "Screams and Laughter: Transfer of Affect in Nadeem Aslam's *The Blind Man's Garden*," *Journal of Postcolonial Writing* 56, no. 3 (2020): 361, https://doi.org/10.1080/17449855.2020.1739292.
[288] Edward W. Said, *The End of the Peace Process: Oslo and After* (New York: Vintage Books, 2001), 114.
[289] Aslam, *The Blind Man's Garden*, 292, 293.
[290] Aslam, *The Blind Man's Garden*, 292.

image of superhumans whose destruction and power are unstoppable. This offers a rather a controversial image of a Muslim female terrorist figure in 9/11 fiction. While Aslam sheds light on the effect of radicalism on both men and women and the people who have to endure their violent sovereignty, the scenes are rather problematic. The images depicted construct an Islamophobic portrait of people from the Muslim world as fearsome, brutal terrorists who wear religious symbols (the veil) and speak in the name of Islam. Hamid Dabashi's argument in his book *Brown Skin, White Masks* (a titular reference to Frantz Fanon's pioneering work *Black Skin, White Masks*[291]) highlights the contribution made by 'the insider' as the 'native informer' in contributing to dominant rhetoric when it comes to terrorism and postcolonial countries.[292] The danger of this rhetoric is that it cements colonial ideologies about the Middle East while generating further misconceptions that eventually feed into the discourse of post-9/11 terrorism and the 'War on Terror'.

It can be argued that *The Blind Man's Garden* echoes Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* in its depiction of the barbarity – and perhaps inhumanity – of the Other in Africa. The wildness of these women in Aslam's novel is reminiscent of the black woman who is Kurtz' mistress in Conrad's novel:

> She was savage and superb, wild-eyed and magnificent; there was something ominous and stately in her deliberate progress… Her face had a tragic and fierce aspect of wild sorrow and of dumb pain mingled with the fear of some struggling, half-shaped resolve. She stood looking at us without a stir, and like the wilderness itself, with an air of brooding over an inscrutable purpose.[293]

Conrad's controversial novel is vital to the understanding of forms of knowledge that stir discussions around the power of representations between Europe and Africa and their

[291] Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks* (London: Pluto Press, 2008).
[292] Hamid Dabashi, *Brown Skin, White Masks* (London: Pluto Press, 2007).
[293] Joseph Conrad, *Heart of Darkness*, Edition Unstated (San Bernardino, CA: Tribeca Books, 2010), 88.

association with imperialism. Similarly, Aslam's novel creates a space to discuss forms of knowledge that are represented in *The Blind Man's Garden*, and the ways it challenges or reproduces problematic depictions of violence within the framework of 'War on Terror'. In this vein, Carl Schmitt explains that the ideological concept of humanity is useful for imperialist expansion because to "confiscate the word humanity, to invoke and monopolise such a term probably has certain incalculable effects, such as denying the enemy the quality of being human and declaring him an outlaw of humanity; and a war can thereby be driven to the most extreme inhumanity".[294] In a sense, the illustrations of the physical appearance of the female perpetrator of terror are compatible with the way she looks. She embodies visible features that resemble wilderness more than being fully human. Descriptions like 'a look of wilderness of her face', 'eyes crazed', 'black veiled', 'black gloves' and 'wild-eyed' contribute to the enforcement of the western view of the barbaric western's Other.

A similar representation that questions the (in)humanity of the Other can be found in Faqir's *Willow Trees Don't Weep*. The novel takes place after the decade-long Soviet War, following from which the people in Afghanistan, according to the novel, cannot stop fighting. Najwa's father explains: "*when the enemy that united us was no more, we fractured into gangs. In their bid for power, the mujahideen began exterminating each other and the injuries were mounting*".[295] This suggests that these people are trapped in a cycle of violence and that the absence of the enemy from the equation does not eliminate suffering and destruction in the region. One of the most dreadful portrayals of terror in the narrative is depicted after the end of the Soviet invasion, as Omar, working as a medic treating the injured, writes in his diary a detailed account of his "*worst case*" that involves a severely wounded baby:[296]

[294] Carl Schmitt, *The Concept of the Political* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 54.
[295] Faqir, *Willow Trees*, 114.
[296] Faqir, *Willow Trees*, 115.

> *He was covered with dust, grime and dried blood the colour of chocolate, which it should have been, when they brought him in. He cried incessantly. I held him, put him in the makeshift operating table and removed his nappy, which was full of dry excrement. All his limbs had been blown off willy-nilly, the jagged skin hung loose from his thighs. He was left with a right arm. Thank God for that. If he was going to live then he would need it. I washed, cut and stitched him as quickly as I could. Throughout the procedure he squealed. How do you turn this mess into order?* [297]

This is part of the narrative's comprehensive description of the 'injured baby', on which Omar has to perform a fourth amputation. Faqir highlights the ugliness of war and political violence, where the most vulnerable are the ones who suffer the most. While the baby's surgery could be interpreted as an accurate and raw depiction of the brutality of war and the inevitability of children's victimization during these harsh circumstances, it could also be read as the narrative's failure to humanise the victims of war. This failure, according to the baby's storyline, is established through the exclusion of personal details about the baby that have the potential to create an empathetic and humanistic depiction of the victim. Instead, the baby remains unidentified: his name, age, family and fate after the surgery are absent from the narrative. Aslam and Faqir do not fully counter-narrate the discourse of the neo-imperialism in its dismissal of, to use Said's words, "human suffering in all its density and pain",[298] and how the Self/ Other is depicted. Having said that, if these scenes are essential to the construction of the narrative, the humanity of the characters involved should be preserved, especially that Arabs or Muslims as characters are often misrepresented or silenced in mainstream western narratives. In Faqir's novel, the horrors of war that are mentioned in explicit detail become a backdrop story of one of the main character's personal regrets for leaving his family and for his life-decisions. The narrative imposes a representation of a place that is inhabited with savagery and

[297] Faqir, *Willow Trees,* 115, 116.
[298] Edward W. Said, *Orientalism*, (London: Penguin, 2003), xvi.

violence since the perpetrators of terror are Muslims and the victims are Muslims. It can be argued that the narrative in this specific scene provokes stereotypes about the West's Other that can be traced to the colonial era, in which people of the Middle East are still, in Abdul R. JanMohamed's words, "at the boundaries of 'civilization'".[299]

The issue of 'human suffering' is closely related to the topic of torture that is highly discussed in socio-political narratives both in the West and the Middle East in the context of post-9/11 terrorism. The 'inevitability' and 'effectiveness' of US 'enhanced interrogation' measures became a constantly debated topic after 9/11, especially after photographs of torture in Abu Ghraib prison were made public in 2004.[300] In an interview about *The Blind Man's Garden*, Aslam talks about the corruption of language by the powerful, who refer to torture as "enhanced interrogation".[301] He explains that giving a label to torture does not eliminate the humiliation and pain associated with this unlawful practice.[302] Aslam's novel captures this issue through the narrator's description of several scenes of torture committed by state and non-state agents: US interrogators, Afghani warlords and Pakistani policemen. The treatment of prisoners during the US 'War on Terror' in Afghanistan is portrayed in the novel in two different settings, one in an Afghan warlord's prison and the other in a US detention facility. Mikal is imprisoned for a significant amount of time by a warlord who believes that he is a member of the Taliban. Soon after he is captured, the warlord and his men conduct extreme violent measures against Malik:

> [The warlord] cut off the trigger finger on each of his hands and nailed the two pieces to a doorframe along with those taken from dozens of their captives. Fearing gangrene, he begged them to extract the bullets from his body, but to no avail. But then two nights later, while he slept, a large group of them came at

[299] Abdul JanMohammed, "The Economy of Manichean allegory," in *The Post-Colonial Studies Reader*, eds. Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin, (London: Routledge, 2006)*, 18*.
[300] "The Images That Shamed America," The Guardian, May 2004, accessed February 11, 2018, https://www.theguardian.com/gall/0,8542,1211872,00.html.
[301] Nadeem Aslam, "Nadeem Aslam, Conversation," interview by Phil Klay. *Lannan Foundation*, 30 March 2016. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZSY_DLXlKoM.
[302] Aslam, interview by Klay.

> him with scalpels and blades. A rumour had circulated that the American had used solid gold bullets.[303]

This scene represents a comprehensive image of the consequences of war upon civilians and fighters and it also represents the attitude of Afghans towards each other during times of war and difficulty. They are depicted as barbaric, cruel and inhuman, ready to tear each other apart for material gain. The narrator refers to the act of bodily mutilation without dwelling on details or describing Mikal's reaction during these painful and horrific experiences. This conveys the process of normalization that these violent practices have undergone and reflects a dark image of the Other. In colonialist literature, the Orient is "perceived as uncontrollable, chaotic, unattainable, and ultimately evil".[304] In this way, Aslam's and Faqir's narratives confirm, rather than counter, images of savagery and primitiveness within the Orient.

Another image of torture is depicted through Rohan's attempt to free a boy from captivity by paying a ransom to a warlord. Through his journey to save him, stories of terror unfold. According to one of the boys under captivity, prison guards turn into "wild animals": "they start with the youngest prisoners and ask their ages. If the boy says twelve, they send twelve men to him."[305] When Rohan hears these horrendous details through the boy's tears, the narrator's and Rohan's voices overlap: "it would terrify even the stars".[306] The scenes of terror and torture toward boys as young as twelve produce a disturbing representation of this group of people in which every ethic of war and imprisonment is violated in these prisons. In this instance, the source of terror is not the invading army coming from the West, it is in the heart of Afghanistan committed by Afghans themselves. The locals have turned the US war into an ugly and abusive one, where people attack each other and victimise each other seeking money and power.

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[303] Aslam, *The Blind Man's Garden*, 110,111.
[304] *JanMohammed,. "The Economy of Manichean,"* 18.
[305] Aslam, *The Blind Man's Garden* 136.
[306] Aslam, *The Blind Man's Garden*, 136.

These scenes of inhumanity are more extreme than those which occur in a US prison in Afghanistan where US personnel interrogate Mikal in captivity. Once Mikal is brought to the enemy prison under the belief that he is one of Osama bin Laden's men, they treat his wounds and give him medication that brings "an astounding reduction of the pain".[307] They only start the interrogation after the doctor states that he is "well enough to speak".[308] Mikal refuses to speak and because of his attitude he is forced to sit in a stress position and is taken to a "sleep deprivation cell."[309] Throughout the detailed depiction of Mikal's imprisonment, two points could be made with respect to the narrative. One is that detainees of the US prison are interrogated because the Americans, believing that these detainees are members of al-Qaeda, want to protect their country from other terrorist attacks. The second point is that the techniques of interrogation are not represented explicitly as torture, especially when compared to the warlords' treatment of prisoners. This is a provocative representation of prisoners' treatment in US facilities because the interrogation techniques mentioned in *The Blind Man's Garden* are the same techniques that were approved by the US administration in the direct aftermath of 9/11 including, for example, "forced nudity, waterboarding, sleep deprivation and stress positions".[310] To give another example, the narrator depicts Mikal's first encounter inside the US interrogation facility in a problematic manner: "he struggles in terror when they must perform a cavity search and snarls, roaring, and they have to pin him down".[311] The narrator's use of the modal 'must', and 'have to', is potentially controversial as it expresses either an obligatory action associated with a "logical conclusion", or conveys a sense that "it's the normal

[307] Aslam, *The Blind Man's Garden,* 200.
[308] Aslam, *The Blind Man's Garden*, 201.
[309] Aslam, *The Blind Man's Garden*, 204.
[310] Amal Ahmad, "Did CIA Interrogation Methods Break the Law?" *Al Jazeera America*, 9 December 2014, Accessed 18 February 2018. http://america.aljazeera.com/articles/2014/12/9/the-cia-torture-reportalegalexplainer.html.
[311] Aslam, *The Blind Man's Garden*, 200.

thing to expect".[312] The questions that are raised here are whether the narrator is expressing the viewpoint of the US interrogators or the author, or whether it is normal to perform a cavity search under the circumstances of the 'War on Terror'. It seems that the narrator is less assertive of the damage, pain and humiliation inflicted on prisoners while being 'interrogated' by US interrogators than that administered by the warlords, which inevitably creates a contrasting tone between torture in a US space and Middle Eastern one. While the novel deals with the highly controversial issue of the implementation of illegitimate measures against prisoners of war in a post-9/11 context, the images portrayed between the two locations (the warlords' prisons and US detention camps) are not even-handed.

Terror and the Narrative of Stereotypes

In both Aslam's and Faqir's novels, representations of religion, gender relations, and East and West encounters are associated with a specific set of images and frames that either induce or complicate the hegemonic depictions of the Self/Other. Islam and Muslims are at the centre of a nexus in *The Blind Man's Garden* that portrays the role of religion in people's lives and how it can relate to terror. Rohan, as a religious Muslim, is represented as a problematic character.[313] He is an educator who founded a school in Heer (Ardent Spirit) that has been taken over by religious fundamentalists that have terrorist tendencies. Rohan's faith becomes one of the most troubling aspects in his life. This is mostly represented through Rohan's conduct in handling his wife's transition to atheism at a later stage in her life. Hoping that she might find God before she dies, Rohan withholds her medication and, as a result, people spread the rumour "that she

[312] "Must, Should, or Ought To?" Oxford Words blog, March 3, 2014, https://blog.oxforddictionaries.com/2014/03/03/must-should-ought/.

[313] There is no single identification of how Muslims adhere to their faith. In this research, I use the term 'practising Muslims' to refer to the characters that believe in Islam and apply its principles into their daily life (each according to his/her interpretation of Islam). At the same time, the term 'Muslims' could refer to an identification of one's faith without following the Islamic traditions, or even being a believer in the first place.

had a heart attack" due to "the sudden lack of drugs".[314] Rohan's religious ideologies create a sort of terror within him instead of peace. His radical beliefs convince him that he can save Sofia from being "damned eternally" in the afterlife.[315] He burns all the pictures that Sofia has painted of living things "fearing she would be judged for disobeying 'Allah', who forbade such images lest they lead to idolatry".[316] He also disposes of all the photographs and images in the house and, in the process, he abuses his children by enforcing "an extreme form of piety" on himself and on his children, "making them pray and keep fasts, revealing to them things inappropriate for their ages. The transience of this life, the tortures of Hell and, before that, of the grave".[317] The main motivation that drives him to leave the school is his desire to "concentrate on the alleviation of her death-suffering",[318] and thus the school without Rohan's supervision is transformed into a terrorist-breeding institution instead of being a beacon of knowledge and enlightenment.

This radical behaviour stems from images that Rohan associates with Islam and torture in the afterlife through imagining the consequences of the sin of "apostasy", and being "fully able to imagine her [his wife] calling out in pain from beneath his feet".[319]

> Until the time she is resurrected on Judgement Day, she will be subjected to torments, the consequences of her rejection of God. After the world ends she will be cast into Hell […] he [Rohan] reads the Holy Book, trying not to think of how her beautiful body is receiving injuries inside the ground at this very moment, a toy for Allah's demons. Torturers known as *Kabar Ka Aazab*. She is alive down there, fully sensate and conscious, the underworld from where no smoke or cry escapes. A person is brought to life immediately after the grave is

[314] Aslam, *The Blind Man's Garden*, 72.
[315] Aslam, *The Blind Man's Garden*, 72.
[316] Aslam, *The Blind Man's Garden*, 24.
[317] Aslam, *The Blind Man's Garden*, 98.
[318] Aslam, *The Blind Man's Garden*, 47.
[319] Aslam, *The Blind Man's Garden*, 46,47.

> closed up and is even said to clearly hear the receding footsteps of the men who had come to bury him.[320]

According to the above, as Rohan put helps his wife "see again the beauty of belief" before she dies, he ends up being tormented by the same belief. It seems that the depiction of Sofia's torture by 'Allah' is parallel to the torture of warlords. Both depictions evoke the idea of horror. The narrator offers powerful details of what it might be like to be a Muslim who is able to envisage God's cruelty and unforgiveness towards loved ones in the grave. Imagining Sofia being conscious, helpless, unheard and tortured by demons while Rohan cannot intervene has affected his rationality and good judgement. The significance of Rohan's conduct towards his wife's atheism is not merely about his understanding and interpretation of Islam, but is significant because he is one of the few (if not the only) practising Muslims in the novel who is educated, civilised and opposes terrorism in a town that recruits terrorists. It could be argued that there is a resemblance between the portrayal of Muslims in the narrative and the ideologies of New Atheism that perceive religion – with an emphasis on Islam – as a negative aspect in people's lives that prompts violence and hatred.[321] Notably, the good characters in the novel who are represented in a positive manner are consistently those who have rejected religion (Sofia, Mikal, Naheed and Basie). In comparison to Rohan's character development, for example, Sofia is a practising Muslim with great knowledge of the main sources of Islam. She gradually becomes an atheist while knowing "intimately" what she is rejecting. In the narrative, she is represented as an open-minded individual, who is tolerant and has a sense of fairness towards others even if they are rejected by society. In an incident that takes place at her school, she eventually

[320] Aslam, *The Blind Man's Garden*, 46,47.

[321] One of the major advocates for this movement is Sam Harris who writes that "unless Muslims can reshape their religion into an ideology that is basically benign - or outgrow it altogether - it is difficult to see how Islam and the West can avoid falling into a continual state of war, and on innumerable fronts". Sam Harris, *The End of Faith: Religion, Terror, and the Future of Reason* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2005), 152.

decides to quit teaching when Rohan "expelled a pupil whose mother was revealed to be a prostitute".[322]

Another aspect of the narrative's approach to the controversial topic of religion and its impact on people's life in Pakistan is presented through the story of Tara. The author creates a provocative connection between religion, ignorance and corrupt 'Islamic' governments in the Muslim world illustrated by Tara's life journey. As a young widow, Tara is sexually assaulted by a man. Hence, "she went to the police and they demanded – in accordance with Sharia law – proof from four male witnesses that was indeed an assault and not consensual intercourse".[323] As a result, Tara is jailed for adultery because of the impossibility of acquiring such witnesses. She is victimised by the police and the 'Sharia law' according to the narrative, and her religion, similarly to Rohan, becomes a source of fear. As a practising Muslim woman, Tara is tormented by "combatting desire, the feeling of guilt in her whenever she thought of a man".[324] The conflict between religion, human desire, and corrupt social and legal laws on women have a severe impact on Tara who suffers temporary madness. As an old woman who sees her daughter Naheed becoming a widow at a young age, she is filled with terror that her daughter, too, will be victimised. However, contrary to Tara, her daughter Naheed refuses to submit to fear, and her rejection of religion makes her stronger. During a heated discussion between the mother and her daughter about Rohan's illness, the possibility of losing his house, and asking God for help, Naheed's objection of religion is manifested in a moment of truth: "it was Allah and His laws that put you there [prison] in the first place".[325] In this instance, Naheed does not separate between God, religion and the 'Islamic Sharia Law' and perceives religion as a major victimiser of her mother. These representations of the intersection between religion, law, fear and guilt

[322] Aslam, *The Blind Man's Garden*, 48.
[323] Aslam, *The Blind Man's Garden*, 118.
[324] Aslam, *The Blind Man's Garden*, 119.
[325] Aslam, *The Blind Man's Garden*, 236.

reassert people's victimhood and the oppression of women who live in a corrupt, patriarchal and authoritarian state within the Middle East.

When imperialism, with its different phases and eras, "produces its own distorted knowledge of the other, each its own reductive images, its own disputatious polemics",[326] literary fiction becomes a nexus to challenge or reinforce these images. In Faqir's *Willow Trees Don't Weep,* the narrative complicates the representation of Muslims and their religious identity. In an interview, Faqir states that "if the discourse in the metropolis aims to de-humanise Arabs and make them disappear in order to justify 'collateral damage', my fiction and writing aims to humanise".[327] Hence, Faqir attempts to contest a polarising depiction of religious Muslims in her novel. Najwa's grandmother, who prays and reads the Quran, is represented as a kind woman who is supportive of her family (her daughter and granddaughter) and who prevents the family from collapsing after her son-in-law travels to Afghanistan. According to Najwa's first-person narrative, the grandmother accepts her daughter's secularisation of the house and she is tolerant and forgiving towards her daughter's extreme attitudes. In another depiction of religious Muslims, Hani's family becomes a possible foster family for Najwa, since her father is sentenced to life imprisonment. Because of this family's kindness, Najwa will not end up living alone in her home country, which would prove difficult in such a conservative society. In this vein, *Willow Trees Don't Weep* offers various images of practising Muslims who are tolerant, kind and supportive to one another, and hence counters the image of religious Muslims who are perceived in post-9/11 narratives as essentially violent and different. In his work *Covering Islam*, published in 1981, Said studies the reductive images and poor representations of Muslims and Islam that circulate in western media, scholarship and dominant rhetoric:

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[326] Said, *Orientalism*, xvii.

[327] Rachel Bower, "Interview with Fadia Faqir, 23 March 2010," *Journal of Postcolonial Writing* 48, no. 1 (February 1, 2012): 3–12, https://doi.org/10.1080/17449855.2011.569380.

> Today Islam is defined negatively as that with which the West is radically at odds, and this tension establishes a framework radically limiting knowledge of Islam. So long as this framework stands, Islam, as a vitally lived experience for Muslims, cannot be known.[328]

How much has changed since the publication of this book with regards to the stigmatization of Muslims as terrorists in the aftermath of 9/11? The encounter between East and West that is dominated by rigid stereotypes can be problematised by hybrid writers. Hence, it is highly significant to offer complex representations of religious Muslims in 9/11 fiction. Islam is a way of life and core identity to many people who live in the Middle East, and steering away from a Manichean portrayal of Muslims in 9/11 novels contributes to an empathetic approach to that which is often presented in 'dominant' discourse as strange and unfamiliar.

Faqir does not only endeavour to portray religious Muslims in a nuanced manner, but also terrorists. Omar Rahman, who is depicted as the mastermind of the 7/7 bombings in London, is not depicted as an evil person or through a black-and-white lens. He is presented as a loving father, caring husband, and faithful friend to Hani. Nonetheless, the circumstances that push him towards terrorism are mainly about revenge: his desire is to "punish the English for the death and destruction their army had visited on Afghanistan. A taste of their own bitter medicine".[329] Near the end of the narrative, the terrorist acknowledges the gravity of his actions and thus is burdened with remorse:

> *…thoughts go round and round in my head. There is no decency and honour in what I have done. There is a schism between the man I hoped I would become and the man I finally became* […] *How foolish of me. Young and trusting, we were duped, brainwashed and even exploited by the imams. The scheme was larger than us and we, without the eyesight and perspective of an eagle, fitted right into it* […] *Watching myself from a height, I can see that I was like an*

[328] Edward W. Said, *Covering Islam: How the Media and the Experts Determine How We See the Rest of the World* (London: Vintage, 1997).
[329] Faqir, *Willow Trees*, 2014, 248.

> *earthworm crawling from one dark ditch into another* […] *Earthworms have no eyes. And if you don't refrain, you shall not see.*[330]

Omar appears sincere and genuine as he realises that the process he has gone through is one of indoctrination into violence and victimization. He even admits that being far from the 'dark ditches' enabled him to see and thus '*refrain*'. This powerful comparison of terrorists to "*earthworms*" is an attempt to envisage the nature and circumstances that govern people who join terrorist organizations: once brainwashed or deluded to become a member, one loses one's moral compass and ability to see what is beyond the 'dark ditches'. Notably, Omar does not denounce Islam in the process of realising the amount of suffering and terror he has inflicted on other people. On the contrary, he embraces his religious identity as a path to reach peace and self-forgiveness. Consequently, through re-imagining of the 7/7's terrorist(s) in the construction of Omar's character, Faqir has departed from the image of hostile terrorists that are driven by a mere desire to kill. Faqir's terrorist is a complex person who resorts to violence after the dreadful torture and murder of his friend provokes him to terrorise civilians in the UK.

Islam is, for many Muslims, a fundamental aspect of their identity and it affects many areas of their life. Hence, the way Islam is represented intersects with the core identity of the Middle Eastern population. If their religion is perceived as a peaceful one, then Muslims are seen as peaceful people, and vice versa. On this, Amin Malik points out that "many Muslims regard religion as a key component of their identity that could rival, if not supersede, their class, race, gender, or ethnic affiliation".[331] To this effect, Faqir engages with a positive depiction of Islam and Islamic culture, illustrating how this religious culture feeds into Hani's family's decision to offer Najwa a home and also contributes to Omar's ability to find peace. In contrast, Aslam represents Islam in his novel as a source of terror, torture and violence. It is illustrated, in the

[330] Faqir, *Willow Trees*, 245-247.
[331] Malak, *Muslim Narratives*, 3.

construction of the characters, as a tormenting component of their identity as they embrace their faith.

Home-grown terrorists in the West become a major topic of analysis and writing in a post-9/11 era and Faqir refers to the issue of home-grown terrorists in her novel. Similarly to Updike's *Terrorist*, *Willow Trees Don't Weep* enforces a narrative that holds a connection to existing rhetoric concerning the politics of fear. This is most apparent in how Omar plans and executes a large-scale terrorist attack in London under the mission of global *jihad*. He targets a mosque in London, is allowed to lead prayers and – most significantly – is given a safe space to preach about his radical ideologies and the necessity of defending 'Islam and Muslims'. As a result, Omar selects the bombers from the mosque's attendees and is able to convert them from innocent worshippers to "*hungry dogs*":

> *The bombers have to be 'cleanskins', totally unknown to the police. Out of the hardcore, who attended every prayer, I have chosen four. They have an innocence and naivety about them that you see only on the faces of those who think they can change the world. I befriended them … then I began to question their identities and made them feel guilty about their silence. They were accessories to the murders of fellow Muslims. I have given them books to read and tapes to listen to. Now, slowly, they – yes, they – are beginning to suggest a way out, a rebirth.* [332]

This portrayal of the process of brainwashing young naïve Muslims is similar to how Omar becomes a terrorist in the first place, but the major difference here is that this indoctrination occurs in the heart of London and in an open space (the mosque). In this vein, the narrative illustrates the vulnerability of the West to the dangers of global terrorism. It also alludes to the fear of the proliferation of terrorism in a globalised world in which high-profile al-Qaeda members – according to the novel – can enter the UK under false pretences and smuggle

[332] Faqir, *Willow Trees*, 192.

manuals and books for their terrorists' missions. Omar and Abu-Hafs (a real name that refers to the military chief of al-Qaeda)[333] are granted a visa to the UK so Abu-Hafs can undergo a complex procedure to restore his "facial muscles, bones and nerves".[334] Years after, Najwa enters the UK on a forged visa while carrying SIM and data cards from al-Qaeda and hands them to a potential terrorist.[335] It can be argued that in re-imagining the 7/7 bombings there is an underlying tendency in *Willow Trees Don't Weep* to fill in the missing pieces of the UK government's official story about the deadliest attack in twenty-first century Britain.[336] The usage of real names, actual quotations by 7/7 bombers, real dates and real events are highly controversial because the narrative makes a direct connection between the terrorist attack, al-Qaeda and the threat that the twenty-first century migration movement imposes on the West. In this respect, Faqir's novel brings to the surface the ultimate question of the legitimacy of increasingly accepted anti-migration policies in Europe towards people from the Muslim and Arab world.

Women in the Middle East form a critical part of colonial and postcolonial narratives. Faqir's representations of Muslim/Arab women in her novel reinforce stereotypical depictions of the 'Oriental woman'. It can be argued that Faqir's feminist ideologies "have been influenced by colonial discourse", which might be apparent in the portrayal of Najwa and Omar's second wife.[337] What is distinct about *Willow Trees Don't Weep* is that Middle Eastern women in the narrative are reimagined and situated in the framework of post-9/11 terrorism. The main female character, Najwa, is exploited by the patriarchal society in her home country and she is also

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[333] Martin R. Mason and Leland Montgomery, *FBI s Most Wanted Terrorists* (North Carolina: Lulu.com, 2015), 115.
[334] Faqir, *Willow Trees*, 176.
[335] Faqir, *Willow Trees,* 208.
[336] "Report of the Official Account of the Bombings in London on 7th July 2005," *Home Office, GOV.UK*, 11 May 2006, accessed February 15, 2018, https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/report-of-the-official-account-of-the-bombings-in-london-on-7th-july-2005.
[337] Hasan Saeed Majed, *Islamic Postcolonialism: Islam and Muslim Identities in Four Contemporary British Novels*, (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2015), 124.

traumatised because of her father's abandonment to join al-Qaeda. The narrative reaches a point where she is alone in Britain, unable to contact her father, and is suffering from an illness while staying at a cheap hotel room. Andy, an English white man whom she has only met once, comes to her rescue. He brings Najwa to his house and he and his mother help her to recover. Andy and his mother make Najwa feel "warm" and "safe" in the house. Najwa describes how "my insomnia was cured and was replaced with constant sleepiness".[338] On one hand, this encounter conveys the significance of human connection between people of different ethnicities and portrays the goodness of humanity. On the other hand, it presents a (neo)colonial perception of the white saviour and the vulnerable Middle Eastern woman who needs saving because of the heroic intervention of Andy and the dreadful state of Najwa. Within postcolonial theory, the alleged protection of women serves as one of the justifications for military ambitions in Third World countries. This notion is discussed in Gayatri Spivak's essay "Can the Subaltern Speak?", which investigates the proposition that "white men are saving brown women from brown men".[339] This quote alludes to the relationship between the coloniser and the colonised, where the former seeks moral justification to rationalise their actions.[340] In an attempt to examine the 'ethics' of the 'War on Terror', Lila Abu-Lughod raises the same controversial issue by asking "do Muslim women really need saving?"[341] She examines the controversy surrounding women in Afghanistan and how they are represented in western socio-political discourse post 9/11.[342] Abu-Lughod argues that the West's project of 'saving' Muslim women becomes one of the justifications for military invasions of other countries – a justification that constantly recurs in (neo)colonial/postcolonial rhetoric.

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[338] Faqir, *Willow Trees*, 202, 204.
[339] Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, '"Can the Subaltern Speak?"', in *Can the Subaltern Speak?: Reflections on the History of an Idea*, ed. Rosalind C. Morris (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010), 50, https://doi.org/10.7312/morr14384.5.
[340] To support her argument, Spivak refers to the issue of the widow sacrifice *sati*, which is a rite that was abolished by the colonial authority of Britain to 'save' women in India. Spivak, "Can the Subaltern Speak?".
[341] Lila Abu-Lughod, *Do Muslim Women Need Saving?* (London: Harvard University Press, 2013).
[342] Abu-Lughod, *Do Muslim Women*, 783.

Besides being depicted as victims in dominant western narratives, women in the Middle East are represented as exotic and sexual. *Willow Trees Don't Weep* stereotypes women's sexuality through the depiction of Omar's second wife, an Afghani woman who is characterised as a sexual concubine to a Muslim fighter. In a scene where Omar has made a decision to leave Afghanistan and return to his home country and his family, he is united with a widow of a deceased Muslim fighter and gets captivated by her beauty: "*I walked into her house a free man and left a prisoner, shackled, my hands tied behind my back with colourful silk ribbons*".[343] Male sexuality in this scene is depicted as an overwhelming force that cannot be controlled in the presence of an attractive woman. The almost voiceless woman is instructed to take Omar to her house by another man. Here she is described according to her typically sensual features: large eyes, high cheekbones and full, fleshy lips.[344] The woman only appears in Omar's first-person narrative in relation to her beautiful looks and their sexual relationship. For instance, after the horrible death of his friend, Omar becomes deeply traumatised and for days he "*couldn't eat, sleep or speak*".[345] He writes in his diary that because of his wife's tending and sexual inducement, he is "*restored*" back to life or, more precisely, revived so as to conduct global terrorist missions.[346] In this instance, the narrative portrays the Afghani woman as an object of desire and seduction which does not depart far from an Orientalist tradition of associating the Orient with sexuality.

There is a tendency of some of the narratives produced after 9/11 to view people of the Middle East as barbaric and terrorist, and this tendency is not separated from narratives prior to 9/11. In this respect, the discourse of the 'War on Terror' is masked by a narrative that promises security to the West and enlightenment to the Middle East. Aslam and Faqir are among the

[343] Faqir, *Willow Trees,* 143.
[344] Faqir, *Willow Trees ,*142.
[345] Faqir, *Willow Trees*, 247.
[346] Faqir, *Willow Trees,* 247.

writers who examine and problematise terror in their construction of characters and narratives. They re-envisage the Middle East in their literary fiction as a location for state and non-state terror in their depiction of the impact of war on those caught in the crossfire. Their novels encapsulate the horrors of war and terrorism in a global world. However, the novels also represent a neo-colonial image of the western's Other that reflects western mainstream rhetoric and post-9/11 political narratives which create standard knowledge of other people and cultures.

Chapter Three

Veiled Terror in Chris Cleave's *Incendiary*

The 9/11 attacks on the US generated significant critical debates on the topic of terrorism and the term 'terror'.[347] In his article "Collective Passion", published in September 2001, Edward Said reflects on the events of 9/11 and looks at how terror is reproduced in different forms in the East and West, and how it is given different names and justifications. He establishes the notion that "what is especially bad about all terror is when it is attached to religious and political abstractions and reductive myths that keep veering away from history and sense".[348] Accordingly, Said draws attention to the dangers of violence that is legitimised through a dependence on myths and ideologies that are hostile to rational critique. In the aftermath of 9/11, dominant narratives emerged which often linked terror with non-state terrorism, religious violence and Muslims. In Chris Cleave's *Incendiary*,[349] the author depicts various forms of terror and explores how people, media and the state deal with the aftermath of a massive terrorist attack. Cleave's *Incendiary* offers a critical depiction of terrorism post-9/11, avoiding stereotypical and generic tropes which recur in 9/11 fiction.

In this chapter, I will examine how *Incendiary* represents and problematises state and non-state terror in a post-9/11 era. Terror, in *Incendiary*, is not an exclusive product of fanatical terrorists, but also the product of the state which uses political and systematic violence to safeguard its sovereignty. This perception is examined by several prominent critics, including Jean Baudrillard, who takes a critical stance towards the idea of the ubiquity of freedom in modern

[347] See the Introduction Chapter.
[348] Edward W. Said, *The End of the Peace Process: Oslo and After* (New York: Vintage Books, 2001), 371.
[349] Chris Cleave, *Incendiary* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2011 [2005]).

states. He explains that "liberal globalization is coming about in precisely the opposite form – a police-state globalization, a total control, a terror based on 'law-and-order' measures".[350] The state in this respect can use various forms of terror such as violence, intimidation or dominance through legal means in the protection of its best interests. In his book, *Welcome to the Desert of the Real*, Slavoj Žižek critiques the concept of a democratic state in light of the 9/11 attacks: "The paradox is that this state of emergency was the normal state, while 'normal' democratic freedom was the briefly enacted exception".[351] In this light, he alludes to controversial political notions that are associated with democracy (such as violence committed by state agents on the premise of safeguarding democracy and freedom) that create a false state of free-will. Žižek asks: "Is not the rhetoric today that of a global emergency state in the fight against terrorism, which legitimizes more and more suspensions of legal and other rights?"[352] This question is central to the analysis of state-political violence and its intersection with post-9/11 terrorism and counter-terrorism. In *Incendiary*, Cleave offers various representations of the state's response during times of emergency and illustrates how this might disrupt the concept of democracy and human rights. Cleave produces a resistance narrative in opposition to the dominant rhetoric around non-state terrorism and the legitimacy of state terror. In doing so, the novel alludes to the problematic narratives of 'us' versus 'them', where the West is democratic, good and innocent, and the East is autocratic, bad and terrorist. What is significant in *Incendiary* is its depiction of the distinction between the state and the government and between the people who are governed. The governed citizens are manipulated and victimised by the state, putting all citizens in one boat, whether they live in the East or the West.

[350] Jean Baudrillard, *The Spirit of Terrorism and Other Essays*, trans. Chris Turner (London: Verso, 2012), 24.
[351] Slavoj Žižek, *Welcome to the Desert of the Real* (London; New York: Verso Books, 2002), 107.
[352] Žižek, *Welcome to the Desert*, 107.

The narrative of Cleave's novel depicts what it is like to live in London after a deadly terrorist attack perpetrated by the terrorist organization Al Qaeda results in a high state of emergency, constant surveillance and the implementation of radical measures to keep London safe. An international bestseller and multiple prize-winner, *Incendiary* tells the story of a woman who loses her son and husband during the attack. Cleave narrativises how terror continues to unfold in London following this event and how the state and London's population respond. The climate is one of fear and anticipation of subsequent attacks, with London turning into a fortress protected by extreme measures implemented by counter-terrorism units.

Chris Cleave, a British novelist and journalist, wrote the first draft of *Incendiary* at a time of increased tension between East and West. He comments that "this was the time of the train bombings in Madrid, and the snickering torturers at the Abu Ghraib prison. The airwaves were filled with body counts and brutish ideologies, and I needed to write something to remind myself of the simple human cost of this folly".[353] Cleave is aware of the amount of terror inflicted on people in different parts of the world because of political violence, and his novel reflects this awareness. *Incendiary* is an endeavour to raise questions about the source of this violence, destabilise the concept of terror and highlight the "human cost" attached to it.[354] The novel was published on the 7th July 2005. The specific date of publication is an interesting element of *Incendiary*, as it is now memorialised as '7/7', during which terrorist attacks hit London's transport system and resulted in tens of fatalities and hundreds of injuries. It was perceived as "the worst single terrorist atrocity on British soil"[355] and as one of "the first successful mass causality suicide attacks in Europe".[356] Consequently, the novel, with its cover

[353] Chris Cleave, "The Story behind INCENDIARY," accessed January 30, 2019, https://chriscleave.com/incendiary/the-story-behind-incendiary/.
[354] Cleave, "The Story ."
[355] "7/7 Attacks: What Happened That Day?," July 3, 2015, sec. UK, https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-33253598.
[356] Petter Nesser, *Islamist Terrorism in Europe* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), 181.

portraying a large silver barrage balloon with a burning London in the background, was removed from window shelves. Hundreds of provocative posters that depicted "the smoking London skyline and the headline: 'WHAT IF?'" were taken down from London Underground stations.[357] Cleave comments: "I cringe to remember it. My god – really – what were we thinking?"[358] Hence, it comes as no surprise that a journalist would refer to *Incendiary* as "The Book That Became Too Hot to Handle".[359] Such a "grotesque coincidence", as Cleave described in a comment that both disturbed as well as suggestively illuminated the relationship between literary fiction and reality, "suddenly made fiction unimportant".[360]

The reality which 9/11 fiction deals with is not only violent and traumatic, but is also so recent that its ramifications and history are very much present. Moreover, since terrorism is subject to some sort of fictionalization (such as speculation of future attacks, emotive language, and exaggerated information), novels like *Incendiary* are no longer perceived, according to Zulaika and Douglass's argument, as "the antithesis of fact".[361] On this topic, Robert Young explains that "terror moves you into a state of producing fiction: it makes you live imaginatively on the borderlines of the real".[362] Significantly, Cleave wrote this novel while knowing or predicting that a terrorist attack was likely to occur in London because of increased terrorist threats. The question "WHAT IF?" was answered on the same day of the novel's publication and fiction became 'reality'. Some critics compared the novel's events, especially in its depiction of the aftermath of the terrorist attack, to the aftermath of the real terrorist attack (the 7/7 bombings). For example, in *The Guardian*, Alfred Hickling comments that "Cleave's evocation of the

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[357] Cleave, "The Story."
[358] Cleave, "The Story."
[359] Vanessa de la Torre, "'Incendiary': The Book That Became Too Hot to Handle," August 18, 2005, http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2005/08/17/AR2005081702109.html.
[360] Cleave, "The Story."
[361] William A. Douglass Joseba Zulaika, *Terror and Taboo: The Follies, Fables, and Faces of Terrorism* (New York: Taylor & Francis Group, 1996), 10.
[362] Robert Young, "Terror Effects," in *Terror and the Postcolonial*, eds. Elleke Boehmer and Stephen Morton (Malden, MA: Wiley Blackwell, 2015), 309.

aftermath of the bombing strikes the reader as undeniably authentic" and that it seems "precisely to sum up the national mood".[363] This is true in terms of how the novel depicts people's attempts to cope with the crisis, the media's provocation of nationalism and the state's implementation of extreme measures. Hence, contrary to the 9/11 attacks, where writers of literary fiction struggled to process and describe that day and its aftermath, Cleave imagined an event akin to 'Britain's 9/11' before it occurred.

Cleave's attempt to write about the effect of terrorism and the victims of terror received varied reviews. Some critics hailed it as a "stunning debut novel" and as "a haunting work of art".[364] On the other hand, other critics argued that the unfolding of the novel's events is unbelievable and were critical of Cleave's writing techniques. Lorraine Adams describes the novel as "ungrammatical, poorly punctuated, tasteless, and hyperactively honest".[365] Although Cleave abandons proper grammar and punctuation, it is one of the most interesting aspects of Cleave's writing and is consistent with the work's composition as an epistolary novel that depicts the voice of a working-class mother who is "not a big writer".[366] *Incendiary* is narrated by a grieving mother who addresses her letter/s to Osama bin Laden. The form of writing that Cleave adopts is significant as it allows the main character to speak in an authentic voice which gives her enhanced credibility.

The narrator, who remains anonymous in the narrative, is a widow of an officer who works at the "bomb disposal" unit and a mother of a three-year-old boy.[367] She seems to suffer from obsessive-compulsive-disorder which makes her even more vulnerable to the aftermath of

[363] Alfred Hickling, "Review: Incendiary by Chris Cleave," *The Guardian*, July 16, 2005, sec. Books, https://www.theguardian.com/books/2005/jul/16/featuresreviews.guardianreview7.
[364] Malcolm Jones, "DEAR OSAMA BIN LADEN...," *Newsweek*, July 31, 2005, https://www.newsweek.com/dear-osama-bin-laden-121239.
[365] Lorraine Adams, "Terror Fiction." 233, no. 12 (September 19, 2005): 39–41.
[366] Cleave, *Incendiary*, 3.
[367] Cleave, *Incendiary*, 15.

losing her family. On the very first page, she states the reason behind writing these letters to Osama bin Laden: "I want to be the last mother in the world who ever has to write you a letter like this. Who ever has to write to you Osama about her dead boy".[368] As a grieving mother, the tone of her words is not aggressive nor resentful towards her victimiser; on the contrary, she is keen to deliver her message using an empathetic approach. Cleave explains that he "got her to write her story as a plea against violence, directly to Osama bin Laden, because for a mother who had lost her son I did not see what could be more natural".[369] Perhaps, by doing so, the victim is attempting to reclaim her voice and take control in the midst of a life-crisis, and in the process the reader can learn about the tiny details of the narrator's life. Quoting Mikhail Bakhtin, Joe Bray highlights the advantages of writing epistolary novels: "the letter leads the novel to 'the depths of everyday life, its smallest details, to intimate relations between people and into the internal life of the individual person'".[370] Bray points out that "critics of the epistolary novel have also emphasised its ability to offer a full and convincing representation of the 'inner lives' of its characters".[371] Hence, the subjectivity of this form of writing provides it with a realistic dimension. Echoing this, Cleave states: "what the narrator of *Incendiary* feels for her son is what I feel for mine".[372] It seems that this is what Cleave endeavours to achieve in his novel: to give it a true voice and a "convincing representation" of a life of a grieving mother who is subjected to state and non-state terror.[373] Postcolonial and feminist writers resorted to this form of writing in the late twentieth century because it offers a critical space for reclaiming the voices of the oppressed. Thomas O. Beebee explains that the epistolary form

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[368] Cleave, *Incendiary*, 3.
[369] Cleave, "The Story."
[370] Joe Bray, *The Epistolary Novel: Representations of Consciousness* (London: Routledge, 2003), 8.
[371] Bray, *The Epistolary Novel,* 9.
[372] Chris Cleave, "Chris Cleave Author Interview," interview, *BookBrowse*, December 2005, accessed January 30, 2019, https://www.bookbrowse.com/author_interviews/full/index.cfm/author_number/1183/chris-cleave.
[373] One of the distinctive aspects about the epistolary genre is that it is considered the novel's earliest mode of writing. It dates back to the late seventeenth-century with its peak in the second half of the eighteenth-century Europe. See Peter Melville Logan, ed., *The Encyclopedia of the Novel* (West Sussex: John Wiley & Sons, 2014), 230.

"provides an obvious format for postcolonial subjects to "write back" to the empire".[374] Cleave's protagonist, however, attempts to "write back" not so much to Empire but to the people who contributed to her victimization, and she cannot do that without using her authentic voice, the voice of a mother who is not 'big' on writing letters.

Beyond surveying reviewers' aesthetic critiques of the novel, one of my main intentions is to interrogate how *Incendiary* alludes to, challenges, and complicates dominant western post-9/11 political discourse. Conventional and populist post-9/11 political discourse tends to justify and normalise political violence using emotive language that focuses on fear and insecurity. The rhetoric of this discourse replays images associated with the colonial era's representations of the Other and repurposes them in a modern context to represent Middle Eastern and/or Islamic terrorism. Through a close reading of the novel, I will discuss how *Incendiary* represents these images and how the characters react to a polarising rhetoric. Lucienne Loh explains that the discourses of neo-Orientalism, multiculturalism and immigration "form important analytical lenses of postcolonial studies in contemporary Britain".[375] This brings to the surface questions about Britain's colonial legacy and neo-Orientalist ideologies embedded within contemporary British literature.

While Cleave's novel could be read as a work about the conflict between classes in twenty-first century Britain, I aim to interrogate the topic of terror post-9/11 through a postcolonial reading of the text. Postcolonialism is a contested field of study in terms of definition and scope, yet the "complex fabric of the field" invites various discussions that are related to post-9/11 British literature.[376] Through tackling postcolonial issues that challenge stereotypical representations

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[374] Logan, *The Encyclopedia of the Novel*, 233.

[375] Lucienne Loh, "Postcolonial and Diasporic Voices: Contemporary British Fiction in an Age of Transnational Terror," In *The 2000s: A Decade of Contemporary British Fiction*, eds Nick Bentley, Nick Hubble, & leigh Wilson (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2015), 117.

[376] Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin, eds., *The Post-Colonial Studies Reader*, 2nd ed (London: Routledge, 2006), 2.

of terror and the Other, Cleave's *Incendiary* raises questions about migration and neo-Orientalism in a post-9/11 world. I subscribe to Graham MacPhee's theoretical argument in *Postwar British Literature and Postcolonial Studies* that "rather than restricting the relevance of postcolonial studies to a particular body of writing by authors from British colonies and their descendants, this study argues that all postwar British literature needs to be read with a consciousness of the continuing relevance of that imperial legacy".[377] Similarly, Loh argues that "following 9/11, British literature that seeks to address the transnational threat of Islamist terror must necessarily be considered in a postcolonial light since this more recent form of terror reflects long-standing colonial legacies and their attendant discourses". [378] In this vein, this chapter attempts to explore Cleave's *Incendiary* using a postcolonial lens. According to MacPhee, this is not a proposition to "extend the definition 'postcolonial' to all and everything" but to argue that the "postcolonial literature needs to be understood as much more central to postwar British Literature and culture than has previously been understood". [379] This perception brings postcolonial theory to the centre when analysing twentieth and twenty-first century British literature, and potentially opens up the discussion around issues that are vital to both East and West (such as migration, integration, and political violence). Ultimately, and contrary to mainstream polarised depictions of East and West, humanity and globalization connect these two worlds together.

Terror, The Media and Representations of Terror

There is a tendency in popular narratives that disseminated in the West after the attacks of 9/11 to interpret terror in terms of binarism: 'us' against 'them'. Such a binary approach may

[377] Graham MacPhee, *Postwar British Literature and Postcolonial Studies*, (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2011 [1968]), 1.
[378] Loh, "Postcolonial and Diasporic Voices", 117.
[379] MacPhee, *Postwar British Literature*, 3.

promote a nationalistic discourse and contribute to an Islamophobic rhetoric that evokes the innocence of the West and the corruption of its enemies. Those enemies are often projected in contrast to the West: they are represented as fanatical terrorists who belong to an eastern Islamic culture, who oppose secularism and who have a mission to attack the US and Europe through terrorism. On the other hand, the western state is depicted as a protector of freedom and guardian of people's security. In *Incendiary,* Cleave disrupts this Manichean depiction of the Other by problematising the state's discourse in relation to terrorism, the politics of fear, and the potential threat of the Other.

From the first lines of the novel, the author destabilises the dominant perception of terror: "Dear Osama they want you dead or alive so the terror will stop. Well I wouldn't know about that I mean rock 'n' roll didn't stop when Elvis died on the khazi it just got worse".[380] The narrator refers to George W. Bush's statement that to either capture or assassinate Osama bin Laden is one of the objectives of the 'War on Terror'.[381] In a sense, the grieving mother refuses to associate 'terror' or the death of her family with one person or one party. Her remarks on George W. Bush's statement allude to the futility of the 'War on Terror' and the problematic approach of associating political violence with one man or a single organization. In doing so, the narrative sets the tone of the novel, with the principal character's scepticism with respect to western political rhetoric about terrorism giving a critical edge to the narrative. The first-person narrator acknowledges the danger that surrounds post-9/11 rhetoric in fostering violence and xenophobia. In the following, I will examine the role of the news media as portrayed in *Incendiary* and its intersection with political rhetoric in influencing the national climate in the aftermath of a terrorist attack.

[380] Cleave, *Incendiary*, 3.
[381] Gordon Corera, "Dead or Alive? US Indecision on Bin Laden," July 15, 2011, sec. US & Canada, https://www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-14115327.

Incendiary revolves around the fictional events of a massive terrorist attack and its aftermath, in which eleven suicide bombers target a full football stadium as fans of Arsenal and Chelsea gather to watch the game. The narrative reveals how the news circulates revealing details about the attack, the attackers, and the number of victims, in which horrid details are made public. Listening to the BBC, the narrator informs Osama about the news of the attack: "They reckon maybe 500 people were crushed and burned to death while fire rained down on the East Stand".[382] The part the media plays in shaping the general atmosphere is vital in terms of depicting new information about what has happened, announcing the rise of the death toll, and navigating how to refer to the attack:

> The radio was still on in the ward. 966 dead it said. They kept calling it The Catastrophe. The BBC never did work out what to call the thing you'd blown up. After days of calling it the Emirates Stadium or Ashburton Grove or Gunners Park they gave up and started calling the whole thing May Day. Everyone did. Like you hadn't just blown up a football ground you'd blow a hole straight through our calendar.[383]

The narrator, who is badly injured, spends her time among other victims in the hospital involuntarily listening to the radio every morning: "I couldn't count the days all I could count was the bodies".[384] The climate is one of anticipation and terror which is highly captivating. The media are one of the main drivers behind this climate. For example, the number of deaths announced on the radio news starts with 700 and keeps rising until this figure reaches 1,003. The radio news also reveals specific details about the attack and offers expert commentary.[385] In addition to such apparently objective news coverage and commentary, the radio serves an emotive function, playing "a song Sir Elton John had just written called ENGLAND'S HEART

[382] Cleave, *Incendiary*, 54.
[383] Cleave, *Incendiary*, 51.
[384] Cleave, *Incendiary*, 51, 52.
[385] Cleave, *Incendiary*, 50, 53.

IS BLEEDING".[386] Everything that surrounds the victims of the attack makes it harder for them to deal with their loss and process their traumatic experiences. Furthermore, the term "May Day" is significant as it transforms the attack instantly into a memorable event that will be commemorated yearly, guaranteeing its immortality which provides a justification of anti-terrorism and anti-migration policies. This illustrates both the power of the media and media discourse to shape the national imaginary. Richard Jackson argues that "the role of the media is never more important than during times of national crises" in respect to shaping public opinion by providing information and coverage related to national crises.[387] The published images and news is disturbing and haunting, like the image of "a couple of Chelsea fans hanging from a big old Victorian lamppost".[388] They "were in all the papers", with the authorities trying to bring them down.[389] While this prompts anger and terror among the public, it also violates ethics around media coverage and the right to publish such a critical story. At the same time, it highlights the media's role in choosing stories to cover and distribute for the consumption of the masses.

The protagonist in *Incendiary* gets involved in a love triangle with two journalists: Jasper and his girlfriend Petra, who both work at the *Sunday Telegraph*. They both attempt to help her but end up exploiting her nonetheless. Their interference with the course of her life becomes significant after she informs them that the government knew about "May Day" before it happened. Petra becomes determined to expose this too-dangerous-to-handle information to the public. As a journalist in a national newspaper, she is conscious of the power and accountability attached to her trade. She tells Jasper: "We're 2 of the very few people in this country with the power to change things. If people like us won't do the right thing with the truth what hope is

[386] Cleave, *Incendiary*, 53.
[387] Richard Jackson, *Writing the War on Terrorism: Language, Politics and Counter-Terrorism*, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2005), 165.
[388] Cleave, *Incendiary*, 54.
[389] Cleave, *Incendiary*, 53.

there for civilization?" [390] The questions that the novel raises here are what will happen to the truth once obtained by the media if it is linked with terrorism, and how will the state react? After the narrator sends solid evidence to Petra, she learns that "The paper's sold out to the government and Petra's sold out to the paper". [391] On a personal level, Petra, as an elite journalist, is ultimately concerned with what serves her rather than what serves the people of her country. From a general perspective, the paper strengthens its relationship with the government by becoming one of its agents – both parties empower each other, and the benefit is mutual. The state, in this case, is in control of the conservative media and the mainstream narratives and will not allow anything to jeopardise its authority and dominance. In a similar vein, the press, especially the national press, safeguards the best interests of the government at the expense of the truth. All the while, they claim that they offer the masses accurate information, which in Cleave's novel is far from the case. Accordingly, the conservative media's rhetoric in *Incendiary* does not only represent the discourse of the state, but also supports the state's policies and anti-terrorism measures.

As the narrator's life falls into complete chaos and uncertainty, Petra's life is thriving. It is therefore of significance that the narrator – towards the end of the novel – chooses to dress, act, and sound like Petra every Sunday. She writes to Osama: "for half an hour every Sunday morning Osama I am Petra Sutherland. I forget all about the cold and the dirt and my poor dead chaps… every Sunday morning Osama I am just so happy being Petra Sutherland".[392] Despite Petra's betrayal, the narrator generates power and temporal feelings of happiness by becoming an elite journalist. This provides an indication of the amount of power and popularity given to Petra through her career that gives her the privilege to have a voice. By doing so, the narrator attempts to reclaim the voice that Petra has sought to alter and eventually silence. In this respect,

[390] Cleave, *Incendiary*,191.
[391] Cleave, *Incendiary*, 210.
[392] Cleave, *Incendiary*,191.

Incendiary is critical of the people who have the power to speak and how worthy they are of the platform given to them by authoritative parties. It also depicts the government's role in the recruitment of newspapers and journalists in influential circles to inform and influence the public as they deem appropriate.

The relationship between the media, government and state's discourse is most apparent in Mena's story in terms of the profiling of Muslim minorities and Muslim migrants. Muslims in the West became more visible after the 9/11 attacks in a manner that endorses their otherness in popular narratives. They are often projected as outsiders and a threat to national security and western culture. *Incendiary* portrays the state's perception of the Other through the character of Terrance Butcher. Butcher is the ex-boss of the narrator's deceased husband who leads a counter-terrorist unit in the British police forces. During their first encounter, as the narrator seeks information about her husband and son's death, Butcher displays a firm opinion about Muslims and Arabs as potential terrorists:

> – Look, he said. The Arabs are different from us. Don't fool yourself you can understand them. In the Iran-Iraq war they sent children to walk across the minefields. To clear a path so the grown-ups could go and gaz each other. They gave each kid a little metal key to paradise. The kids hung those keys around their necks. The grown-up Arabs told the little Arab children that there weren't enough landmines to send all the kids to paradise. So the little children actually ran. Can you picture what an antipersonnel mine does to a human child? If you saw it I dare say you wouldn't think it was getting anyone closer to god. But that's what's in Johnny Arab's mind. He can't get to heaven without sending you to hell.[393]

Butcher perceives Muslims as fundamentally different and he seems convinced by the cruelty and inhumanity of Arabs. The novel presents a highly critical view of the state's response to terrorism by placing Butcher as the head of an anti-terrorist unit that is responsible for

[393] Cleave, *Incendiary*, 95.

implementing surveillance and executing measures to prevent future terrorist attacks. He is also, to some extent, a representative of the state and its rhetoric regarding counter-terrorism. Butcher explains to the narrator, as she attempts to refute his perceptions, that "it's an ugly war and there's no honour in it […] it's a war we win by ditching our principles".[394] Their dialogue reveals the contradictions of Butcher's ideologies and moral compass. He criticises Muslims and Arabs for being brutal in terms of the terror some are capable of. At the same time, he is aware of the unethical approach that the state is willing to take to "win this war".[395] Butcher uses a sentimental story as 'evidence' to support his argument, a type of story that is usually covered by media outlets with right-wing, anti-Muslim agendas. While the narrator is grieving her dead child, who is a victim of terrorism, she is told that Muslim children are sent to die in minefields by Muslim/Arab adults who exploit the children's innocence and murder them in the process.

Early in their conversation, the narrator rejects Butcher's view of Muslims and Arabs because of her positive first-hand interaction with Mena: "I know a Muslim. She was a nurse in the hospital. She was the gentlest woman I ever met. Her god wasn't a bombing god".[396] In a post-9/11 era, Islam becomes more of an identity rather than merely a religion that one adopts. The negative connotations and misconceptions that are attached to Islam/Muslims, as a result, drive writers to illustrate Muslim characters as apologetic to their mainstream depiction. In other words, Mena is portrayed as kind and empathetic towards the narrator and because of that, her god cannot be a god of terror. Though the narrator feels gratitude towards Mena and her "god", she ends up being convinced by Butcher's argument and rhetoric: Arabs and Muslims are brutal, and their brutality is most visible at times of war. Frantz Fanon argues that colonialism sought

[394] Cleave, *Incendiary*, 96.
[395] Cleave, *Incendiary*, 96.
[396] Cleave, *Incendiary*, 94.

to assert the perception that the history of Arabs is dominated by barbarism;[397] hence, Arabs' willingness to sacrifice children in such an inhuman way is evidence of their nature. The narrative in this context demonstrates the power of such a biased rhetoric that promotes human inequality and paints all Arabs with the same brush. It also brings to the surface how these colonial ideologies still play a substantial role in forming the West's perception of the Orient. The story that Butcher refers to is highly problematic: it captures narratives that endorse the Other as essentially different, suggesting that any attempt to understand them will be futile. According to the counter-terrorist officer, the only solution is the "war against terror".[398] During these critical times, and instead of speaking of solidarity and inclusion, Butcher induces nationalistic sentiments. His discussion revolves around the othering of Muslims and Arabs and projecting them as a threat to the country. Since nationalism is embedded within a polarising discourse that focuses on the exclusion of minorities and provoking fear of the unfamiliar, the narrator leans towards resisting Butcher's views. However, because he speaks from a place of authority, she conforms to his nationalistic ideas. The discussion between Butcher and the traumatised mother incites her to react in a firm way and to adopt his beliefs. This scene provokes George W. Bush's famous statement in the immediate aftermath of 9/11: "Either you are with us or you are with the terrorists."[399] Notably, the narrator ends up working in the counter-terrorism department. By doing so, she chooses to side with the state in its 'war' against 'terrorism' which establishes the susceptibility of the public to the state's discourse.

In Cleave's novel, Muslims are banned from sensitive positions and are suspended overnight as the state considers them a "security risk".[400] Mena, an Asian nurse who works in a hospital, is suspended from her position after the terrorist attack. This is a counter-terrorist measure that

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[397] Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, trans. Constance Farrington, (London: Penguin Classics, 2001), 171.
[398] Cleave, *Incendiary*, 96.
[399] "Washingtonpost.Com," accessed 25 March 2020, https://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-srv/nation/specials/attacked/transcripts/bushaddress_092001.html.
[400] Cleave, *Incendiary*, 64.

is linked to her status as a Muslim migrant. She further experiences animosity because of her ethnicity and religious affiliation. Mena tells the narrator about her ordeals following "May Day":

> My family is Muslim right. Do you have any idea what it's been like for us? I don't think you can imagine how it feels for me just to walk to work since May Day. To see the hate in people's eyes when they look at me. I have become the enemy number one. There's this one caff I walk past on my way here. The builders and the market traders go there. This morning I saw this old man in there. He must have been 80. He was reading the paper and the headline on the paper was THE CRUELTY OF ISLAM. He actually curled his lips. That is the nature of this madness. It fills the sky with barrage balloons and people's eyes with hate.[401]

It seems that Mena draws a distinct line between herself as a migrant and the narrator as a white British woman, and she uses the "us/them" dichotomy to present her plight. She acknowledges that the narrator is a victim of terrorism and sympathises with her. Nevertheless, Mena attempts to communicate how she and other people from her community are victimised in the process. After the attack, minorities who are categorised as a threat or outsiders are victims of the state's rhetoric, counter-terrorism policies and media narratives. Large sections of the media and official voices with governments and organizations across the North Atlantic world combined to induce Islamophobic sentiments that associated Muslims with terrorism. Edward Said explains that "in the demonization of an unknown enemy, for whom the label 'terrorist' serves the general purpose of keeping people stirred up and angry, media images command too much attention and can be exploited at time of crises and insecurity of the kind that the post-9/11 period has produced".[402] In this sense, and looking at how *Incendiary* portrays migrants in a post-terrorist attack, Mena as a non-white character with her visible religious identity (she wears

[401] Cleave, *Incendiary*, 63.
[402] Edward W. Said, *Orientalism*, (London: Penguin Books, 2003), xxvi.

a headscarf) becomes an outcast or a representative of "the enemy number one".[403] The climate prompts biased treatment and resentful sentiments towards the Other especially when political and media rhetoric is paralleled with visual measures (such as the barrage balloons) that indicate a state of defence. For Mena, the biased discourse and the counter-terrorism tactics are deployed to protect the city from people like her. Because of that, she feels that she becomes a target and, in being selected as a threat to national security, is conversely threatened in her own country of residence.

Terror and Anti-Terrorism

Political violence in the twenty-first century is typically more associated with non-state agents than the state itself. *Incendiary* complicates the relationship between the state and the production of terror in connection with the state's fight against terrorism. On one level, it seems that the terrorist attack emphasises the victimhood and vulnerability of the nation, which the state must guard. On another level, the state is seemingly involved with the terrorist attack itself, and its anti-terrorist measures are problematised in terms of violence and the potential victimization of its citizens. In this vein, *Incendiary*'s representation of how political violence unfolds and intertwines during and after the terrorist attack is significant as it depicts the association between death, injury and trauma and the state's role in such a critical climate of terror.

Incendiary portrays London in the midst of a terrorist attack and draws a vivid picture of the bombing that involves horrific images of injury and dismembered bodies. The fictional attack is broadcast live on TV, similarly to the 9/11 event that was captured live by media outlets. Before the narrator experiences the terrorist attack first-hand, as she eventually comes to the

[403] Cleave, *Incendiary*, 63.

stadium looking for her husband and son, she first watches the terror unfold live on TV. The scene on the screen is one of horror, shock and surrealism: one moment the fans are singing and cheering, the next moment they are "just gone":[404]

> Some of the players were down and the rest were running now. They were running for the tunnel ahead of the waves of smoke and fire and some of them didn't make it. The other players had their arms up to cover their heads because half of the Gunners fan club was falling down around them in bits. There were feet and halves of faces and big lumps of stuff in Arsenal shirts with long ropes spilling behind them like strings of sausages I suppose it was guts. All of it was falling out of the top of the screen. It didn't seem real.[405]

The narrative here explores the vulnerability of civilians against violence and the mass destruction a single attack might cause. The narrator's remark that the broadcast of the bombing on TV "didn't seem real" is reminiscent of the first reactions to the 9/11 attacks. Jean Baudrillard argues that today's terrorism is an image first and foremost and that reality is "superadded to the image".[406] According to Baudrillard's logic, if a terrorist attack is not covered by the media and there are no images attached to it then it is more fictional than real.[407] The need to associate images with terrorism becomes vital in a world that is marked by the influence of social media and the endless coverage of events where millions of images are posted daily. At the same time, terrorism particularly impacts those who experience the violence and terror first-hand: it is real to them, whereas others only experience the aftermath of terrorism through images. In this respect, literary fiction has the advantage of representing a terrorist event in a way that gives personal and public details and can shift the narrative from a description of an image on a screen to a description of the event itself. *Incendiary* manoeuvres between the real and the image attached to its fictional attack. The narrator first sees the blast

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[404] Cleave, *Incendiary*, 39.
[405] Cleave, *Incendiary*, 40.
[406] Jean Baudrillard, *The Spirit of Terrorism and Other Essays*, trans. Chris Turner (London: Verso, 2012), 22.
[407] See the Introduction Chapter.

on the black screen and watches what happens after the bombs explode. Then she physically comes to the stadium to witness the blood, dismembered limbs and cries of the injured first-hand: "The bodies were like islands in a river with the blood all piled up in sticky clots on their uphill sides".[408] The narrative takes the reader to the heart of the event, of which one is no longer a spectator who watches from a safe distance.

While Cleave appears critical of non-state terror in *Incendiary*, representing it with intense images of horror and the victimization of innocent civilians, the novel also presents how this form of terror is implicitly connected to the state. The narrator learns about the state's foreknowledge of the terrorist attack which it does nothing to prevent. Butcher, the counter-terrorist officer with whom the narrator has a relationship, reveals to the narrator that the state has known about 'May Day' before it took place and that senior officials made the decision not to stop attackers:

> AT THE VERY HIGHEST LEVEL. That was the moment Osama. When he said those words I stopped blaming you for my husband and my boy and I started blaming Terrance Butcher. He murdered them. He just used your Semtex to do it with […] I was just crying a bit and trembling and thinking nothing much till the ciggie burned down into the skin between my fingers. Then the pain hit me and I screamed and screamed like my boy must of screamed when the flames cut into him and then I puked up all over London and the puke ran down the inside of the glass down over St. Pauls Cathedral and down towards the Thames.[409]

This revelation becomes a turning point in the narrative as the impact of the government's decisions upon its citizens' lives is made apparent. At one moment, the narrator is actively involved with the state in its mission to eradicate terrorism. In another, she is confronted with confidential information that ends her romantic relationship with Butcher, who for her represents the state. The use of capitalisation represents the narrator's shock, anger and disbelief

[408] Cleave, *Incendiary*, 49.
[409] Cleave, *Incendiary*, 185, 186.

as she attempts to deal with the trauma of losing her family. She is willing to forgive Osama bin Laden, but not the betrayal committed by her government. The moment of revelation described above presents the terror she is experiencing in a manner that is similar to the horror of "May Day". In a way, it is happening all over again, because some of the perpetrators are the people who are supposed to protect her and whom she trusts. The act of 'puking' is symbolic of discharging and cleansing herself from the lies and misleading information of the authorities.

In this context, the character's name, 'Butcher', is highly symbolic. A butcher's career involves slaughtering, cutting and selling meat. While the officer's alleged goal is to protect, he ends up being a 'butcher', with the decision he is involved with marking the deaths of more than a thousand fans and the injury of many others. Significantly, and despite the brutality of the decision to permit the attack, Butcher does not only approve of this decision but also endeavours to justify it. The reasoning is that if the attackers had not bombed the stadium, the state would lose track of the terrorists and sensitive targets (such as the Houses of the Parliament or the Supreme Court) could have been attacked. Thus, as Butcher puts it: "we'd have lost all insight onto what they were planning. And we couldn't let that happen".[410] In this respect, the state acts as a supreme authority through its verdict that bombing a stadium is permissible provided the sovereignty of the state remains protected. Hansen and Stepputat argue that the state's sovereign power "is always a tentative and unstable project whose efficacy and legitimacy depend on repeated performances of violence […] these performances can be spectacular and public, secret and menacing".[411] Accordingly, *Incendiary* is critical of how the state might practice its authority through different "performances of violence". This is manifested by the government's withholding of information from the public and thus subjecting the people of London to a deadly and horrific fate.

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[410] Cleave, *Incendiary*, 148.

[411] Thomas Blom Hansen and Finn Stepputat, eds., *Sovereign Bodies: Citizens, Migrants, and States in the Postcolonial World* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2009), 3.

In *Incendiary*, it is not only the absence of action before "May Day" that creates a radical government, but also the endorsement of radical measures and violence to safeguard the state in the aftermath of the attack. The narrative portrays what it is like to live in London after the deadly event, with a high state of emergency and constant surveillance to keep London 'safe'. Cleave's narrator observes "what they were doing to London" every morning: "they stopped boats using the river" to protect the Houses of Parliament and the River Thames is transformed into "an empty vein with police boats drifting up and down".[412] Bridges are closed and Tower Bridge is raised, helicopters hover in the sky, yet the most disturbing transformation of the city is the "barrage balloons" that give the narrator "the shivers".[413] The narrative captures how these measures are essentially visual, occurring in iconic places in London to represent a major transformation. According to the narrator, the barrage balloons appear to be the most disruptive measure taken by the state. Indeed, the barrage balloons' visual presence in the sky implies that the country is at war, since they are an air defence that was largely used during World War Two. The novel questions the effectiveness and the logic of these radical measures that resemble the declaration of a state of war within the city: "we turn London into a fortress. As if that could possibly stop the terror".[414] The critical tone indicates that the narrator, as a victim, rejects how the state deals with the aftermath of terrorism: the measures are aimed to control and terrorise rather than to heal and prevent. This gloomy image of London is normalised later in the narrative and what was once radical and unfamiliar is made to seem more familiar using patriotic images and symbols. For example, the barrage balloons and helicopters are still there but are gradually assimilated within the city. The black helicopters are painted "red white and blue" and "each balloon had the face of one of the May Day victims painted on it".[415] They are

[412] Cleave, *Incendiary*, 61.
[413] Cleave, *Incendiary*, 61.
[414] Cleave, *Incendiary*, 62.
[415] Cleave, *Incendiary*, 117.

called “the Shield of Hope”, a name that demonstrates the power of political discourse when it comes to counter-terrorist measures.[416]

The novel represents a critical depiction of how a politics of fear could transform a city from civility to brutality. Violence caused by petrified people is connected to the state’s rhetoric around the possibility of subsequent terrorist attacks that might be more destructive. The people of London are in a position of anticipation and fear, in which “there are so many bomb scares now. You can’t leave a ciggie butt unattended these days without someone coming and doing a controlled explosion on it”.[417] This is mostly described during the mass panic that occurred “with the telly reporting a dirty bomb in Parliament Square”:[418]

> Once it started everything happened so quick. The panic was like a living thing Osama it had a smell and a voice. The smell hit me in the guts it was the smell of bodies sweating and struggling. Then there was the horrible noise. It was grown men screaming and sirens going berserk and the crunch of cars reversing into legs and bollards and railings […] I was in the middle of all these young blokes in office suits and they were shouting and barging everyone out of their way so I just had to run with them. Then I couldn’t keep up any more and I fell. I lay on the streaming wet tarmac and they all ran over me in their hard leather shoes.[419]

The narrative is critical of how people react when terror erupts. Terror in this context is not a bomb or a terrorist attack, it is fear that becomes a “living thing” with a destructive force.[420] Cleave’s style in illustrating how ‘panic’ becomes alive is powerful in terms of writing techniques. The smell, the sound and the movements of ‘panic’ turns it into something monstrous that haunts people and changes them into something they are not. In this case, fear of another terrorist attack drives people to commit dreadful actions to escape what they perceive

[416] Cleave, *Incendiary*, 117.
[417] Cleave, *Incendiary*, 176.
[418] Cleave, *Incendiary*, 215.
[419] Cleave, *Incendiary*, 215, 216.
[420] Cleave, *Incendiary*, 215, 216.

as imminent danger. During this mass panic, violence and complete chaos are caused by individuals consumed by fear. The narrator experiences how people could terrorise each other for the sole purpose of one's own survival and safety, with those who are visibly the most 'civil' becoming the most cruel. During the mass panic, men with "suits" walk over the narrator when she falls down and nearly kill her with no one offering help – to her or to one another. Amid this panic, a man attempts to kill a woman who does not allow him inside her car. He is transformed from a seemingly modern man in a suit to a sociopath willing to commit murder.[421] Dagmar Dreyer notes that "Cleave provides us with some graphic depictions that are reminiscent of the May Day scenario".[422] This is true with reference to the description of death and injury: a man is burned alive, people are screaming and running, some are falling and others drowning.[423] Perhaps the most familiar detail is the radio announcing that "INITIAL ESTIMATES PUT CASUALTIES AT 100 TO 120" which, similarly to "May Day", will most probably be followed by more updates.[424] The main difference in this scenario is that "May Day" is the work of a terrorist organization, whereas the later incident is the product of fear facilitated by the state. The novel therefore subverts the dominant perception that terror and violence are essentially linked with religious fanatics.

The novel further complicates the scene by describing how the police use aggressive tactics within London. Here the narrator finds herself running with crowds to reach safety or perhaps to avoid falling and being run over:

> A hard black line of riot vans was keeping us from turning West up to the Horseferry Road and they were laying into us with water cannons and teargas… every breath with teargas is like dying the shock is horrible. The crowd streamed

[421] Cleave, *Incendiary*, 216.
[422] Dagmar Dreyer, "Letters to Osama and Terrorist Mindsets: Coming to Terms with 9/11 in Chris Cleave's Incendiary and John Updike's Terrorist," in *Radical Planes? 9/11 and Patterns of Continuity*, eds. Dunja M. Mohr and Birgit Däwes (Leiden, The Netherlands: Interactive Factory, 2016), 105, https://brill.com/view/book/edcoll/9789004324220/B9789004324220-s007.xml.
[423] Cleave, *Incendiary*, 216, 217, 218.
[424] Cleave, *Incendiary*, 224.

> onto Lambeth Bridge and I ran with the snot pouring down my face. Then things got worse because there were too many people for how narrow the bridge was […] the bridge got more and more jammed. I was pushed towards the edge and I started to see people going over into the river. I fought and kicked like everyone else but was getting nearer and nearer to the edge. When I finally went over myself it was quite a relief because there was no more screaming and crushing.[425]

Incendiary's portrayal of the police's treatment of the crowds problematises the state's aspiration to strengthen its sovereignty through violence, as it commits atrocities against the same people whom it professes to protect. This brings to the surface the question of the extreme measures that are adopted to preserve the state's dominance inside and outside its territory. During such a frightful event for the people of London, the authorities resort to using "water cannons and teargas" against civilians, which creates more chaos and panic.[426] This is illustrative of a terrorising state that punishes its people collectively when they disobey the rules. The state's reaction to the scared crowds that are running aimlessly is to limit their movement and direct them towards or away from specific locations using force. Significantly, and according to the narrator, it seems that the police are guarding the route that leads to "Horseferry Road" and the west-end of London, which is associated with the high-class side of the city. At the same time, Cleave seeks to depict how the construction of the city plays a role in steering the masses and creating traps and blocks along the way. In other words, "the city was not only planned and built, but also altered to allow for the state's authorities to have an advantage over civilians: narrow bridges lead to stampedes, vans and burning cars are used to block roads, and the main streets are dominated by police, in a concerted effort to control the

[425] Cleave, *Incendiary*, 217,218.
[426] Cleave, *Incendiary*, 217.

masses".[427] This presents a sovereign state that adopts an authoritarian approach to govern the population even at times of uncertainty.

While in most popular fiction, as Antony Taylor explains, London is represented as "a target, the home of extremist terrorist cells or as a point of counter-operations against Islamic militancy",[428] Cleave's novel complicates these popular narratives and reconfigures representations of terror in relation to London and the state. The narrator's journey home after she is dropped in the river offers controversial images of the authorities' terror and violence. As the narrator walks the streets of London in a miserable condition after pulling herself out of the river, she is faced with "choppers" that "were all over the sky" and one of them moves "along the street towards" her.[429] Instead of having a sense of safety and protection from the existence of the state's forces, the narrator feels intimidated by the police helicopters and attempts to hide from them. Her fear turns out to be legitimate as she witnesses a man getting shot by one of them, and later on she herself is caught by the helicopter's "search light" with a warning that she is "IN VIOLATION OF CURFEW".[430] The narrative illustrates the problematic nature that surrounds curfews, which are implemented to control the masses and their movement. They also permit state agents to use extreme measures when people break curfews – a regulation that is highly controversial. Furthermore, London resembles a city under invasion with soldiers "with machine guns and armoured cars" and "some tanks" dominating the main streets of London.[431] The narrator's comment on the presence of heavy machinery – "god knows what they were in aid of" – critically points to the state's approach to counter-terrorism and suggests that there is a reason other than people's safety behind the state of

[427] Maria-Irina Popescu and Asma Jahamah, '"London Is a City Built on the Wreckage of Itself': State Terrorism and Resistance in Chris Cleave's Incendiary and Mohsin Hamid's Exit West," *The London Journal* 45, no. 1 (2 January 2020): 129, https://doi.org/10.1080/03058034.2019.1687203.
[428] Antony Taylor, *London's Burning: Pulp Fiction, The Politics Of Terrorism And The Destruction Of The Capital In British Popular Culture, 1840 - 2005* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2013), 160.
[429] Cleave, *Incendiary*, 221.
[430] Cleave, *Incendiary*, 222,223.
[431] Cleave, *Incendiary*, 222.

emergency.[432] All of these images raise questions around the definition of terror, terrorism and anti-terrorism in relation to the state and its sovereignty. It seems that the government's expression of power is conducted through violence and surveillance. In their article "Sovereignty Revisited", Thomas Blom Hansen and Finn Stepputat look at state sovereignty "as a tentative and always emergent form of authority grounded in violence that is performed and designed to generate loyalty, fear, and legitimacy".[433] This perception of state sovereignty is depicted in *Incendiary* in a manner that complicates the state's authority, particularly where violence against citizens is legitimised as a response to a terrorist attack.

The Narrative of Resistance

Abdul R. JanMohamed argues in his essay "The Economy of Manichean Allegory" that colonialist fiction insists "on the profound moral difference between self and Other" by "portraying the supposed inferiority and barbarity of the racial Other".[434] Such colonialist rhetoric is often assimilated within post-9/11 narratives that incite xenophobic sentiments attached to biased depictions of West versus East. As an attempt to challenge the concept of "the moral superiority" of the West, *Incendiary* problematises the source of terror and rejects narratives of polarization.[435] From the first few pages, the novel invokes the imperial history of Britain in relation to global terrorism. The traumatised mother is aware that her country committed terror as a past-imperial state and still engages with neo-imperial policies and practices toward postcolonial countries:

> I know you can love my boy Osama. The Sun says you are an EVIL MONSTER but I don't believe in evil I know it takes 2 to tango. I know you're vexed at the leaders of Western imperialism. Well I'll be writing to them too.

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[432] Cleave, *Incendiary*, 222.
[433] Thomas Blom Hansen and Finn Stepputat, "Sovereignty Revisited," *Annual Review of Anthropology* 35, no. 1 (2006): 297, https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev.anthro.35.081705.123317.
[434] Abdul JanMohammed, "The Economy of Manichean allegory," in *The Post-Colonial Studies Reader*, eds. Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin, (London: Routledge, 2006), 23.
[435] JanMohammed, "The Economy of Manichean," 23.

> As for you I know you'd stop making bombs in a second if I could make you see my son with your heart for just one moment. I know you would stop making boy-shaped holes in the world. It would make you too sad. [436]

Cleave's protagonist is not highly educated nor involved in politics and often using simple terminology to communicate and express her ideas. Nonetheless, she is aware of the problematic nature of the proposition that the West is innocent and that the East is corrupt. Her usage of capitalization represents the amount of exaggeration and fallacy in the media's description of "Osama" as an "EVIL MONSTER".[437] If he is both evil and a monster, then it can be inferred that a nuanced representation of terrorists and terrorism is unlikely, especially in 'tabloid' press. The narrator opposes the 'black and white' categorization of people by alluding to the western state's involvement in committing violence equivalent to that perpetrated by 'May Day' terrorists. Therefore, *Incendiary* destabilises narratives and concepts associated with Samuel P. Huntington's work about a 'clash of civilizations'.[438] At the same time, *Incendiary*'s protagonist believes in the power of her words and the humanity of the terrorist, not only Osama bin Laden but terrorists in general. She imagines Osama repenting once he acknowledges the terror of his actions by reading her letters. Such a romantic depiction of the narrator's letters' unlikely effect on the terrorist helps her through her journey of surviving terror. In this way, terrorism, according to Cleave's novel, is not about a clash between cultures and civilizations, it is about a cycle of victimization, injustice, and violence.

Incendiary challenges Islamophobic narratives and subverts the image of the Muslim Other by depicting Muslim characters as insiders rather than outsiders. The Muslim character Mena is an active member of her society, working in a hospital as a nurse and caring for her patients. Of all the people the protagonist interacts with, Mena is portrayed as the only person who is kind

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[436] Cleave, *Incendiary*, 4.
[437] Cleave, *Incendiary*, 4.
[438] See Samuel P. Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order*, (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2011); and Chiara Bottici and Benoît Challand, *The Myth of the Clash of Civilizations* (London: Routledge, 2010).

to the narrator with no ulterior motives. Both women spend the morning shifts talking and watching the sunrise together. Mena's image as an empathetic nurse who holds the narrator's hand and makes sure to give her tranquiliser pills undermines the state's rhetoric of the "enemy within" that Butcher talks of. Mena helps the narrator to survive and endure the pain she is going through. She writes: "I'd definitely of killed myself if it hadn't of been for her".[439] The narrator's need for human connection and empathy is essential to her survival. After Mena is removed from her job because of her religious identity and ethnicity, the narrator attempts to commit suicide. The narrative highlights how a Muslim nurse is able to ease the pain of a patient and perhaps save her life as she lays on a hospital bed, traumatised both physically and emotionally. These two women, who come from different backgrounds and belong to different communities, are both affected by the aftermath of the terrorist attack and their bond affirms the significance of human connection. This subverts the 'us' and 'them' dichotomy that existed before 9/11 but proliferated in a post-9/11 discourse that projects differences between the Self and the Other.

Resisting fear and its ramifications in the aftermath of terrorism is essential to overcome a state of victimhood. In *Incendiary*, people who are not directly victimised by the terrorist attack attempt to deal with fear by staying busy. Jasper Black, the journalist with whom the narrator has had an affair, tells her as he observes the people of London that "what you see down there is the real front line in the war against terror. That's how people go on. Staying just busy enough so they can't feel nervous." [440] Jasper's analysis of the people's reaction to fear is associated with resisting the feeling itself: in a sense, if people forget about the horror that happened that day, they will be able to cope with fear. However, people who are directly victimised find the experience "horrible" [441] and can be consumed by anxiety and pain unless they establish their

[439] Cleave, *Incendiary*, 61.
[440] Cleave, *Incendiary*, 71.
[441] Cleave, *Incendiary*, 71.

own line of resistance. In this respect, the state's efforts to help the survivors are scarcely enough. A woman like the protagonist of the novel needs all the support she can get to overcome her loss. Moreover, despite being a strong woman, she feels constant pain, attempts to commit suicide, and persistently sees her son burning after she leaves the hospital. At the same time, the state is represented as a major factor in victimising the protagonist. She is deprived of her widow's pension as a punishment for her disobedience. Hence, her mental illness and trauma remain untreated and her financial situation forces her to live in dreadful circumstances where she cannot afford electricity and proper food. In this light, the novel undermines the terror caused by the terrorist attack as opposed to the terror caused by the state. Establishing a channel of communication with the terrorist, in the form of letters, becomes vital for the narrator's own survival.

A distinctive notion in *Incendiary* is the ability of the narrator to forgive Osama bin Laden for the death of her family. This is related to overcoming the fear of communication with the terrorist and coming to terms with her trauma. Further, as a mother who loses her child to terrorism, forgiving Osama suggests that committing violence will not heal her or other victims. The healing can start through having the power to forgive and communicate with fellow humans, which the novel suggests is essential for surviving terror. However, Rennhak is critical of this, perceiving *Incendiary*'s narrative technique as a demonstration of "the inherent danger, and even terrorist potential of such a precarious epistolary dialogue with the terrorist Other".[442] It is true that addressing the entire narrative to the terrorist by starting each chapter with "Dear Osama" is a controversial approach when writing about victims of terrorism and survival because of atrocities that are linked with Osama bin Laden. Nonetheless, the novel undermines "the inherent danger" of this method of communication with the "terrorist Other". The main

[442] Katharina Rennhak, "Philosophical and Literary Dialogues in a Time of Terror," in *Radical Planes? 9/11 and Patterns of Continuity*, ed. Dunja M. Mohr and Birgit Däwes (Leiden: Brill Rodopi, 2016), 64.

reason for that is related to the destabilization of controversial terms such as 'terrorists' and 'terrorism'. In a sense, the narrator continues to suffer after "May Day" – not only because of the death of her family – but mostly because of the state and the people she becomes involved with.

The discourse of terrorism in the twenty-first century "has emerged as one of the most important political discourses of the modern era" and has often been used by the state to provoke fear and demand dominance.[443] In Cleave's novel, the narrator's attempt to resist the state is depicted through her determination to expose the corruption of the state, hence undermining its sovereignty. She seeks to reveal the state's involvement in the terrorist attack while jeopardising her safety and placing herself in a precarious position. This suggests that she, as a victim of a terrorist attack and the state's terror, insists on countering fear. In this context, the enemy is not the Other: the enemy is people's subjugation to the effects of terror. On this, Young explains:

> What does terror want? Terror makes us reactive rather than proactive and creative. It prevents us from telling stories. To live in terror is to acknowledge a state of submission to it. The fear has to be overcome: here ordinary people in their unhistorical lives show the way by moving spontaneously into a world that offers a richness and generosity of response, refusing the random and its state of fear, resisting its aestheticized politics, refusing to submit to the terms, the discourse and demands of terrorism, and refusing too the macho political response which only responds with further destruction.[444]

According to the above, terror does not stem from an unknown enemy or, in the case of *Incendiary*, Osama bin Laden as a representative of post-9/11 global terrorism. Terror, as Young argues, is to submit to fear. This state of fear leads to more violence, war, xenophobia, and the violation of human rights. The 'refusal' of being in a state of terror, especially after

[443] Richard Jackson, "Constructing Enemies: 'Islamic Terrorism' in Political and Academic Discourse," *Government and Opposition* 42, no. 3 (2007): 394.
[444] Young, "Terror Effects," 326.

violence erupts, is a powerful means of resistance, and one which can be adopted by individuals, communities, and governments. In *Incendiary*, the traumatised mother refuses to 'live in terror', although this is a constant struggle. Her resistance is projected, not only in exposing the state's corruption, but more significantly in dealing with daily challenges and trying to cope with the horrible loss of her family. Through working at the department of counter-terrorism, and later at Tesco superstores, and also empathising with those who are perceived as the victimisers (such as Mena), the narrator illustrates a determination to overcome or at least deal with terror.

It can be argued that the author of *Incendiary* is among those writers who interpret twenty-first century terrorism from a global angle that transcends differences and, using the words of Tim Gauthier in his book *9/11 Fiction, Empathy and Otherness,* "focus[es] on its capacity to unify".[445] This is portrayed by how the narrator perceives the nature of violence: "all the violence in the world is connected it's just like the sea".[446] Violence, to her, is similar despite its severity, perpetrators, or location, because it ultimately creates a state of terror. Towards the end of the novel, in a state of shock and having nowhere safe to go after her failure to expose the state's involvement in "May Day", the narrator sleeps in a "doorway" and dreams of a better life, "a dream where the terror was over": [447]

> They united all the balloons in the Shield of Hope and let them float away. I held on to the cable of my boy's balloon and I hung there under his smiling face getting carried higher and higher in the night sky […] there was a warm wind pushing us and we swooped down low into the valleys and there were little villages there where the windows were lit up and all the colours glowed and you could smell food cooking. And from inside all the houses you heard mums singing their children to sleep and their love was stronger than bombs. [448]

[445] Tim Gauthier, *9/11 Fiction, Empathy, and Otherness* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2015), 1.
[446] Cleave, *Incendiary*, 9.
[447] Cleave, *Incendiary*, 209.
[448] Cleave, *Incendiary*, 209, 210.

This dream represents the opposite of the narrator's harsh reality and seems to be an unconscious method of survival in her situation. The dream engages the reader's senses, evoking the feeling of the warmth in the air, the sight of the colours and lights of the houses, and the smell of the food. As a powerful narrative technique, this dream temporarily removes the reader from the disappointment of how the events turned out, and also from bitterness and the horror of the narrator's position. The Shields of Hope are transformed from a war defence mechanism to flying balloons that actually symbolise 'hope', as they take the mother and the boy on a ride to observe a better place. At the same time, the dream is not solely about the mother and her boy: it is about imagining a world where terror ceased to exist, which invokes the concept of humanity and the power of solidarity in resisting terror. This echoes Judith Butler's argument in her book *Precarious Life* that "loss has made a tenuous 'we' of us all".[449] Hence, the novel suggests that not only is the world connected with violence and suffering, but also with healing and hope for a better life.

Along the same lines, one of the last significant scenes in *Incendiary* depicts the narrator attempting to burn Petra – the journalist who contributes to the narrator's victimhood. Instead of burning Petra, the narrator gives her a bunny toy that belongs to her dead son.[450] The narrator describes the scene after she has soaked Petra's office with petrol: "My boy wasn't taking any notice he was laughing and running round the office banging on the glass windows and looking out over the whole of London in flames underneath us".[451] While the vision of London on fire is a hallucination, it is a symbol of the terror that people cannot see or directly experience, as opposed to terrorist attacks that are essentially visual. It also invokes the notion that "the idea of an 'honest democracy' is an illusion", according to Žižek.[452] He explains that people in the

[449] Judith Butler, *Precarious Life: The Powers of Mourning and Violence* (London: Verso, 2004), 20.
[450] Cleave, *Incendiary*, 235.
[451] Cleave, *Incendiary*, 235.
[452] Žižek, *Welcome to the Desert*, 79.

West have the illusion that they are free and live in democratic states while they are controlled by capitalism, the politics of fear, and surveillance.[453] On one hand, this scene represents the terror and fear that occur in a city like London, and of the injustice and victimhood that people might be subjected to. On the other hand, it invokes empathy and forgiveness. The narrator's decision to forgive Osama bin Laden and then Petra (a character who stands for the exploitation committed by the upper-class and the media) alludes to the goodness of humanity. The narrator realises that committing terror against terror will only produce more atrocities and violence, and the only method of resistance is to respond with "love", as she tells Osama towards the end of her letter: "love is not surrender Osama love is furious and brave and loud".[454] Although the narrative of the narrator leans towards "escaping into utopian worlds" where love triumphs, it explores people's potential to empathise and heal, even during catastrophic moments.[455] In this context, Young raises a vital question about the relationship between literary fiction and terror: "can fiction also show us how to move out of terror, how to refuse its effects?"[456] The narrative of *Incendiary* reflects this question through Cleave's illustration of how literature can counter narratives of fear and polarization.

[453] Slavoj Žižek, "9/11 and the End of Liberal Democracy?," interview by Marwan Bishara, 29 October 2014, accessed April 25, 2019, https://www.aljazeera.com/programmes/empire/2014/10/911-end-liberal-democracy-2014102910404894104.html.
[454] Cleave, *Incendiary*, 237.
[455] Popescu and Jahamah, "London Is a City Built on the Wreckage of Itself," 138.
[456] Young, "Terror Effects," 310.

Chapter Four

Terror and Humanity between East and West in Mohsin Hamid's *Exit West*

In this final chapter, I examine Mohsin Hamid's latest novel *Exit West*.[457] The novel depicts the lives of citizens of a country that falls into chaos and violence and in which the citizens seek an exit that transforms them into the status of refugees. The narrative of the novel problematises the plight of refugees and the West's response to this plight. *Exit West* is written in an era of mounting tension in the West towards non-western migration, and in which instability, dreadful circumstances and violence force millions to leave their countries and come to the West. While the start of the twenty-first century is marked by the migration-crises and the politics of pro-migrants and its antithesis, it is also characterised by the "individual plight of millions of displaced peoples".[458] On this issue, Robert Young argues that "fear of migrants and illegal immigration has turned out to be one of the most consistent terror effects of all".[459] In nationalist and far-right political spheres the notion that the West is under threat by such migration has been a vital component of anti-migration rhetoric. Where politics has the power to shape the present and the future in relation to migration, Hamid believes that "novels and the arts more generally, in looking at what may come, are also shaping what may come. It isn't an

[457] Mohsin Hamid, *Exit West* (Milton Keynes: Penguin Books, 2018).
[458] Marianna Karakoulaki, *Critical Perspectives on Migration in the Twenty-First Century*, ed. Laura Southgate and Jakob Steiner (Bristol: E-International Relations, 2018), 1.
[459] Young, "Terror Effects," 322, 323.

entirely passive position".[460] *Exit West*'s depiction of the future of migration, from less-privileged countries to the West, is an attempt to take a more active position. Hamid reflects on the dynamics of this encounter, the challenges, hopes and aspirations from a global perspective which problematises narratives of xenophobia and fear.

Hamid's fiction often engages with controversial politics and their impact on individuals caught between the crossfire. In his work *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*, a bestseller and a highly acclaimed novel, Hamid writes about the aftermath of the 9/11 attacks and the conflict between a Muslim East and a secular West. He challenges dominant narratives about the topic of terrorism and stereotypical representations of the Other. Similarly, in *Exit West*, which was shortlisted for the Man Booker Prize, Hamid tackles timely issues around globalization, immigration and the ramifications of terrorism and counter-terrorism on individuals and nations. *Exit West* captures the experiences of people before and after becoming refugees at a time of increased mass migration and the impact of this on individuals and nations between East and West.[461]

Hamid attempts to reconstruct the plight of refugees, the harsh circumstances that they experience and the psychological aftermath of leaving one's own country and loved ones behind to face violence and hostility. At the same time, the author attempts to depict the locals' acts of empathy toward refugees, highlighting that refugees and residents of host countries are all citizens of this world and, no matter how different, they are connected through humanity. The concept of humanity in this research is associated with the premise that all people can be

[460] Mohsin Hamid, "It's Important Not to Live One's Life Gazing towards the Future," interview by Alex Preston, the Guardian, 11 August 2018, http://www.theguardian.com/books/2018/aug/11/mohsin-hamid-exit-west-interview.

[461] A migrant *chooses* to leave, a refugee or asylum seeker is forced to leave (UNHCR, 2016). In this research, the term 'refugees' is often used to refer to the main characters' experience as they flee their country because of armed conflict. However, there is an overlapping between the terms 'refugees' and 'migrants' since it is challenging to draw a line between the experience of migrants, refugees and asylum seekers in the host countries, within *Exit West*.

exposed to violence and victimhood despite location and ethnicity, and when terror erupts, it does not differentiate between people.[462] In this vein and through exploring Judith Butler's work on human vulnerability to violence, the politics of mourning and its ethical repercussions, I argue that *Exit West* promotes the notion of ethnic equality through subverting the "faceless" or the "evil face" of the Other.[463] As the novel challenges narratives of exclusion, hatred and fear in a post-9/11 era, it also problematises various forms of terror and slowly undermines stereotypical representations of the Other between East and West. According to Butler's approach to post-9/11 violence, narratives that seek to "humanise" the victims of political violence are essential to establishing people's capacity to identify with the "human vulnerability" of the Other,[464] which is ultimately a shared ethical responsibility in countering terror and victimization.[465]

Exit West is a distinctive work within postcolonial and 9/11 fiction because of its disruption of representations that are associated, not only with a West's Other, but more significantly with an East's Other. There is an inevitable separation between the Self and the Other in terms of identity construction, which is influenced by various factors, such as location, culture, class, race, ethnicity, religion and gender. According to postcolonial studies, the politics of representation and dominance play a vital part in this construction and its relationship to power dynamics.[466] For example, in western narratives of the East and West encounter, the Other/the East is commonly reduced to specific images which are associated with the exotic, the barbaric, and the threatening. Alternatively, the Self/the West is projected as the dominant, the saviour and the civilised. Postcolonial novels offer counter-narratives to the colonial representations of

[462] Judith Butler, *Precarious Life: The Powers of Mourning and Violence* (London: Verso, 2004), XVIII, XIX, 145.
[463] Judith Butler, *Precarious Life: The Powers of Mourning and Violence* (London: Verso, 2004), XVIII, XIX, 145.
[464] Butler, *Precarious Life,* 19.
[465] Butler, XVIII, XIX, 145.
[466] Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, and Said, *Orientalism; Culture and Imperialism; Covering Islam*.

the Other and in doing so they reclaim their voice and disrupt power dynamics. In *Exit West*, written by a multicultural writer, Hamid attempts not only to give Middle Eastern characters an authentic voice and representation but, I propose, goes a step further and destabilises representations of the West and problematises stereotypical depictions of anti-migration. My analysis of the proposed argument is based on the interrogation of the term 'natives', a term the narrator often uses when referring to the citizens of the host country which also transforms and intersects with notions of 'migrants and migration'. Nira Yuval-Davis' argues in her work on identity and notions of belonging, that "the relationality of the identity construction was that of complete exclusion and negation, and was often accompanied by the demonization of the Other".[467] This polarising relationship between the Self and the Other is challenged in *Exit West* through the construction of various images of hope and empathy in the midst of a migration crisis.

In the first half of the novel, *Exit West* takes place in an unnamed country that is "not yet openly at war",[468] but is on the verge of civil war between the state and militants who are trying to take over the city. The protagonists Nadia and Saeed meet at an evening class early in the novel and gradually form a romantic relationship. The lives of these two young people are depicted in a manner that confirms the normality of their lives – except when violence erupts in their city. The narrator establishes this central point early in the narrative suggesting, through switching to the pronoun "we", that this might happen to anyone: "for one moment we are pottering about our errands as usual and the next we are dying".[469] In the case of Nadia and Saeed, they endeavour to lead an ordinary life as citizens of a global world: they both have jobs, attend classes, go to cafes and restaurants, are connected through cyberspace and experience life's

[467] Nira Yuval-Davis, "Theorizing Identity: Beyond the 'Us' and 'Them' Dichotomy," Patterns of Prejudice 44, No. 3 (2010): 261-280., 276, 277
[468] Hamid, *Exit West*, 1.
[469] Hamid, *Exit West*, 1,2.

challenges and pleasures. They also struggle to hold on to their daily routine in the midst of chaos before their city falls gradually into the "abyss".[470] Hence, the couple is represented "not as refugees but as individuals with families, studies, and occupations".[471] This is highly significant in twenty-first century narratives since refugees are predominantly depicted in the context of their status as refugees.

The narrative tackles stereotypical representations of the Other that are associated with Islam and Muslims. These stereotypes often construct religious Muslims as violent and barbaric, and present Islamic culture and religion as the source of extreme and backward ideologies. The dominant image of Muslim women in western media and narratives, for example, is governed by certain frames of oppression, victimization, and exploitation.[472] In Hamid's novel, Saeed is raised by religious, educated parents who have a close, loving relationship. Saeed's commitment to religion does not make him in any way a violent or a bad person; instead, it is a source of solace at times of hardship. For example, after the brutal murder of his mother, Saeed and his father "prayed a great deal". [473] In this respect, it can be argued that *Exit West* complicates stereotypical representations of 'religious Muslims'. Likewise, Nadia is a modern woman who works at an insurance company, rides a bike, and chooses to live by herself in her own apartment. Her choice of attire being "clad from the tips of her toes to the bottom of her jugular notch in a flowing black robe"[474] does not define her as a woman – she is not religious nor oppressed. In other words, she is a woman who does not need to be 'saved'. Significantly, she is more independent and resilient than Saeed in terms of adapting more quickly to their new surroundings and feeling less melancholic. Saeed's father could see this in Nadia and hence he

[470] Hamid, *Exit West*, 1.
[471] Betsy L. Fisher, "Doors to Safety: Exit West, Refugee Resettlement, and the Right to Asylum," Michigan Law Review 117 (2018): 1119, 1120.
[472] Said, *Covering Islam*, and Morey and Yaqin, *Framing Muslims.*
[473] Hamid, *Exit West*, 74.
[474] Hamid, *Exit West*, 1.

asks her before leaving the country with Saeed that "she must see Saeed through to safety".[475] This conveys a counter-image to western depictions of Muslim women as fragile and dependent, and in which their 'hijab' is a sign of oppression.

In the second half of the novel, the narrative moves to countries of refuge where Nadia and Saeed are transported by magical black doors to Greece, and then to the UK and finally to the US. These magical doors are a central feature in *Exit West's* narrative because this magical element, as I will interrogate in this chapter, allows the author to challenge the dominant depiction of migrants in the West, and to create a metaphorical dimension to their journey. When Saeed and Nadia stand in front of the untransparent black portal for the first time, they have no idea where they will be transported to. Fear of persecution accompanied by hope drives them to cross through to the unknown; hence, the doors symbolise a journey that is 'away from' as opposed to 'towards to'. In the case of forced displacement, which Nadia and Saeed are represented as part of, the "levels of displacement usually correspond to the level of violence in the country of origin".[476] In other words, the refugees do not go anywhere in particular, just elsewhere and 'away from', escaping death and horrid living circumstances. This notion problematises one of the anti-migrant stereotypes that 'they'/migrants come 'here', whereas Hamid is posing that they come 'somewhere' (which is the location they end up at after going through the black doors) and not 'here' at all.[477]

The Concept of Terror between East and West

[475] Hamid, *Exit West*, 93.
[476] Christina Boswell, C. "Addressing the Causes of Migratory and Refugee Movements: The Role of the European Union," New Issues in Refugee Research Working Paper No. 73, Geneva, Switzerland: United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, 2002, 5.
[477] For example, in the Syrian refugee crises (2011-present), "the majority of Syria's 5.6 million refugees have fled — by land and sea — across borders to neighboring countries". They did not choose where to go, but rather they had to flee 'away from' violence to the nearest safe place. "Syrian Refugee Crisis: Facts, FAQs, and How to Help," *World Vision* (blog), 15 March 2020, https://www.worldvision.org/refugees-news-stories/syrian-refugee-crisis-facts.

Regardless of the location of political violence, terror is the product of various forms of violence that can be committed by state's agents and non-state agents alike.[478] In the first half of the novel, *Exit West* vividly captures how the city falls into terror as the fighting between the government and the militants escalates. It is "no longer a city where the risks facing a young woman living independently could be thought of as manageable", when "funerals were smaller and more rushed affairs" and when "large bombs still dropped from the sky and exploded with an awesome power".[479] The omniscient narrator describes the grave effects of terror on people using precise, powerful sentences that are similar to a documentary or reportage style of narration where feelings and emotions are barely explored in a vulnerable manner. For example, when militants come to Saeed's building "looking for people of a particular sect", the narrator in the following extract describes the scene:[480]

> The neighbours upstairs were not so lucky: the husband was held down while his throat was cut, the wife and the daughter were hauled out and away. The dead neighbour bled through a crack in the floor, his blood appearing as a stain in the high corner of Saeed's sitting room, and Saeed and Nadia, who had heard the family's screams, went up to collect and bury him, as soon as they dared, but his body was gone, presumably taken by his executioners, and his blood was already fairly dry, a patch like a painted puddle in his apartment, an uneven trail on the stairs. [481]

This horrific incident is described in concise sentences without dwelling on many details or revealing how Nadia and Saeed reacted to the screams of the family, as if Hamid leaves this to the imagination of the reader. Nonetheless, it is an effective technique in illustrating the amount of terror and precariousness that takes place once violence erupts. Indeed, the unsaid could be

[478] While both parties utilise violence, state agents are people who work under the umbrella of the state and the government, while non-state agent are people who commit illegal acts. See the Introduction Chapter for further analysis.
[479] Hamid, *Exit West*, 72,73,76.
[480] Hamid, *Exit West*, 79.
[481] Hamid, *Exit West*, 79, 80

more haunting and powerful in emphasising the complexities of terror and its impact than detailed description. The narrator shifts the narrative between two locations, Saeed's apartment and the neighbours' upstairs apartment, giving the illusion of a video camera that moves between the two spaces capturing a few disturbing images. These images seem sufficient and extremely powerful in terms of illustrating the violence within this unnamed country, a sort of violence that aims to divide the country by targeting a specific group of people.

In the novel, state terror is interwoven with non-state terror in a way that shows that the principal victims of this conflict are civilians. The state appears to be more concerned with practising its sovereignty than protecting the people who are held in the crossfire. It victimises them as much as the militant-opposition does. The government in this country that is left anonymous could stand for any postcolonial country that suffers from limited resources, corruption and autocratic rule. In an incident in which "a group of militants" takes over the city's stock exchange, the army decides that it is worth risking the hostages' lives when national security is at risk.[482] Eventually, in the very same day, the army "exterminated" the militants and also the hostages in the process to confirm that the state is still in "complete control". [483] A similar scene is depicted in Aslam's *The Blind Man's Garden* during a school siege in Pakistan by a terrorist group. As the state gets involved, the siege ends with many casualties on both sides, civilians and terrorists. Cleave's *Incendiary* also complicates state violence in its depiction of the extreme measures implemented to counter terrorism, in which the state victimises the residents of London. Thomas Blom Hansen and Finn Stepputat explain the relation between state power and sovereignty: "sovereignty is not the bedrock of state power but a precarious effect – and an objective – of state formation".[484] In other words, for the state to practise its authority and

[482] Hamid, *Exit West*, 40.
[483] Hamid, *Exit West*, 40.
[484] Thomas Blom Hansen and Finn Stepputat, *Sovereign Bodies: Citizens, Migrants, and States in the Postcolonial World* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2009), 2.

dominance, it requires the use of violence regardless of its legality or form. Hamid, Aslam and Cleave illustrate how sovereign power could lead to the direct victimization of citizens in which the goal is reclaiming and affirming the state's authority. Protecting the people and guarding their best interests, in this vein, becomes secondary and, in certain moments, an illusion.

Exit West offers an insight into the circumstances that drive people to leave their country and become migrants. The mounting of violence between the state's army and the militants is transformed into a civil war and a constant state of fear and persecution. In one of the scenes that represent the dreadful and shocking images of violence and extremism is what happens to the "ponytailed man", a drug dealer who sells "shrooms" among other things.[485] He "would be beheaded, nape-first with a serrated knife to enhance discomfort, his headless body strung up by one ankle from an electricity pylon".[486] What seems to be more dreadful, as described in the narrative, is that no one dares "to cut him down".[487] The militants in this city do not only torture and kill people, they instil fear in the inhabitants of the country – a feeling that prevents the living from pursuing the normalities of life. In this context, Robert Young contends that "like history, terror is known only by its effects, its aftermath, on the people subjected to terror. Terror brings error, a perpetual confusion of subject and object, in which the one folds into the other".[488] In the novel, no one in the city is able to offer the "ponytailed man" a proper burial – to do an act of righteousness – as they fear or anticipate that they might be subjected to the same fate. This is highly significant since fear is a haunting and overwhelming state of being that might strip the people out of their humanity and prevent them from practising empathy. If the people cannot object to the injustice another human being is subjected to or react to it because they are under the effect of terror, then terrorism and extremism will gain a robust authority.

[485] Hamid, *Exit West*, 38.
[486] Hamid, *Exit West*, 38.
[487] Hamid, *Exit West*, 38.
[488] Robert Young, "Terror Effects," in *Terror and the Postcolonial*, eds. Elleke Boehmer and Stephen Morton (Malden, MA: Wiley Blackwell, 2015), 308.

Empathy in this context is not an emotion, it is an ethical action that shows solidarity and rejection of injustice. The concept of empathy here could be defined as the understanding of other people's feelings and perceptions in which this understanding leads to actions.[489] These actions are vital during times of conflict and distress.

As the militants succeed in their conquest and as death and terror hover over the city, 'magical' doors suddenly appear which have the ability to send people into a different place and a different reality. The narrative mentions the impossibility of obtaining a visa and gaining a legal channel to travel to a safe place, hence the doors become a means to escape. Although these doors seem magical, they encapsulate the desperation of forced displacement. Many refugees find themselves in a position of forced displacement in which leaving their home-country is a matter of survival. In one interview, a Syrian family living in a camp in Lebanon explain that "the consistent airstrikes" compelled them to leave their home "to keep the family safe". In the refugee camp, they live a life of constant struggle hoping to resettle in a better place, as the father makes it clear that "he still has a dream to return back to Syria one day".[490] There is a close association between Hamid's novel and narratives of migration in the twenty-first century that revolve around fear and hope. Hope that migrants can move somewhere else, and fear of where they are moving to and the journey in between.

In *Exit West* Hamid alludes to the significance of the character's place of birth and residency. A person's home-country becomes an essential part of the character's life and can interfere in his or her present and future. Saeed and Nadia are somehow living a normal life or striving to do so but have lost this 'privilege' because of the violence that thrives in their part of the world. Death, persecution, and terror force them and other people from different countries to leave, transforming them into refugees. In an interview, Hamid comments on this: "in geopolitical

[489] Roman Krznaric, *Empathy: Why It Matters, and How to Get It* (New York: Perigee, 2014) x.
[490] Mark Priceman, "Faces of Migration," *Justice for Immigrants* (blog), accessed 17 January 2021, https://justiceforimmigrants.org/faces-of-migration/stories-of-migration/

terms, geography can be a matter of life and death. When relations between people start to break down, when suspicion and xenophobia grow, and when schisms start manifesting themselves, the exact location where you are from can take on deadly forms".[491] The concept of one's location is disrupted in the novel as the narrative takes the reader instantly to different settings away from Saeed and Nadia's city in the form of vignettes. In this manner, the novel provokes questions as to how technology and social media transport people instantly through time and space.

The first vignette in *Exit West* takes place in Australia as a man emerges from the closet door of a bedroom where a "pale-skinned woman was sleeping alone".[492] The narrator gives the reader an insight into the newcomer's "perilous circumstances": "he was aware of the fragility of his body. He knew how little it took to make a man into meat: the wrong blow, the wrong gunshot, the wrong flick of a blade, turn of a car, presence of a microorganism in a handshake, a cough. He was aware that alone a person is almost nothing".[493] This person escapes death in his country of birth using one of the dark doors and arriving into a house whose alarm is not active. Violence in this context directly impacts the body, and it is evident of its fragility. It captures how a person might perceive the precariousness of his existence because of the violence he witnesses. There is an emphasis here on the "vulnerability to others", which is, according to Butler, a primary attribute of being a human.[494] Consequently, life is represented as conditional and ultimately lost as it depends on the endurance of the human body that exists within a dangerous environment. In contrast, the image of a woman sleeping alone in her bedroom alludes to the feeling of safety in her environment. Accordingly, the narrative in this scene illustrates how people perceive their bodies within their space.

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[491] Mohsin Hamid, "Migration Will Become a Human Right," interview by Graeme Green, *New Internationalist*, 28 May 2017, https://newint.org/columns/finally/2017/06/01/and-finally-mohsin-hamid.
[492] Hamid, *Exit West*, 5.
[493] Hamid, *Exit West*, 7.
[494] Butler, *Precarious Life,* XIV.

The location or geography has an impact on the identification of terror, terrorism, and people who are perceived as terrorists or victims. *Exit West* attempts to problematise how terror is manifested in the narrative, and in this context, it is significant that Hamid chooses not to use the label 'terrorism' and 'terrorist' to describe the events and the people in the novel. Instead, he uses terms such as "fighters" and "militants".[495] Before the fighting between the state and the militants turns into a civil war, the city "had yet to experience any major fighting, just some shooting and the odd car bombing".[496] These violent acts fit the description of the narrative of post-9/11 terrorism, in which violence against the state and civilians becomes an act of terrorism. The narrative technique in this instance highlights what Butler calls the "moral equivalence" of using certain terms to describe an act despite nationality and background.[497] For example, if the word 'terrorist' is reserved for Arabs and Muslims rather than the nature of the act itself, this violates the "moral equivalence" between people. In this respect, *Exit West* destabilises forms of power attached to these terms since 'terrorism' or 'terrorists' cannot be identified or defined, especially when violence takes place between state and non-state agents, in which each party has its own justifications. The state kills civilians in the name of protecting its national security and the militants kill to seize the city. Both sides seek power and dominance over a territory using violence and intimidation.

When migrants arrive in the West, they are treated as intruders despite the reality that they are forced to leave their country. Though the majority of migrants in the novel are not violent nor pose any form of danger to the residents of the 'host' countries, they are perceived as a threat. Consequently, the state employs "anti-terrorism measures" to deal with migrants.[498] The first measure conducted by the British government is to disconnect them from mobile phone

[495] Hamid, *Exit West*, 9, 40.
[496] Hamid, *Exit West*, 2.
[497] Butler, *Precarious Life,* 14.
[498] Hamid, *Exit West*, 55.

communication and "internet connectivity": "an announcement of the government's decision was made over television and radio, a temporary anti-terrorism measure, it was said, but no end date given".[499] The result of this initial measure to counter terrorism is that migrants in London "felt marooned and alone and much more afraid". [500] Hence, the whole situation is reversed: the government, in its attempt to stop or prevent terror, becomes a source of terror itself. The closing down of internet connectivity bears a relation to real-life political conflicts. For instance, one of the major measures taken by the Egyptian authorities during the 'Arab Spring' mass-protest in the country (2011) was to disconnect the people from the internet, mainly online social networks, for its main role in stirring the revolution.[501] In *Exit West*, the internet-disconnection is applied to disconnect migrants from each other and perhaps to prevent instant transmission of information and images of the current situation. This creates a sense of isolation, fear, and intimidation of what might happen next.

Hamid's novel highlights the controversy that surrounds the use of the term 'anti-terrorism' that becomes more prevalent in post-9/11 discourse. When anti-terrorism units are joined by the "natives'" use of excessive power against primarily unarmed women and men with children amongst them the legitimacy of the state's authority becomes undermined:

> That night a rumour spread that over two hundred migrants had been incinerated when the cinema burned down, children and women and men, but especially children, so many children, and whether or not this was true, or any of the other rumours, of a bloodbath in Hyde Park, or in Earls Court, or near the Shepherd's Bush roundabout, migrants dying in their scores, whatever it was that had happened, something seemed to have happened, for there was a pause, and the

[499] Hamid, *Exit West*, 55.
[500] Hamid, *Exit West*, 55.
[501] Anne Alexander, "Internet Role in Egypt's Protests," *BBC News*, 9 February 2011, Middle East, https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-12400319.

> soldiers and police officers and volunteers who had advanced into the outer edges of the ghetto pulled back. [502]

These rumours stand for the sort of violence that could occur once armed authoritative parties choose violence as a solution – instead of a peaceful approach – to eradicate the other unarmed party. The speculations of the aftermath of "anti-terrorism" measures against migrants, who are civilians in the first place, are horrendous. When a "pause" is implemented after the attacks, an evaluation seems to have occurred. If a humanitarian crisis takes place, and it is perceived, treated, and propagated as a matter of national security, the suspension of human rights, as Butler argues, is "rationalised by the claim of 'self-defence'".[503] This rationale is constantly tested and problematised in *Exit West* in which, in the case of the London attacks, the pulling back of "soldiers and police officers and volunteers" suggests the need for a different approach to deal with this issue, where violence is not the solution.

In the UK, 'terrorism' as an offence is identified by "the use or threat of action" that involves "serious violence", "serious risk", "endangering a person's life" or interfering with an electronic system.[504] In *Exit West*, the British state commits atrocities against the migrants and supports the terrorist activities committed by the 'natives'. For instance, "three lives were lost" and many injured during an attack committed by a local "mob".[505] Consequently, terror is manifested in different forms and legalised through the state with anti-terrorism measures often resembling/mirroring terrorist acts. The discourse that is used at times of conflict is shaped and controlled by the state which, as the narrative reveals, has the power to use the term "anti-terrorism measure" without properly identifying its meaning.[506] Anti-terrorism is used to

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[502] Hamid, *Exit West*, 160, 161.
[503] Butler, *Precarious Life,* 39.
[504] "Terrorism," *The Crown Prosecution Service*, accessed 19 September 2019, https://www.cps.gov.uk/terrorism.
[505] Hamid, *Exit West*, 131, 132.
[506] Hamid, *Exit West*, 55.

'legitimise' the measures taken against migrants whom the state perceives as terrorists or at least a threat.

Using the same narrative technique of omitting certain terms from a novel that revolves around terror and migration, Hamid does not mention the words 'Islam' or 'Muslims' throughout the novel. Though the protagonists are from a Muslim background and belong to an eastern, predominantly Muslim country which serves as the setting of the first part of the novel,[507] there is no reference to the word Islam. As Edward Said asserts in *Covering Islam*, Muslims and Islam are often essentialised in the western discourse about the Other: "malicious generalizations about Islam have become the last acceptable form of denigration of foreign culture in the West; what is said about the Muslim mind, or character, or religion, or culture as a whole cannot now be said in mainstream discussion about Africans, Jews, other Orientals, or Asians".[508] Islam, represented as the antithesis of the West, is predominantly misrepresented and stereotyped in western narratives and such misrepresentation gained further momentum in the post-9/11 era. As a counter-narrative, *Exit West* offers a critical perception of these terms and the discourse associated with them. It can be argued that the non-existence of these terms functions as a reaction to the exploitation of and excessive focus on the word 'Islam' in western narratives.

In *Exit West*, Hamid appears to disempower post-9/11 discourse by omitting its most hegemonic and problematic terms. In doing so, Hamid's novel resists both: western stereotypes and the 'War on Terror' discourse. Arabic words that gained momentum after 9/11, such as 'jihad', 'mujahideen', are also not used in the novel. This narrative technique of avoiding certain terms is powerful in respect to establishing a different view towards the Other and hence challenges some of the binary stereotypes that are part of the dominant narrative about the topic of

[507] It can be inferred form the novel that the setting of the unnamed country is in the Muslim World because of the description of the religious culture and religious practices and women's attire.
[508] Said, *Covering Islam,* xii.

terrorism and counter-terrorism. In a sense, *Exit West* reclaims the voices of people who live in postcolonial countries and who are affected by terror on a daily basis, and who face another form of terror as refugees/migrants in the West.

Terror of Migration

In a post-9/11 era, the fear of migrants – particularly those coming from the Middle East, North Africa or Asia – in the West is translated into tough immigration policies, typically supported by right-leaning political parties. On one hand, the rhetoric around Islamic/Middle Eastern/North African/Asian migrants is conflated with their supposed inability to assimilate into a secular western culture and the belief that this might eventually turn them towards terrorism or adopting extreme ideologies. Such a rhetoric turns these migrants into something fundamentally different that might jeopardise the West's security and its citizens' way of life. On the other hand, such nationalistic discourse is challenged by narratives of empathy and inclusion that transcend xenophobic views about migration. *Exit West* belongs in the latter camp because it is central to the novel representation and reflection on people's lives before migration and the reasons that force them towards relocation. Crucially, it offers a sympathetic portrait of the migrant's experiences and life.

Saeed and Nadia's decision to leave home comes about due to despair and a life-threatening situation. Though the situation is not in any manner ideal in their city, the option of leaving before the escalation of violence is never outlined in the narrative. The narrator's description of the heart-rending discussion with Saeed's father to convince both his son and Nadia to leave

without him encapsulates the cruelty of migration before the soon-to-be migrants even step out of their country:

> one day when things were better Saeed would come back to him [his father], and both men knew as this was said that it would not happen, that Saeed would not be able to return while his father still lived […] Saeed's father then summoned Nadia into his room […] and all he asked was that she remain by Saeed's side until Saeed was out of danger, and he asked her to promise this to him […] and so by making the promise he demanded she make she was in a sense killing him, but that is the way of things, for when we migrate, we murder from our lives those we leave behind.[509]

Nadia and Saeed, according to the narrator, are killing Saeed's father by leaving him behind because he is dependent on them as an old man, and because they both know that this is a one-way journey. More crucially, leaving him in such a vulnerable position, in a city where death is just around the corner, is tantamount to leaving him for dead. Terror in this case manifests itself in the form of abandonment and guilt: in the premise to survive, Saeed has to endure the ramifications of consciously detaching his father from his life and deserting him in "this death trap of a country".[510] His father dies later out of illness and "in the absence of antibiotics he had succumbed".[511] Upon hearing the news that is "reported to Saeed by a cousin", Saeed "did not know how to mourn, how to express his remorse, from so great a distance".[512] Accordingly, the novel brings to the surface questions around traumatic ramifications of migration and its impact on migrants when detaching themselves only physically, and not psychologically, from a life that is left behind.

In the same context, it alludes to the universality of migration as the narrator uses the pronoun "we" and "our" instead of "them".[513] This is a significant narrative technique – to shift between

[509] Hamid, *Exit West*, 92, 93, 94.
[510] Hamid, *Exit West*, 70.
[511] Hamid, *Exit West*, 170.
[512] Hamid, *Exit West*, 170.
[513] Hamid, *Exit West*, 94.

third-person pronouns to first-person pronouns, which evokes a collective sense of migrants' plight instead of highlighting Saeed and Nadia's experience as something unique to them. In other words, the narrative highlights human sameness – it is not only Nadia and Saeed and people less fortunate who have to endure migration, it will become a global experience. It also foreshadows that migration will become the norm, that "the whole planet was on the move" because of the existence of the 'magical doors' and because everyone migrates at a certain point in their life (if not in location, in time).[514]

Hamid, in an interview, speaks about the symbolism of the doors, which he feels "kind of already exist. They are a representation of a technological reality we already live inside". [515] He explains that people can be transformed from one place to another in a relatively short time because of technological advancements in transportation and virtually through accessing the online world. In *Exit West*, the doors are a seemingly magical solution for those who seek migration and this element allows the author to bypass writing about the perilous journey of migrants in which horrific stories unfold during border crossings and for the migrants to reach their destination. By doing so, Hamid is not dismissing or trivializing the migrant's journey – which is fundamentally a story in and of itself. Rather, he attempts to focus primarily on what he thinks is important to him as a writer of fiction: "what makes someone want to leave, which is all of their life before migration, and what happens to them in the new place, which is the life after migration? Which is something that every human being participates in […] and so the doors allowed me to focus on parts of the migration narrative that often get de-emphasized".[516] In this vein, *Exit West* is more concerned with describing the soon-to-be-migrants as ordinary people who have families, aspirations and daily struggles before their life is condensed to the

[514] Hamid, *Exit West*, 167.
[515] Mohsin Hamid, "From Refugees To Politics, Mohsin Hamid Writes The Change He Wants To See," interview by David Bianculli, *NPR*., 8 March 2017, https://www.npr.org/2018/03/09/592158501/from-refugees-to-politics-mohsin-hamid-writes-the-change-he-wants-to-see.
[516] Hamid, interview by Bianculli.

status of refugees. This provokes the reader to recognise that there is something beyond the terror people are subjected to during their enforced journey to leave home – because the terrible circumstances they encounter might alter how they are perceived as humans and in the process, turn them into something different: the Other. Slavoj Žižek argues that even in moments of tragedy in the West, "the distance which separates Us from Them, from their reality, is maintained: the real horror happens *there*, not *here*".[517] Accordingly, Hamid attempts to envisage the collapse of this distance that separates people and this particularity of skipping the journey of migrants' crossing altogether challenges notions of discrimination against migrants because the Us and Them dichotomies are questioned. For instance, Nadia and Saeed lead a life in their home-country with dreams and challenges that could be similar to other young people in the West. They only change their location through an instant means of transportation (the black portals) to flee unrestrainable violence.

In her discussion and analysis of postcolonial fiction, Zoe Norridge notes that "postcolonial novels of conflict are uneasy about any possibility of full knowledge of events,"[518] since violence – as a topic – can be challenging to depict in literary works of fiction. The same thing applies to realist novels that are written during the era of decolonization and which must "negotiate appalling violence".[519] As a result, employing magical elements within narrative fiction "emerged as one of the key forms of postcolonial writing".[520] In this vein, *Exit West* negotiates the representation of the terror of migration since the stories of migrants' crossing illustrate how precarious and potentially fatal their journeys can be. These details are perhaps encapsulated in the novel by describing what happens to people as they enter the black door

[517] Slavoj Žižek, *Welcome to the Desert of the Real: Five Essays on September 11 and Related Dates* (London; New York: Verso, 2002), 13.
[518] Zoe Norridge, "Magical/Realist Novels and The Politics of the Possible," in *The Cambridge Companion to the Postcolonial Novel*, ed. Ato Quayson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 70. doi:10.1017/CBO9781316459287.005.
[519] Norridge, "Magical/Realist Novels," 67.
[520] Norridge, "Magical/Realist Novels," 72.

and appear on the other side. For Nadia, as she draws close to the door, she is "struck by its darkness, its opacity".[521] The darkness, the unfamiliar, and the absence of knowledge are essential elements of the black portal which create an intense and terrifying experience before even stepping inside the door. Though the crossing through the black rectangle is almost immediate, it is rigorous nonetheless – as if a person goes into a state of rebirth. The instant experience of migration is described in the narrative as "both like dying and like being born, and indeed Nadia experienced a kind of extinguishing as she entered the blackness and a gasping struggle as she fought to exit it".[522] Amanda Lagji comments that "the physical effects that Nadia and Saeed experience as they step through the doors reassert the pain, struggles, and difficulties migrants face".[523] Indeed, the black portals do not provide a magical solution to those who seek migration and do not transfer the migrants to a land of fantasy. Stepping through the doors allow migrants to escape one form of potential terror to replace it with another form. Nevertheless, the black portals provide people with hope and opportunity, and hence "most people began to gaze at their own doors a little differently"[524] hoping that a simple door will be altered to a gateway. This confirms "the reality that refugees will try every door they can to get out",[525] and it also suggests that closing borders in the faces of refugees will not stop migration.

Hamid's implementation of these magical portals enables the narrative to shift from one location to another in the form of vignettes: as the crossing is instant, moving between different scenes, locations and characters is instantaneous too. This gives a sense of the dynamics of the magical doors, and at the same time undermines the magical component of those portals

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[521] Hamid, *Exit West*, 98.
[522] Hamid, *Exit West*, 98.
[523] Amanda Lagji, "Waiting in Motion: Mapping Postcolonial Fiction, New Mobilities, and Migration through Mohsin Hamid's Exit West," *Mobilities* 14, no. 2 (4 March 2019): 225, https://doi.org/10.1080/17450101.2018.1533684.
[524] Hamid, *Exit West*, 70.
[525] Viet Thanh Nguyen, "NYT Book Review of 'Exit West': A Refugee Crisis in a World of Open Doors," PBS NewsHour, 15 March 2018, https://www.pbs.org/newshour/arts/nyt-book-review-of-exit-west-a-refugee-crisis-in-a-world-of-open-doors.

because of the harsh reality those migrants flee from and arrive to. And while *Exit West* cannot be labelled as a magical realist novel because it only includes one supernatural element (the instant mean of transportation between countries), the effect of the magical doors in the narrative is powerful. People are rapidly transported to new locations, which dramatically impacts the temporal and causal events of the novel. This gives the novel a global dimension and different perspectives on people's movement and its impact on individuals, nations and cities.

The first vignette in the novel introduces the magical door to the reader, which takes the form of a closet. In the novel, any door can change its substance abruptly and become a gateway to an entirely different location:

> The door to her closet was open. Her room was bathed in the glow of her computer charger and wireless router, but the closet doorway was dark, darker than night, a rectangle of complete darkness – the heart of darkness. And out of this darkness, a man was emerging.
>
> He too was dark, with dark skin and dark woolly hair. He wriggled with great effort, his hands gripping either side of the doorway as though pulling himself up against gravity, or against the rush of a monstrous tide […] He rallied himself, fighting mightily to come in, but in desperate silence, the silence of a man struggling in alley, on the ground, late at night, to free himself of hands clenched around his throat. But there were no hands around this man's throat. He wished only not to be heard.
>
> With a final push he was through, trembling and sliding to the floor like a newborn foal. He lay still, spent. Tried not to pant. He rose. His eyes rolled terribly. Yes: terribly. Or perhaps not so terribly. Perhaps they merely glanced about him. [526]

This vignette asserts the sharp contrast between the two worlds in which migration allows them to meet. The man who emerges from the door is described by his dark skin, and the woman who

[526] Hamid, *Exit West*, 6, 7.

sleeps inside the room is described by her pale skin colour.[527] There is an emphasis on the darkness and paleness in a manner that evokes Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*. The door (that functions as a portal to a dark man coming from Africa to the West) is described as "the heart of darkness".[528] On this Lagji argues that "this reference revises rather than reinstates the racism of the original text. Marlow's certainty and judgment in *Heart of Darkness* are absent here; the gradual revision of judgment contained within Hamid's sentence – from certainty about terrible rolling eyes to the uncertainty of 'perhaps' – exposes the Conradian racism of 'rolling eyes' and underscores the uncertainty that characterizes these moments of sudden and unexpected encounter".[529] In doing so, Hamid disrupts colonial perceptions about the Other – the black person does not impose any sort of danger to the defenceless sleeping woman. The latter interpretation of the dark man's eyes which "merely glanced about him, at the woman, at the bed, at the room" uncovers how colonial narratives influence knowledge and representations of the West's Other. The dark man is merely looking at his new surrounding as a migrant arriving in a new and unfamiliar location while using an unconventional method of migration. In her analysis of Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* as a realist novel and its connection with colonialist ideologies, Norridge argues that such writing is "dangerous, because it normalizes imperial ideology, because it takes [a] specific perspective on the world and encourages the reader to believe that this is the *only* plausible viewpoint".[530] In this context, postcolonial criticism tends to distrust singular points of authority. Patrick Williams explains, referring to Edward Said's *Orientalism*, that "a central task of postcolonialism, then, is to think about knowledge differently, produce it differently, use it differently".[531] *Exit West*, as a postcolonial

[527] Hamid, *Exit West*, 6, 5.
[528] Hamid, *Exit West*, 6.
[529] Lagji, "Waiting in Motion," 224.
[530] Norridge, "Magical/Realist Novels," 63, 64.
[531] Patrick Williams, "Postcolonialism and Orientalism," in *Postcolonialism and Islam: Theory, Literature, Culture, Society and Film,* eds. Geoffrey Nash, Kathleen Kerr-Koch, and Sarah Hackett (New York: Routledge, 2013), 48.

text, offers several perspectives of the world while problematising colonial representations of the West's Other.

Exit West captures what it is like to be a migrant once you cross through one of the doors and the challenges migrants face in relation to survival and dealing with what Young calls the "fear of migrants". This 'fear' is manufactured by a mixture of the state, media and the residents who are influenced by this xenophobic imaginary about the newcomers. Nadia and Saeed's life is changed dramatically once they become refugees: they carry their home with them, so once they feel safe, they can "set it up" and sleep.[532] They try fishing for food, reduce energy and wait for a chance to leave for a better place. As "their funds were growing thinner…, they better understood the desperation they saw in the camps, the fear in people's eyes that they would be trapped here for ever".[533] The protagonists' state resembles the migrants in their unnamed city before it turns into complete chaos – the main difference is that those migrants are not feared: "some seemed to be trying to recreate the rhythms of a normal life, as though it were completely natural to be residing, a family of four, under a sheet of plastic propped up with branches and a few chipped bricks. Others stared out at the city with what looked like anger, or surprise, or supplication, or envy. Others didn't move at all: stunned, maybe, or resting. Possibly dying".[534] One of the most basic human needs is to have a roof over one's head, a place one can call home. The lack of this affects people in a tremendous way, adding to the difficulties which migrants face as they struggle to deal with the trauma of being displaced and the fear of being forced to return to their home-country as death awaits. Accordingly, when Saeed and Nadia cross to London with many other migrants to a luxurious house, the migrants in this place "savoured being indoors, for many had spent many months without a proper roof over their heads".[535] In

[532] Hamid, *Exit West*, 113.
[533] Hamid, *Exit West*, 110.
[534] Hamid, *Exit West*, 23.
[535] Hamid, *Exit West*, 128.

a way, they choose to stay indoors, realizing that this could be lost at any moment. The basic human right of having a proper shelter is altered in the narrative into a precious possession that is short-lived.

Exit West brings to the surface the question of how people are transformed into something they are essentially not. While the space between the black doors does not exist, because the crossing is instant, the crossing itself is life-changing: in one moment, a person is a citizen of a country and a victim of horrible conditions; in another moment, this person becomes a migrant and a threat. In a scene that illustrates the severity of being a refugee, Nadia has the chance for the first time in weeks to have a bath with running hot water, soap and clean towels: "In the hall nearby was a bathroom, and Nadia wanted to take a shower more than anything, more even than she wanted food… and she thought her body looked like the body of an animal, a savage".[536] Nadia's body holds the image of refugees, "an animal, a savage", because they are living on the outskirts of civilization and humanity while world leaders force them to live in such a state in refugee camps where basic human needs are barely available. To Nadia, having a bath and washing her dirty clothes before she puts them on "was for her not about frivolity, it was about the essential, about being human, living as a human being, reminding oneself of what one was, and so it mattered, and if necessary was worth a fight".[537] Ultimately, Nadia is not only cleaning her body, she is reclaiming her humanity, and this is a constant struggle in the midst of chaos and survival to reconstruct her humanity according to the conditions she is living in, and hence to regain her rights as a human being. In this respect, *Exit West* probes the experiences of migrants who flee terror and in the process are subjected to one of the most brutal forms of terror materialised in the consistent fear of losing what they have, whether a roof over their heads, food, safety and, most importantly, their humanity.

[536] Hamid, *Exit West*, 122.
[537] Hamid, *Exit West*, 120,121.

As the magical doors give rise to mass migration, London is reimagined in *Exit West* as a city where "houses and parks and disused lots were being peopled in this way" occupying "empty spaces".[538] Significantly, this situation is depicted in a way that "it was now said that between Westminster and Hammersmith legal residents were in minority, and native-born ones vanishingly few".[539] This is a gloomy and terrifying depiction of London since it gives the perception that the city is under occupation and that soon 'natives' will be out-numbered or, worse, turned into outcasts. The narrative critically represents how the sole existence of migrants in empty spaces in London could be interpreted as a threat to the existence of British citizens or the nation as a whole. This perception of refugees is fuelled by the media that ultimately promotes the state's political discourse. In this context, the media is "referring to the area as the worst of the black holes in the fabric of the nation".[540] Physical violence is promoted by a hostile rhetoric that normalises and justifies terrorising the Other, especially using language that is reminiscent of a colonial mindset, for example in the imperative "to reclaim Britain for Britain". This ideology of "reclaiming Britain" "falsely implies that the people seeking refuge in London are powerful and belligerent, determined to invade the entire country starting with its capital".[541] Hence, the mere presence of Nadia and Saeed in the streets of London prompts terror perpetrated by what Hamid calls "a nativist mob": "the mob looked to Nadia like a strange and violent tribe, intent on their destruction, some armed with iron bars or knives, and she and Saeed turned and ran, but could not escape". [542] It seems that once a certain form of violence takes place, it gives way to further violence. Here, Hamid depicts a city on the verge of war, in a manner that echoes Nadia and Saeed's city.

[538] Hamid, *Exit West*, 126.
[539] Hamid, *Exit West*, 126.
[540] Hamid, *Exit West*, 126.
[541] Maria-Irina Popescu and Asma Jahamah, "'London Is a City Built on the Wreckage of Itself:' State Terrorism and Resistance in Chris Cleave's Incendiary and Mohsin Hamid's Exit West," *The London Journal*, no. 0 (21 November 2019): 1–23, https://doi.org/10.1080/03058034.2019.1687203, 132.
[542] Hamid, *Exit West*, 131.

Narrative of Humanity and Resistance

As the narrative portrays a world immersed in chaos, violence, and xenophobia, *Exit West* also articulates how people reject terror and the effects of terror. Just as the protagonists of the novel migrate from one city to another facing different forms of hostility and alienation, acts of humanity, empathy and resistance to terror unfold throughout Saeed and Nadia's journey through the doors. In Greece, the first country they migrate to, Nadia is injured and a "local girl who was not a doctor or a nurse but just a volunteer, a teenager … cleaned and dressed the wound" at a clinic at the outskirts of the old town in Mykonos.[543] The wound that Nadia gets while running from four men (who are probably local residents) on the island is treated by a young local girl who volunteers to help refugees. Both the girl and Nadia become friends instantly and she is the one to help the couple leave Greece through a door that might lead to a place with better opportunities for migrants. These two women who come from different cultures are not entirely different – the bond created between them in the form of a friendship is manifested during a farewell as both become emotional, embracing each other in a "hug [that] lasted a long time".[544] In London, as the events escalate towards the use of force and intimidation to remove migrants from a house full of frightened people, human solidarity comes into sight as "something they could never have expected happened":

> Other people gathered on the street, other dark- and medium- and even light-skinned people, bedraggled, like the people of the camps on Mykonos, and these people formed a crowd. They banged cooking pots with spoons and chanted in various languages and soon the police decided to withdraw. That night, it was calm and quiet in the house, though there were sometimes snatches of beautiful singing that could be heard, in Igbo, until quite late. [545]

[543] Hamid, *Exit West*, 113.
[544] Hamid, *Exit West*, 115.
[545] Hamid, *Exit West*, 125.

This scene illustrates how human empathy could counter terror and this promotes hope in humanity in the midst of hatred. At the same time, it alludes to the impact of globalization and multiculturism in a city like London where people are united by their diversity. These people who stand in the face of terror against the most vulnerable protest to show their solidarity and are able to overcome state-terror peacefully. More significantly, the effect of their coming together gives a message to the migrants that they are not alone, which is highly powerful to counter terror. As a result, a sense of peace and security – even if temporary – emerges in the house of refugees in the form of "beautiful singing". Indeed, as Said advocates in his essay "Collective Passion", "demonization of the Other is not a sufficient basis for any kind of decent politics, certainly not now, when the roots of terror in injustice and misery can be addressed".[546] Said acknowledges that "it takes patience and education, but it is more worth the investment than still greater levels of large-scale violence and suffering".[547] In Hamid's novel, the people who gathered on the streets are advocating peace rather than violence, hence rejecting the mass-media rhetoric that promotes an anti-terrorist mission. It may be that the locals in London know that the migrants are not terrorists and that treating them with violence will only breed more violence. The task of dealing with the newcomers and integrating them into society is far from ideal in *Exit West*, yet, as the narrative suggests, it is the humanistic approach towards the Other and towards the Self.

In the same vein, the narrative provides an extreme image of London in which "nativist extremists were forming their own legions, with a wink and a nod from the authorities".[548] However, the novel offers a counter-narrative of this image: "and yet while all this occurred there were volunteers delivering food and medicine to the area, and aid agencies at work, and the government had not banned them from operating, as some of the governments the migrants

[546] Edward W. Said, *From Oslo to Iraq and the Road Map: Essays*, (New York: Vintage, 2005),111.
[547] Said, *From Oslo*, 111.
[548] Hamid, *Exit West*, 132.

were fleeing from had, and in this there was hope".[549] Thus, Hamid portrays a civilised state that, in its mission to vacate migrants by force, is not entirely barbaric, perhaps because of the laws that govern western states, or because of protests to prevent the police from invading the houses of refugees, or by volunteering to help them. The whole image, as the narrator of the novel comments, creates "hope".[550] On one hand, Hamid does not entirely represent a dystopian image of a post-9/11 world in *Exit West*, nor does he imagine an ideal world where people live in peace and harmony. On the other hand, Hamid endeavours to represent a futuristic view of humanity where it is more bright than dark and where hope and faith have a potential to prevail – especially in relation to the young who, as the narrative portrays, are the most accepting and the most empathetic. For instance, a young native boy "just out of school, or perhaps in his final year" volunteers to administer "polio drops" to migrants: "none had the heart to refuse him" because "there was such earnestness in the boy, such empathy and good intent".[551]

Tim Gauthier in *9/11 Fiction, Empathy, and Otherness* argues that the 9/11 attacks can be perceived as "a symptom of an expanding and inevitable contemporary 'condition of togetherness' in which we live and from which there is no refuge".[552] This resonates with how Hamid represents post-9/11 terror in which East and West both, hypothetically speaking, live in a "condition of togetherness". Indeed, terror has ramifications on both spheres whether directly or indirectly, and empathy is a vital factor that helps in countering terror and reducing its traumatic effect. This can be applied to how people in the novel deal with fear and the anticipation of terror. The migrants inside the house of refugees – who all fall under the umbrella of being illegal newcomers to London – arrive from different locations, speak different languages and are strangers to each other. Nonetheless, in the midst of fear as the police

[549] Hamid, *Exit West,* 135.
[550] Hamid, *Exit West,* 135.
[551] Hamid, *Exit West,* 136, 137.
[552] Tim S. Gauthier, *9/11 Fiction, Empathy, and Otherness* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2015), 5.

surrounds the house, "they spoke more to one another than they otherwise might, strangers speaking to strangers… here they were penned in together, and being penned in made them into a grouping, a group".[553] This brings a sense of community to the house in which the mere interaction with fellow human beings might be sufficient to deal with terror and perhaps overcome it. In this respect, people's reactions to being "terrified" transforms them into a state of "togetherness" – in which they eventually form a community inside the house – that becomes known as a "Nigerian house" on account of the majority of Nigerians inside the building.[554] Perhaps migrants become aware that facing this form of state-terror as a group rather than as individuals will make them less vulnerable and more in touch with their humanity.

The exploration of the effects of human-connection to overcome terror is significant in the narrative and it is elucidated in various engagements and forms. For instance, during Nadia and Saeed's encounter with the militants' violence back in their home country, and after the terrifying atrocity committed against their neighbours, "Saeed entered Nadia's room and they were unchaste there for the first time".[555] The narrator comments that "a combination of horror and desire" drives Saeed to come back each evening to Nadia's room though this act between an unmarried couple could be "punished by death".[556] It seems that they feel the urge to be intimate and more connected to each other after this incident (the murder of their neighbour) because this sort of human interaction by itself is a form of resistance to the militants' violence and authority. At the same time, it makes them more in touch with their humanity – doing what lovers do; to connect with each other on an intimate level.

Exit West attempts to problematise the West's actions and reaction to the migrants' flow to Western Europe and the US in terms of imagining the consequences of mass migration and the

[553] Hamid, *Exit West,* 124.
[554] Hamid, *Exit West,* 124.
[555] Hamid, *Exit West,* 80.
[556] Hamid, *Exit West,* 143.

effects of breached borders in the form of magical doors. As civilians move through the doors seeking safety, militants use the doors to launch attacks in the West. The novel describes how "militants from Saeed and Nadia's country had crossed over to Vienna the previous week, and the city had witnessed massacres in the streets," in which the militants use the doors to appear and then disappear after they shoot people. This is an alarming and frightening scenario of the effect of mass migration, the purpose of which may have been for the militants to "provoke a reaction against migrants from their own part of the world".[557] In this way, the novel asserts that the victims once again are unarmed people who are caught in the crossfire whether they are in Vienna, or are migrants who hypothetically seek refuge and security in Vienna, and who now must face the backlash of these massacres. Hamid endeavours to steer away from a Manichean depiction of terror, especially through people's reactions, when violence erupts in seemingly peaceful societies. On one hand, "a mob that was intending to attack the migrants gathered near the zoo", about which "everyone was talking and messaging", creating a climate of fear that spread online.[558] In contrast, a "young woman… planned to join a human cordon to separate the two sides, or rather to shield the migrants from the anti-migrants".[559] This woman is attacked by furious men "who looked like her brother and her cousins and her father and her uncles". [560] Instead of walking back to her "lovely apartment with its view of the river," she chooses to go to the zoo.[561] The choice she makes is significant because she refuses to surrender to fear and be victimised by it. This idea resonates with what Slavoj Žižek highlights in his book *Welcome to the Desert of the Real*: "when I miss a crucial ethical opportunity, and fail to make a move that would 'change everything', the very nonexistence of what I *should have done* will haunt me forever".[562] Perhaps the people in the narrative, who decide to take a stand to aid

[557] Hamid, *Exit West,* 104.
[558] Hamid, *Exit West,* 104.
[559] Hamid, *Exit West*, 104, 105.
[560] Hamid, *Exit West,* 105.
[561] Hamid, *Exit West,* 106.
[562] Žižek, *Welcome to the Deserl*, 22.

migrants, do not want to be haunted forever with the knowledge that their deeds had the potential to prevent harm. Through this, Hamid highlights the power of human empathy in resisting terror and countering its ramifications.

This novel is compelling because unlike many postcolonial novels it does not only counter-narrate stereotypes about Arabs, Muslims, or the western Other, it also attempts to provide a realistic depiction of these communities as well as the western communities. For example, the narrative illustrates the different ideologies between migrants, with some believing in armed resistance to state-terror and others believing in a peaceful approach. Yet, ultimately, the notion that "decent people vastly outnumbered dangerous ones" prevails as a general perception of migrants in *Exit West*.[563] At the same time, the narrative problematises representations of the East's Other, as it steers away from falling into the trap of providing stereotypical representations of the West. People who oppose migration and are hostile towards migrants are not essentially bad or violent, according to the narrative. Rather, fear is the driving force behind their hostility. The novel provides a counter-argument to the violence people are capable of through Nadia. She thinks that "the natives were so frightened that they could do anything". She explains to Saeed: "I can understand it. . . imagine if you lived here. And millions of people from all over the world suddenly arrived".[564] Hence, fear drives people to commit violence against each other and abandon empathetic notions because, generally, people are frightened of what they do not know. Fear, as *Exit West* portrays, is a driving factor behind profiling the Other and it also impacts certain policies that exclude rather than include minorities and newcomers.

Gauthier writes: "empathy is not simply thinking about how the other sees and feels the world, it also means accessing how he sees us as part of that world".[565] Hamid's novel, *Exit West*, presents an empathetic account of migration and how the Other and the Self are represented.

[563] Hamid, *Exit West,* 101.
[564] Hamid, *Exit West,* 162.
[565] Gauthier, *9/11 Fiction,* 6.

Religious extremists' terror as well as state and natives' terror are questioned in Hamid's novel in a sense that provokes the reader to move beyond the dominant rhetoric and creates "a shift in perspective". [566] In this construction, the narrator describes a scene in Saeed and Nadia's city where "a brave man stood in the light of a torch built into his mobile phone and waited" for a man with a rifle to emerge from a black door who will join "the fighting within the hour, among many who would do so".[567] The man is described as "brave", and "was ready to die, but he did not plan on dying, he planned on living, and he planned on doing great things while he did".[568] In a sense, those who might be perceived as essentially bad or barbaric because they commit atrocities against humanity by persecuting civilians are not depicted in the narrative as such.[569] It can be argued that Hamid attempts to examine the fighters/the militants' psychology and perhaps give them a voice; they believe they are brave, not afraid of dying, and they want to do "great things". This is their driving force – according to them, they are fighting a "righteous" cause, which alludes to what the preacher talks about during Friday's sermon at the mosque. [570] Non-state terror and state-terror are justified through monopolization of righteousness by each group while overlooking the real reasons behind hatred and violence, such as dominance, authority, power, fear, and ignorance.

The same argument can be applied to why violence in *Exit West* erupts in London and other parts of the world that receive a high number of migrants. The authorities and anti-migrant citizens have their own justifications for terrorising people, especially when patriotism and preserving the nation's security are cast as the main motivations of political violence. In this vein, the narrator of the novel explores why "the natives and their forces stepped back":[571]

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[566] Gauthier, *9/11 Fiction,* 6.
[567] Hamid, *Exit West,* 65.
[568] Hamid, *Exit West,* 64.
[569] Terrorists or religious extremists who murder and torture civilians are often depicted as evil and inhuman people with post 9/11 narrative.
[570] Hamid, *Exit West,* 49.
[571] Hamid, *Exit West*, 164.

> Perhaps they had decided they did not have it in them to do what would have needed to be done, to corral and bloody and where necessary slaughter the migrants, and had determined that some other way would have to be found. Perhaps they had grasped that the doors could not be closed, and new doors would continue to open, and they had understood that the denial of coexistence would have required one party to cease to exist, and the extinguishing party too would have been transformed in the process, and too many native parents would not after have been able to look their children in the eye, to speak with head held high of what their generation had done. Or perhaps the sheer number of places where there were now doors had made it useless to fight in any one.[572]

As London becomes a site for practising terror against migrants, the narrator critically alludes to the human-dimension and the human cost of the conflict if both or one party determines to use violence as a solution. Hence, and despite the real reason/s behind the retreat of the natives and their forces, the existence of migrants in the West becomes an undeniable state of being that should be dealt with and accepted.[573] Furthermore, the narrator subverts notions of identity related to the anti-migrant "natives" and the state's forces. Although they might be capable of committing violence, they are essentially not murderers. Hence, they know "who they are not",[574] and that might be one of the main reasons to stop the attack on migrants because of the dreadful ethical consequences, in which "decency" and "bravery" prevail.[575] The narrative technique that Hamid adopts in describing the ceasefire in London functions in a way that deters the reader from adopting one single perspective since the narrative offers several points of view as an explanation of events and actions. Instead of imposing one view, the word "perhaps" is often used as a technique to complicate preconceived notions that are related to violence in a post-9/11 and mass-migration climate.

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[572] Hamid, *Exit West*, 164.
[573] Hamid, *Exit West*, 164.
[574] Yuval-Davis, "Theorizing Identity," 279.
[575] Hamid, *Exit West*, 164

The diversity of images that are illustrated throughout the novel encapsulates how migration can be perceived in a hopeful manner. These images envisage a world that transcends differences and in which people embrace 'change' as part of their existence – even if they fight it at first. In Amsterdam, an old man is going through a hard time with "his last lover having left him bitterly", and whose life is later transformed because of the existence of a black portal in his courtyard.[576] He shifts his perception towards migrants from a position of observing them "with a degree of disdain" to communicating with another elderly migrant who takes him to Rio de Janeiro through the same door in the courtyard.[577] Though they come from different backgrounds, do not speak the same language, they find a way to interact, have conversations "with many long gaps", and eventually become lovers.[578] In another scene in London, the sudden existence of a magical door is represented as a new start for an accountant who is on the verge of committing suicide. Upon discovering the black portal in his apartment, and instead of reporting this to the authorities as an initial reaction, "he thought he might step through the door, just once, to see what was on the other side, and so he did". [579] He crosses to Namibia in Africa and chooses not to return, asking his daughter and best friend to "join him" if they wish.[580] *Exit West* illustrates how migration can be a two-way journey in which "even as people poured into London, some were venturing out of it as well". [581] The doors that lead to developing countries could be a way out to people who live in the West, promising new opportunities and hope of a better life. These vignettes suggest the endless possibilities and the positive impact that might occur once people accept the Other and cope with migration.

The disruption of boundaries related to the terms 'migrants' and 'natives' is in the heart of the novel because both terms are contested. Natives could be descendants of migrants who arrived

[576] Hamid, *Exit West*, 172.
[577] Hamid, *Exit West*, 173.
[578] Hamid, *Exit West*, 174, 175.
[579] Hamid, *Exit West*, 127.
[580] Hamid, *Exit West*, 128.
[581] Hamid, *Exit West*, 126.

in a country time ago, and ultimately migrants' offspring could become natives. *Exit West* destabilises the definition of a native through the depiction of pro-migrant protesters in London who appears to come from different races because of the colour of their skin (white, brown, and dark).[582] In the US, a native is more linked to the indigenous people who are the "first nation" in a land.[583] The narrator of *Exit West* points that in Marin, that is full of migrant camps, "there were almost no natives", alluding to the extermination of the indigenous people of America.[584] However, the narrator suggests that "nativeness" is a "relative matter, and many considered themselves native to this country," and those who advocate this position are white people who "looked most like the natives of Britain".[585] Another "layer of nativeness" is linked to the descendants of Africans who are brought "to this continent centuries ago as slaves", and who have a significant effect on how American society and identity are constructed.[586] This alludes to the political dimension of the term 'native' which is associated with certain rights and privileges, especially the right to "exercise suffrage" by people who are denied this right. The premise is that a "greater justice might be less easily denied," and in the long run, justice might be attained. *Exit West* also offers a reflection on how colonialism and the end of colonialism shapes a country's population, and also suggests how migration is a major aspect of influencing a country or an entire continent. In this respect, the novel stretches the boundaries between natives and migrants, reinforcing the notion that ultimately no one is essentially a native of a specific land nor a migrant.

Along the same lines, in Britain people (migrants and natives) along with the state ultimately find a way to co-exist since "the whole planet was on the move". [587] Violence has not vanished,

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[582] Hamid, *Exit West*, 125.
[583] Carlos Yescas Angeles Trujano, *Indigenous Routes: A Framework for Understanding Indigenous Migration* (Geneva: Hammersmith Press, 2008), 17.
[584] Hamid, *Exit West*, 195.
[585] Hamid, *Exit West*, 196.
[586] Hamid, *Exit West*, 197.
[587] Hamid, *Exit West*, 168.

but "for most people in Britain at least, existence went on in tolerable safety".[588] In *Exit West* Hamid imagines a futuristic image of Britain and America that accepts illegal migrants, even in large numbers, and finds a way to accommodate them in exchange for labour and taxes. Indeed, the magical element (that is ultimately illegal) complicates the status of the newcomers in the narrative. The doors, along these lines, stand as a kind of parallel for what happens in today's world where refugees/asylum seekers can be granted asylum status even if their entry into the country was not by legal means.[589] Nevertheless, Hamid does not describe a utopian world. Life and work in the migrants' camps are hard, with exploitation rife; often they have very little choice or autonomy over the course of their lives. They labour in the "worker camps" and "in exchange for their labour in clearing terrain and building infrastructure and assembling dwellings from prefabricated blocks, migrants were promised forty meters and a pipe".[590] The narrative illustrates an image of Saeed and Nadia during their stay at the "worker camps" as a constant struggle, with them working endless hours to secure a home. This has its toll on their bodies: "their blisters had given way to calluses, and the rain did not much bother them any more".[591] *Exit West*'s emphasis on the situation in cities that accommodate migrants, where "disruptions were enormous, and conflict did not vanish overnight",[592] is far from ideal, and represents a realistic approach to the future of migration. In other words, Hamid is not writing about a world of fantasy and magic, his depiction of migration stems from the rapid increase of migrants and the necessity of accommodating this increase in such a global world. This implies

[588] Hamid, *Exit West*, 169.
[589] According to Amnesty International (accessed on 09/02/2021, https://www.amnesty.org/en/what-we-do/refugees-asylum-seekers-and-migrants/), a refugee and an asylum seeker flee their own country "because they are at risk of serious human rights violations and persecution there". However, the difference between the two terms is that an asylum seeker is someone "who hasn't yet been legally recognized as a refugee and is waiting to receive a decision on their asylum claim".
[590] Hamid, *Exit West*, 167, 168.
[591] Hamid, *Exit West*, 169.
[592] Hamid, *Exit West*, 168.

that such a fictional narrative is more possible than impossible and that it requires time, endurance and most importantly empathy on both sides of the conflict.

Hamid, in his novel, suggests that once people overcome their preconceived notions about themselves and others and transcend fear and nationalism, migration will become the norm. Once this happens terror and its destructive aftermath might turn to be less harmful to the people who are most vulnerable in a global world. *Exit West* goes further in suggesting that "we are all migrants through time" using the personal pronoun "we" to emphasise this notion.[593] The narrative tells the story of an old lady who lives in the United States in the town of Palo Alto, and "who had lived in the same house her entire life".[594] And though the old lady "had never moved… it seemed the world had moved, and she barely recognized the town that existed outside her property".[595] The story suggests that even if people stay at the same place their entire life, resisting change and relocation to preserve their identity and what is familiar will not prevent the world that they know from ultimately transforming. In this respect, Sophi Gilbert contends that what seems as "a remarkable accomplishment" of *Exit West* is that it is "not putting a human face on refugees so much as putting a refugee face on all of humankind".[596]

Betsy L. Fisher writes that "Mohsin Hamid's novel *Exit West* reminds us of refugees' urgent need for doors to safety and the failures of modern asylum systems that prioritize border security over human rights".[597] Towards the end of the novel, the narrative captures what it is like to live in a world with open doors or open borders: "the apocalypse appeared to have arrived and yet it was not apocalyptic, which is to say that while the changes were jarring they were

[593] Hamid, *Exit West*, 209.
[594] Hamid, *Exit West*, 206.
[595] Hamid, *Exit West*, 207.
[596] Sophie Gilbert, "'Exit West'Finds Dystopia in the Refugee Experience,"The Atlantic, 8 March 2017, https://www.theatlantic.com/entertainment/archive/2017/03/exit-west/518802/.
[597] Fisher, "Doors to Safety."

not the end, and life went on, and people found things to do and ways to be and people to be with, and plausible desirable futures began to emerge, unimaginable previously, but not unimaginable now, and the result was something not unlike relief".[598] As people fear the worse, the apocalypse, it is only a manifestation of their fears. It might, in fact, be the opposite, since hope for a better life and faith in humanity are what bring people together. In this vein, Hamid attempts to enforce a positive representation of migration and a counter-narrative to xenophobia and the politics of hate, fear and exclusion. Indeed, the fear of change, as *Exit West* suggests, is part of human nature. However, replacing fear with empathy in a world that is constantly in conversion has the potential to lead people towards co-existence.

[598] Hamid, *Exit West*, 215, 216.

Conclusion

The terrorist attack on the US mainland on 11 September 2001 created a watershed moment in twenty-first century history. As artists and writers attempted to interpret and reflect on this major terrorist attack, the 9/11 novel surfaced as a significant space for reflection.[599] This form of narrative fiction plays an essential role in complicating, reimagining, and representing the 9/11 event and its aftermath. The five novels analysed in this study destabilise dominant perceptions and misconceptions that were generated after 9/11. These literary texts are written by authors of various backgrounds and that each text depicts political violence that unfolds in different parts of the world. Hence, when put together in the same study, the novels explore how the 9/11 novel has become a nexus for representing and problematising images of terrorism, terrorists, and various forms of political violence. By examining the five novels using postcolonial theory as an analytical lens, I have argued that these texts – Updike's *Terrorist,* Aslam's *The Blind Man's Garden*, Faqir's *Willow Trees Don't Weep*, Cleave's *Incendiary* and Hamid's *Exit West* –complicate the stereotypical image of terrorists and terrorism in relation to political violence. However, the image of terrorists as non-state agents in the works of Updike, Aslam and Faqir remains pivotal to a broader understanding of 9/11 fiction in which terrorism is depicted as an exponent of a barbaric violent East and extremist Muslims and Arabs. Alternatively, other novelists – Cleave and Hamid – offer a narrative of resistance by reimagining the state as a primary source of terror and by transcending a binary position when writing about terrorism and its aftermath.

This study explores the depiction of non-state terrorism according to the definition that it is political violence perpetrated by individuals and organizations who operate outside of a legal

[599] The 9/11 novel is characterised by employing the 9/11 event and its aftermath whether implicitly or explicitly within the narrative, which remains a contested identification of the 9/11 novel by literary critics.

system. Significantly, "terrorism today is usually associated with political violence perpetrated by groups without the power of the state",[600] whereas state-terrorism is "the intentional use or threat of violence by state agents or their proxies against individuals or groups who are victimized for the purpose of intimidating or frightening a broader audience".[601] State violence is committed against civilians or unarmed people under the umbrella of the law or with the consent of the state's authorities. Indeed, these definitions are highly controversial and contested because of the power dynamics that interfere in the process of defining and articulating what terrorism is.[602] In the context of 9/11 terrorism, the 'War on Terror' became one of the most substantial effects of 9/11 as a prolonged war waged by the US, UK, and coalition forces against 'terror'. George W. Bush, the president of the United States during that period of time, used the controversial phrase 'War on Terror' a few days after the 9/11 attacks, and subsequently 'terrorism' and 'terror' are altered profoundly to be even more vague and expansive terms that could be employed for various motives.[603] This facilitated military interventions of different kinds that often transcended the boundaries of international law and created a state of disparity in twenty-first century global affairs.

Whether violence is committed by the state or otherwise, the point of focus in this work is the representation of the aftermath of terrorism since the consequences are often horrid in terms of death, injury, and trauma. Hence 'terror', as argued in this research, is the most powerful outcome of terrorism and it is often the fundamental purpose of terrorism. Robert Young explains that "the effect of terror is an affect", which is the influence of terror produced by

[600] Chris E. Stout, ed., *The Psychology of Terrorism: Theoretical Understandings and Perspectives* (Connecticut: Praeger Publishers/ Greenwood Publishing Group, 2002), 4.
[601] Richard Jackson, Eamon Murphy, and Scott Poynting, eds., *Contemporary State Terrorism: Theory and Practice* (New York: Routledge, 2009), 3.
[602] See Hoffman, *Inside Terrorism*; Schmid and Jongman, *Political Terrorism*; and Townshend, *Terrorism*.
[603] "War on Terrorism | Summary & Facts," *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, accessed 11 September 2020, https://www.britannica.com/topic/war-on-terrorism.

terrorism.[604] Within this framework and within the scope of this thesis, terror means the impact of political violence on individuals and nations, and, as the novels expose, the impact could be immense, varied and take many forms.

The primary texts I have worked with complicate the depiction of terror in a post-9/11 era by representing various forms of terror that are linked, whether directly or indirectly, with political violence perpetrated by state-agents and/or non-state agents. Some of the selected texts thrive on western dominant rhetoric in associating terrorists and terror with the Middle East[605] (*Terrorist*, *The Blind Man's Garden*, *Willow Trees Don't Weep*). At the same time, other texts (*Incendiary* and *Exit West*) challenge popular narratives that put the Other – whether terrorists, Muslims, or a conflation of the two – in a stereotypical and simplistic frame. In this vein, one of the primary aims of this study has been to explore how the narratives of the selected novels resist the framing of specific groups or ethnicities in the context of a terrorist attack. The argument put forward is that some texts more than others provide nuanced representations of the dynamics related to this theme.

The scope of interest of the thesis falls within the scholarship of literary analysis of 9/11 fiction, focusing primarily on the novel. While acknowledging that many art forms responded to and represented the 9/11 moment authentically and creatively and continue to do so, the novel, as a central art form, can offer nuanced interpretations and representations of the repercussions of 9/11 from various points of views that reflect and are influenced and inspired by other art forms.[606] 9/11 fiction and the 9/11 novel, as I propose in this study, are not confined within a limited or clear-cut paradigm. On the contrary, what defines 9/11 fiction is its expansion to

[604] Robert Young, "Terror Effects," in *Terror and the Postcolonial*, eds. Elleke Boehmer and Stephen Morton (Malden, MA: Wiley Blackwell, 2015), 308.
[605] For more details about the usage of the term 'The Middle East', refer to the Introduction Chapter, p.35, 36.
[606] For example, Richard Drew's photograph *The Falling Man* (2001) has influenced Don DeLilo's novel *Falling Man* (2007). The photograph has also inspired the production of a documentary film by Henry Singer and Richard Numeroff under the title *9/11: The Falling Man* (2006).

include works that are not directly related to 9/11 but which also relate to the vast ramifications of 9/11. Hence, this research identifies 9/11 fiction with the interrogation of the vast consequences of 9/11 as a major event at the start of the twenty-first century that affected humanity and nations in different parts of the globe. Further, it highlights how the response of literature has changed in the past two decades as it has a growing tendency to problematise representations of power constructions and East and West dynamics.[607]

Critics in this field have examined post-9/11 novels from a shared position that literary fiction could become a space to transcend the tragedy of the 9/11 crisis and challenge binary constructions that are often promoted within western hegemonic narratives. As one of the prominent critics of United States literature exploring this genre,[608] Richard Gray (2011) is interested in novels that have the ability to "transform crisis" and hence emphasises the importance of a narrative that is hybrid and multicultural, such as *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* by Hamid.[609] Similarly to Gray, Kristiaan Versluys in *Out of the Blue* interrogates how literary fiction that deals with the aftermath of 9/11 as a traumatic event tackles themes of trauma, healing and humanity as essential topics in 9/11 fiction. Versluys argues that "in a time of globalized witnessing and shared vicarious experience, an event like 9/11 is a rupture for everybody. As a consequence, there is a globalized need to comprehend, to explain, and to restore".[610] While this perception is applied in Versluys' study of literary fiction written by writers from the United States, exploring texts written by writers of other nationalities has

[607] Arin Keeble in his book *The 9/11 Novel: Trauma, Politics and Identity* (2014) notes that early 9/11 novels, of which he refers to as "the first wave of novels", "utilizes a marriage or relationship narrative, placing 9/11 and post-9/11 as the historical backdrop for a domestic drama," 139.

[608] 9/11 fiction as a new genre is a disputed matter between critics in terms of identification and features, however; this research use the term 'genre' loosely to refer to literary works that are associated with the 9/11 event and its ramifications whether explicitly or implicitly as an attempt to expand what 9/11 fiction could mean. See the introduction chapter for further discussion.

[609] Richard Gray, *After the Fall: American Literature Since 9/11*, 1 edition (West Sussex: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011), 83.

[610] Kristiaan Versluys, *Out of the Blue*, (New York: Colombia University Press, 2009) 4.

provided this research with a wider and more global lens. This is a vital aspect of this thesis in terms of including three novels written by authors of eastern ethnicities who have an Islamic heritage or an exposure to an Islamic Eastern culture. The authors Aslam, Faqir and Hamid have encountered both western and eastern cultures and their novels are reflections and interrogations of these encounters, therefore; they provide new insights into how terror could be conceived and perceived in Middle Eastern countries similarly or in a different manner from the West. Bringing these novels together alongside works written by American and British authors (Updike and Cleave) enriches the debate around the impact of 9/11 and generates further knowledge about the 'shared experience' between East and West. At the same time, the novels reflect on how the West (not only the East) is constructed as a monolithic cultural entity by terrorist groups in which there is a hegemonic idea coming from Middle Eastern terrorist organizations that dehumanise and demonise the western Other.

In the realm of 9/11 literary studies, some scholarship pays more attention to American and European literature,[611] whilst other studies emphasise the importance of expanding the 9/11 scholarship to cover transnational texts and to tackle global themes and concepts.[612] Significantly, several critics in studies of 9/11 fiction engage with the concept of empathy, arguing that such narratives have the potential to resist the ramifications of the 9/11 event. This is mostly discussed in Tim Gauthier's[613] and Daniel O'Gorman's scholarship.[614] Both critics scrutinise the role of empathy in 9/11 fiction and how successful this approach to empathy is in helping to provide a balanced view of the Muslim Other. As O'Gorman observes in his book *Fictions of the War on Terror*, which alludes to Said's *Orientalism*, literature can challenge the

[611] See Dawes, *Ground Zero Fiction*; and Versluys, *Out of the Blue*.
[612] See Boehmer and Morton, *Terror and the Postcolonial*; and Banita, *Plotting Justice*.
[613] Tim Gauthier, *9/11 Fiction, Empathy and Otherness* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2015).
[614] Incidentally, Gauthier's and O'Gorman's books were published in the same year in 2015 (14 years after the 9/11 event), in which they adopt similar approach to the analysis of 9/11 fiction. This might be seen as a development in the study of this genre that moves towards a transcending outlook.

simplistic representation of a post-9/11 world and problematise the binary relationship between East and West.[615] In this context, one of the arguments O'Gorman raises here is that despite the authors' attempt to provide an empathetic view of other people and other cultures, they end up encouraging binarism in their representations. Examining this hypothesis by applying it to novels written by authors of Middle Eastern heritage, I have argued that Aslam in *The Blind Man's Garden* and Faqir in *Willow Trees Don't Weep* provide a critical space to interrogate and imagine the reasons behind people becoming terrorists – which is an empathetic approach to the depiction of terrorism. Nonetheless, images of violence and horror are connected to a Muslim East within the narrative of these novels. Hence, while attempting to provide critical representations of the Self/the Other, these images do not ultimately provide a balanced narrative around post-9/11 terrorism. In other words, terror is inevitably associated with the West's Other in terms of region and population.

Since 9/11 fiction is a developing and contested category in literature, this study has explored novels that have not received much criticism within this field.[616] In doing so, this research identifies a new scope of analysis that also requires further examination to open up the discussion around 9/11 novels. The scholarship on 9/11 fiction interrogates various themes related to the 9/11 moment and beyond, such as trauma, victimhood, survival, healing and humanity. However, representations of terror associated with political violence remain a fertile area of analysis in terms of how the narrative of the novels could offer images of resistance to these various forms of terror, which is the main scope of this research. Each of the five novels

[615] Daniel O'Gorman, *Fictions of the War on Terror: Difference and the Transnational 9/11 Novel* (Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015).

[616] The factors that contribute to the novels being overlooked might have to do with authors' literary recognition – not receiving especial critical or popular attention – and the novels' themes and settings. For instance, *Incendiary* is Cleave's first work of fiction that tackles terrorism within the UK. In Aslam's and Faqir's novels, 9/11 is more associated with the 'War on Terror' and the Middle East, rather than the US, and the authors employ Middle Eastern characters as the main protagonists.

covered in this work revolve around a terrorist event in a post-9/11 world in which the locations are diverse, occurring in the US, England, Afghanistan, Pakistan and other locations across the globe. This aspect contributes to destabilizing general perceptions about post-9/11 terrorism and the 'War on Terror' – specifically since these novels have not been included in the same study in terms of comparison and representations, and have not been discussed extensively by literary critics, with the exception of Updike's *Terrorist*. Collectively these novels, I argue, allow readers and scholars in the field to consider new perceptions about a post-9/11 understanding of terror and terrorism.

The five novels illustrate how representations of terror could take a variety of manifestations depending on how terrorism and political violence is identified and imagined in the texts. Written in the framework of post-9/11 terrorism in which all of the primary texts (re)imagine a terrorist event that takes place in the twenty-first century, each novel responds to certain forms of terror. Terror is sometimes directly bound up with a mainstream portrayal of terrorism after the 9/11 attacks that positioned the terrorist as an Arab or a Muslim, and terrorism is associated with the Middle East and also with specific groups (such as 'ISIS' or 'Al Qaeda'). In Updike's *Terrorist*, the narrative responds to the politics of fear and terror that dominated US and western rhetoric in the direct aftermath of 9/11 in the United States. The notion of threat and danger in the novel is affixed to an unknown enemy who plots attacks against US citizens. The perpetrators of terror are presented as the West's Other – Arab Muslims who come from the Middle East to recruit young boys into terrorism. Such a depiction of terror does not change or evolve, but rather remains fixed, defining non-state terrorists who operate on US soil throughout the novel.

From a postcolonial angle, drawing on Said's theoretical work[617] (*Orientalism* and *Culture and Imperialism*),[618] I have argued that what is highly significant about this body of fiction is how the trace of imperial culture "lingers where it has always been".[619] In this vein, despite Updike's endeavour to problematise images of post-9/11 terrorism and scrutinise the circumstances that drive young boys into adopting extreme violent ideologies, *Terrorist* does not fully escape stereotypical representations of 'the terrorist' in which terror is the product of Arab Muslim fanatics who come to the West to terrorise the United States and its citizens. The real terrorists who appear in the novel are represented as violent, evil and almost voiceless. What is not revealed about them in Updike's novel is more significant than what is mentioned. In other words, the representations of their personae are confined within stereotypical perceptions of a dangerous enemy whom we (the West) do not know much about, except as an Other who occupies an antithetical position in relation to western culture. The source of terror and danger that unfolds in the novel is related to the heritage of the main character as the son of an Arab Muslim migrant, and this heritage ultimately connects him to terrorists who, expectedly, are migrants from the Middle East. This portrayal suggests that specific forms of knowledge in relation to Arabs and Muslims are deeply ingrained in western imaginations and narratives.

The association between Muslim men's masculinity, violence and sexuality are reflected within the 9/11 narratives via an Orientalist discourse about Muslims' manhood and their relationship with women. For instance, Maryam Khalid notes that within 'War on Terror' discourse, "the image of the oppressed (veiled) Muslim woman came to represent the threat posed by the irrational, backward, violent, and dangerous masculinity of the enemy".[620] Hence, this image of women's victimhood is presented in connection with Muslim men's violence, and it

[617] See Introduction Chapter, 29, 30.
[618] Edward W. Said, *Orientalism*, (London: Penguin Group, [1978] 2003).
[619] Edward W. Said, *Culture and Imperialism*, (London: Vintage, 1994), 8.
[620] Maryam Khalid, *Gender, Orientalism, and the "War on Terror:" Representation, Discourse, and Intervention in Global Politics* (Oxon: Routledge, 2017), 105.

intersects with the notion that these women need to be saved by 'Us', the West, and they also need to be liberated from specific gender roles as an object of desire and seduction. In *Terrorist*, the depiction of Ahmad as a boy turning to manhood evokes a perception of Muslim masculinity as a threat and demonstrates the role it plays in the process of him becoming a terrorist. The characterization of the protagonist becoming a man and a potential terrorist is highly problematic. In particular, it evokes an Orientalist construction of Muslim manhood as closely associated with violence. During his adolescence, Ahmad is taught extreme and polarising religious ideologies that threaten to turn him towards terrorism. The moment he graduates from school, goes to work, and becomes more mature is the stage he is introduced to other Muslim men who are planning a terrorist attack. On the one hand, his agreement to conduct the terrorist mission gives him a sense of maturity and belonging to a group of men in which he can apparently be an equal. On the other hand, it alludes to the role of women in this construction. Before Ahmad's suicidal mission, a prostitute is sent to him as a sexual reward – this representation is highly critical because it induces the image of women becoming sexual rewards for terrorists before they die (as a sign of manhood) and also in the *afterlife*.[621] In a similar representation that appears in Faqir's novel, the protagonist who is part of a terrorist organization as a physician treating the sick and injured is rewarded with a beautiful widow of a fighter to become his wife. She is characterised as one of the main reasons that drives him to stay with Al Qaeda and become a terrorist. These images establish a sexist notion of the relationship between men and women in the context of terrorism in which Muslim masculinity is associated with violence, whereas Muslim femininity is depicted as a factor that encourages Muslim men to commit violence.

[621] One of the controversial arguments about Muslim men becoming 'martyrs' is the view that "male martyrs will enjoy the pleasure of seventy-two virgins on paradise," Qazi, The Mujahidaat, 39. For more details about this discussion, consult Farhana Qazi, "The Mujahidaat: Tracing the Early Female Warriors of Islam," in *Women, Gender and Terrorism*, eds. Laura Sjoberg, Caron E. Gentry (Georgia: University of Georgia Press, 2012), 29-56.

While terror in Updike's novel is depicted in a specific context, in Aslam's *The Blind Man's Garden* and Faqir's *Willow Trees Don't Weep*, the terror that occurs in Afghanistan, Pakistan and elsewhere keeps evolving and changing in relation to terrorism and the 9/11 attacks. Hence, it has many forms, such as fear, violence, torture, and intimidation. At the same time, terror is not an exclusive product of Islamist extremists: it is interwoven with warlords, the authoritarian state and western troops. In their fiction, Aslam and Faqir offer complex images of political violence that are linked mainly with the East as the source of terror, trauma and victimhood. Both authors interrogate how physical and emotional pain could transform someone into becoming a terrorist, and hence their narratives become a space to examine the psychology of terrorists and how terror is an inevitable cycle. The significance of these two novels is that they shift the focus of the 9/11 event and its aftermath from the West to the East, where violence is problematised in terms of colonialism, corruption, and the 'War on Terror'. When 9/11 ceases to be merely a domestic tragedy the ramifications become universal. Nonetheless, images of barbarism, cruelty and inhumanity are associated with the East within *The Blind Man's Garden* and *Willow Trees don't Weep,* in the sense that while Aslam and Faqir provide nuanced depictions of political violence between the East and the West, they do not fully escape colonial representations of the Orient. From this point of view, the argument that I put forward that it is vital to depict Arabs and Muslims within the framework of political violence to offer a nuanced critique of terror, while countering Islamophobic representations. Stereotyping the West's Other in narrative fiction, of which the novel is an essential form, contributes in propagating certain values and influencing dominant opinions about the Orient and its association with a specific set of images, frames and biased judgments.

Looking at the mainstream western rhetoric that emerged in the aftermath of 9/11, narratives of polarity and framing of Muslims as the Other as well as the source of terror gained great momentum. Elleke Boehmer and Stephen Morton, who interrogate the relationship between

terror that belongs to the colonial era and which has surfaced in contemporary times, argue that post-9/11 discourse is embedded in both an imperial past and neo-imperial present.[622] The 9/11 novel reflects this discourse, and hence has become a space to reproduce or deconstruct the image of the Muslim Other as fundamentally violent and a threat to the West. Postcolonial critics argue that Orientalists' ideologies and stereotypes are revived, brought to the forefront and become more intensified in an era that is marked by the war against terrorism. Stephen Morton, in his article "Terrorism, Orientalism and Imperialism", explains that "the problem with this orientalist axiom of terrorism is that it effaces the imperialist interests that are served by the discourse of terrorism".[623] Indeed, these forms of terror are attached with past and present colonialism where, for the colonised, "terror was not merely an aesthetic experience or feeling, but a brutal material and corporeal experience of sovereign power in the raw".[624] In other words, if western narratives cannot interrogate or depict historical and political reasons behind terrorism, then western politics and its imperial past and contemporary foreign military intervention are justified, normalised and detached from their effect.

As Said's points out in his book *Orientalism*, one of the main perceptions generated by the encounter between the Orient and the Occident during the colonial era and after decolonization is the 'otherness' of the East.[625] The prolonged encounter between East and West produced fragmented knowledge in the shape of assumptions and ideologies that are generally perceived as 'truths' about the Orient, with the West possessing the power to shape and influence these 'truths'. Since the twentieth century, Said writes, the image of the Arab in mainstream media prompted "the menace of *Jihad*" which led to "a fear that Muslims (or Arabs) will take over the

[622] Elleke Boehmer and Stephen Morton, eds., *Terror and the Postcolonial: A Concise Companion*, Concise Companions to Literature and Culture (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2015), 8.
[623] Stephen Morton, "Terrorism, Orientalism and Imperialism," *Wasafiri* 22, no. 2 (1 July 2007): 37, https://doi.org/10.1080/02690050701336774.
[624] Morton, "Terrorism, Orientalism and Imperialism," 38.
[625] Said, *Orientalism*.

world".[626] The moment of 9/11 intensified and cemented this image of the Other. In this construct, dominant western narratives reinforce representations of an enemy who is essentially brutal, inhuman and a threat to western civilization. As this thesis has argued, the implications of these images as presented in the novels are powerful and complex, as each one resists, counters or assimilates these images within their narratives. For instance, in *Exit West*, the main characters Saeed and Nadia, while seeking refuge in London, encounter "a nativist mob" that beats and injures them and other people who are in the street foraging.[627] In this case, the Middle Eastern Other who comes to London as a refugee is represented as vulnerable, especially if compared to anti-migrant groups and the state's counter-terrorism agents. At the same time, these migrants resist terror with music, singing and bonding with each other. Their vulnerability and the means they use to respond to violence are central in emphasizing their humanity.

In contrast, when literary fictional texts fail to portray Muslims in the context of political violence as rational and empathetic people, they may produce/reproduce the same stereotypes that contribute to Islamophobic sentiments. In *The Blind Man's Garden*, this failure to represent religious Muslims as fully human is reflected in the portrayal of 'religious terrorists' as an irrational, violent breed that must be feared and confined. Where they are not terrorists, or terrorist-sympathisers, they are depicted as irrational characters with violent tendencies. In contrast, characters that are identified as secular are open-minded, ethical and empathetic. In this vein, Aslam's novel belongs to a narrative that is written by the 'insider' and yet still contributes to reproducing stereotypical images of the Orient and normalizing Islamophobic sentiments towards the Other.

Alternatively, *Willow Trees Don't Weep* offers critical depictions of Muslims whose religious identities in relation to terror are destabilised. As argued in this study, the narrative in Faqir's

[626] Said, *Orientalism*, 287.
[627] Mohsin Hamid, *Exit West* (Milton Keynes: Penguin Books, 2018), 131.

novel does not strip the 'religious terrorist' of his humanity nor his religion once 'the terrorist' realises the ramifications of his actions and the terror he has caused to fellow humans. This depiction is constructed in a postcolonial light that subverts notions about religious fanatics, who come to terrorise the West, as essentially violent. On the contrary, the protagonist's faith towards the end of the narrative becomes a source of inner-peace and tolerance. Hence, these images depicted by the 'insider' are significant in resisting and destabilizing stereotypical representations of terror and religious Muslims.

Faqir's novel establishes a connection between terror that takes place in postcolonial countries and its ramifications in past/current-imperial states in the West. This connection is also highlighted by the protagonist of Cleave's *Incendiary,* who writes to Osama Bin Laden that "it takes 2 to tango".[628] However, what seems controversial about the depiction of violence in the narrative of *Willow Trees Don't Weep* is how terror unfolds in a Muslim East, where images of corruption, barbarity and extreme violence are portrayed in a provocative manner. Furthermore, by alluding to global terrorism, the narrative suggests that these forms of terror are not confined within a specific space. Migration in Faqir's novel can bring and breed terrorists, thus invoking the rhetoric of threat and danger with respect to migrants coming from a Muslim East to invade western borders. This representation of how major terrorist attacks are planned and executed in the West is similar to the depiction of terrorism in *Terrorist* which portrays the inherent danger of the Other, especially when it is posed in connection with hegemonic rhetoric concerning terrorism. In contrast, *Exit West* offers a counternarrative to the tendency, in popular narratives, to link terror and terrorism with migrants coming to the West. Hamid critically portrays how state-political violence is used against nonviolent refugees to counter migration and to save the national identity at the expense of people who are displaced and victimised. These portrayals, as argued, show that savagery and hostility are not associated with a specific culture or religion,

[628] Chris Cleave, *Incendiary* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2011), 4

but are rather linked with power, dominance and irrational fear. Hence, declaring a state of emergency, as depicted in both Hamid's and Cleave's novels, gives permission to the state to practise violence legally. Slavoj Žižek explains the logic behind the authorities imposing a state of emergency: "the State should be allowed to assert its sovereignty without 'excessive' legal constraints".[629] The justification, as the novels portray, is that the government seeks to protect the people from victimization, and the result is the perpetration of extreme measures by state agents against civilians, migrants or potential suspects of terrorism – and this ultimately prompts more violence.

State violence against the Other cannot be separated from the tendency to associate the ex-colony with barbarism since, according to Said's *Orientalism*, it is an essential part of orientalist discourse.[630] With reference to Said's argument, this preoccupation is manifested in the context of global terrorism which creates problematic narratives that constrain a genuine understanding of other people and other cultures. This inclination to frame the Other as the agent of terror and the antithesis of civility is not only depicted in the context of the threat of migrants as potential terrorists, but also within the context of violence in postcolonial countries. The point raised while analysing Aslam's and Faqir's novels is expressed through Achille Mbembe's words in relation to representations of terror in colonial and postcolonial countries, and their people and culture:

> …colonies are similar to the frontiers. They are inhabited by 'savages.' The colonies are not organized in a state form and have not created a human world. Their armies do not form a distinct entity, and their wars are not wars between regular armies. They do not imply the mobilization of sovereign subjects (citizens) who respect each other as enemies.[631]

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[629] Slavoj Žižek, *Welcome to the Desert of the Real* (London; New York: Verso Books, 2002), 107.

[630] Said, *Orientalism*.

[631] Achille Mbembé, "Necropolitics," trans. Libby Meintjes, *Public Culture* 15, no. 1 (25 March 2003): 24. muse.jhu.edu/article/39984.

This view was brought to the forefront after 9/11 and it is associated with the concept of western exceptionalism, innocence and 'responsibility' towards developing countries. In this construct, Dabashi explains: "something in American imperialism needs to rescue a world it sees as caught in native barbarity, to make it safe for moral humanity and the immortal idea of 'America'".[632] The notion that the postcolonial state is corrupt and is ruling by orthodox religious law provokes the same justifications of western imperialism that are associated with bringing democracy and civilization to other parts of the world. Similarly, the depiction of people in the postcolonial world in a manner that 'they' are not all terrorists and barbaric because 'they' are not all religious highlights the political discourse that revolves around the perception that 'we'/the West aspire to liberate them. Further, Aslam's and Faqir's novels portray extreme and 'raw' images of violence that unfold on Pakistani and Afghan soil. Comparatively, Žižek observes a certain aspect in images that appear on mainstream media about postcolonial countries: "these shots are always accompanied by an advance warning that 'some of the images you will see are extremely graphic and may upset children' – a warning which [was] never heard on the reports on the WTC collapse".[633] In other words, the humanity of the West is reserved and protected even at times of terror since exposing and displaying scenes of dismembered bodies and injury violate the humanity of the victims and their basic human rights of privacy. In this context, Žižek points to an essential difference between the two spaces that are illustrated in Aslam's and Faqir's novels in which the East is filled with terror, torture and horrific scenes of injury and death. What is even more problematic about these images is that they are either perpetrated by the Oriental or against the Oriental and make the allusion that terror and barbarism are rooted in eastern culture and nature, and hence in the Oriental's image. In comparison, the West is

[632] Hamid Dabashi, *Brown Skin, White Masks* (London: Pluto Press, 2007), 9.
[633] Slavoj Žižek, *Welcome to the Desert of the Real* (London; New York: Verso Books, 2002), 13.

imagined as more civil and fully human by virtue of the fact that graphic images of political violence are linked with the Other, even if it is 'us' (the West) who are victimised and injured.

Forming a counternarrative in their novels, Cleave and Hamid challenge dominant depictions of terrorism and terrorists and destabilise notions of the state's authority and counter-terrorism measures. Though the two novels (Cleave's *Incendiary* and Hamid's *Exit West*) depict terrorist attacks perpetrated by religious extremists, terror is more connected with the state as it safeguards its power through violence, intimidation, and control. *Incendiary* deals with the concept of political violence as essentially integrated within the western state, presenting a society where civilians become victimised by the government and the police. While Cleave represents the democracy of the western state as an illusion, he evokes notions of empathy and humanity between people who are traumatised by political violence. In Hamid's novel, terror and its ramifications become a global phenomenon where political violence in postcolonial countries has a direct impact on western countries through mass-migration. In *Exit West*, the author imagines the future of a world that is more connected than ever by terror, trauma, shared human experiences and, most significantly, humanity and solidarity. The narrative technique that Hamid adopts in his novel contributes to forming an empathetic and universal portrayal of migration.

In order to examine the concept of empathy and universality, this study engages with Gauthier's work *9/11 Fiction, Empathy and Otherness*, which interrogates the significance of practising or withholding empathy in 9/11 fiction in a political climate that encourages a polarised view of the world. With reference to Judith Butler's theoretical work *Precarious Life*,[634] which scrutinises the concept of vulnerability and loss, Gauthier argues that empathy has the potential to unite people and hence pushes the analysis of 9/11 fiction towards notions of "sameness and

[634] Judith Butler, *Precarious Life: The Powers of Mourning and Violence* (London: Verso, 2004).

commonality".[635] In my analysis of the five novels, I use Gauthier's argument to make the case that the human connection between the characters in the examined novels has the potential to resist the ramifications of terror. As an example, the protagonist in the epistolary novel *Incendiary* – who is victimised by both the state and the terrorists – possesses the strength to resist fear and hatred because of the act of writing letters as a mean of communication with Osama Bin Laden. The epistolary form lends an authentic voice to the traumatised mother that reflects intimate and raw emotions throughout the novel. The narrator reveals several forms of terror she experiences in the aftermath of the terrorist attack. Significantly, the source of these forms of terror is more associated with the state than the terrorist, thereby subverting dominant perceptions about terrorists and terrorism, and problematising the concept of terror in a post-9/11 society. The letters are an attempt to deal with trauma and to understand the dynamics around global terrorism. This results in the protagonist's ability to forgive and empathise with the terrorist as a symbol of the ultimate Other, in which the 'self' and the 'other' are destabilised.

In *Exit West*, the impact of human bonding between refugees and people from different cultures is powerful. Those who are affected by political violence in their home countries are able to bear the aftermath of being refugees because of the formation of human ties between each other as refugees and between citizens of the host countries. Hamid's novel takes this a step further by constructing an empathetic approach to the anti-migrants' position towards refugees. The narrative explores reasons behind people's xenophobia, in a sense making the case that no one is essentially bad or evil. Rather, the root causes are bound up with people's failure to empathise with the other because of fear and resistance to change. Robert Young argues that one of the most powerful and "consistent" effects of terrorism is the fear of migrants coming to the West, since they embody "the foreign" and hence their existence within western borders becomes a

[635] Tim Gauthier, *9/11 Fiction, Empathy, and Otherness* (London: Lexington Books, 2015), 1.

threat.[636] This shows how dominant perceptions of terrorism turn the western population into the "main victims of terror".[637] In comparison, migrants who used to live in postcolonial countries encounter political violence as a first-hand experience – it is more of a reality than a threat – which highlights the core difference between the West and postcolonial countries in terms of how contemporary terrorism is perceived. The narrative of *Exit West* illustrates this core difference between these two perceptions as the main characters escape death and persecution in their home-countries and, once they enter one of the "special" doors and reach Europe, they are instantly transformed into a threat.[638] However, as the narrative follows Saeed and Nadia in their journey, various acts of empathy unfold. Once the people and the state realise that migrants are not a threat and that migration is inevitable in a global world that is rapidly changing, the effects of terrorism are disrupted.

The construction of characters and narrative techniques used in 9/11 novels are essential in depicting the effects and resistance of terror and answering the question of who the terrorists are and why they hate 'us'.[639] The narrative in *Willow Trees Don't Weep* is constructed through two points of views, which illustrates the power dynamics of storytelling and how one story could include several stories according to the narrator. The narrator of Faqir's novel is the terrorist's daughter who describes her ordeals trying to find her father. The abandoned daughter's perspective is not the only one, as Faqir gives the terrorist a voice in the form of diary intervals. His point of view provides another intimate and emotional story that fills the gap and the missing pieces in his daughter's narrative, and it also gives an insider look at personal details and accounts of how terror manifests in a place like Afghanistan. Similar to

[636] Young, "Terror Effects," 322,323.
[637] Young, "Terror Effects," 323.
[638] Mohsin Hamid, *Exit West* (London: Penguin, 2018), 70.
[639] The form of storytelling and characterisation contribute to a contemplation of the 9/11 experience and an examination of the cause and effect relationships of actions as they are perpetrated and experienced by people in different parts of the world. By contrast, for example, a photograph is a two-dimensional visual representation. It might imply a story, but it remains a depiction of a frozen moment.

Cleave's epistolary novel, the first-person narrative technique adds a level of sincerity to Faqir's novel and contributes to the complexity of the events and points of view, hence even if the plot is not entirely coherent/strong, the point of view used in the novel is an element of strength. The construction of 9/11 novels that employ a first-person point of view or an autobiographical mode of writing evokes notions of 'authenticity' and 'truth-telling' since it bridges the gap between the reader and the writer. More significantly, it brings to the surface questions around truth, who has the right to claim it and how justice is related to post-9/11 narratives. When suspects of terrorism were transferred to other locations outside the US illegally to extract intelligence using unlawful techniques (referred to as 'extraordinary rendition'), it stirred debates about the justification and normalization of torture or 'enhanced interrogation' against alleged 'enemies of the state'.[640] To some extent, it shattered the illusion of the western state's commitment to ideals of truth and justice.[641] In this sense, the effectiveness of the novel in using narrative techniques that suggest truthfulness is a powerful form to use, especially when depicting torture scenes and its traumatic effects.

In Aslam's *The Blind Man's Garden*, the omnipotent narrator provides in-depth details about the characters' thoughts and feelings. Those details are often extended and intensified in the context of writing about terror in which the narrator of the novel reveals the complexity and rawness of how violence affects the characters differently. One of the main characters of the novel, Mikal, resists the ramifications of terror despite the pain and trauma. Being an innocent man who is treated as a terrorist suspect, his experiences of being tortured several times during his captivity at a war lord's prison and also at a US detention facility are horrifying. Despite his severe physical, emotional and psychological victimization, Mikal refuses to respond with

[640] For discussion around the practise of 'extraordinary rendition' and the international law, see Leila Nadya Sadat, "Ghost Prisoners and Black Sites: Extraordinary Rendition Under International Law," *Case W. Res. J. Int'l L.* 37 (2005): 309.

[641] For historical analysis on the topic of torture and the state, see McCoy, Alfred W. McCoy, *Torture and Impunity: The US doctrine of coercive interrogation*. (Wisconsin: University of Wisconsin Pres, 2012).

violence, whereas other characters become terrorists seeking vengeance because of the terror they experience as victims of political violence. A similar encounter is depicted in Faqir's novel: the terrorist, using his own voice, gives horrific details of his friend's torture and death. The experience is extremely powerful and alters his core nature, turning him from a doctor saving lives to a terrorist planning and executing destructive acts of violence. Becoming a terrorist in these two novels is fundamentally associated with the impact of terror in which violence breeds violence. The psychological aspect is important here as, in a sense, terrorists are primarily the product of terror and its ramifications. There is also a fatalistic sense within the narrative that a chain of events is set in motion, from cause and effect, which might be hard to stop. The terrorist in *Willow Trees Don't Weep* is a law-abiding father, but when his friend's torture occurs, a sequence of incidents follow each other like falling dominos. Following the torture event, the father and his friend become part of a terrorist organization in Afghanistan, and following his friend's horrible torture and death, he conducts a major terrorist attack in London. Once the terrorist is confronted with the severe results of his actions that start with victimizing his own daughter and end with the victimization of innocent people in London, violence is disrupted, and the terrorist repents.[642]

It can be argued that the first-person point of view provides a flawed-human perspective, in contrast to the omniscient/third-person narrator who is often regarded as authoritative, yet inauthentic. The third-person narrator of Aslam's *The Blind Man's Garden* gives depictions of detainees' experiences of torture or 'enhanced interrogation' in Afghani warlords' prisons and also in US detention camps during the 'War on Terror'. These two locations within Afghanistan and the people who run them are represented as essentially different, though both use 'illegal

[642] For research on the impact of prisoners' victimization and adopting terrorism, see Mark S. Hamm, *The Spectacular Few: Prisoner Radicalization and the Evolving Terrorist Threat* (New York: New York University Press, 2013).

measures' to force detainees to cooperate. The narrator describes horrific scenes of torture by Afghani guards, for example children's rape, starvation, and body mutilation. In comparison, torture scenes by American interrogators are portrayed as less dreadful, with sleep deprivation and stress-positions being the principal modus operandi. Hence, though Aslam puts the horrific conditions and atrocities committed against prisoners under the spotlight, these representations are not even-handed and therefore the novel risks constructing an authoritarian narrator.

Examining the narration style of Aslam's and Hamid's novels, both writers use 'free indirect discourse'. However, Aslam's narrator tends to project an authoritarian narratological point of view. For instance, the narrative describes a mission conducted by a warlord (who commits all sorts of atrocities against his prisoners) and his son, forcing their prisoner Mikal to accompany them. Mikal is informed that the mission's purpose is to steal "the Prophet Muhammad's 1,400-year-old cloak".[643] As they embark on their journey, "the father gets behind the steering wheel, and he and his son utter in unison the Arabic phrase all good Muslims are meant to use before setting out on travel: 'I hope Allah has written a safe journey for us'".[644] In this instant, the viewpoint of the narration overlaps between the narrator and the characters of the novels, and the term "good Muslims" becomes the most problematic phrase in the scene. In comparison, during an official operation to "clear the migrant ghetto" in London,[645] the narrator of *Exit West* tells the story of the violence that erupts that day: "whatever it was that had happened, something seemed to have happened, for there was a pause".[646] This narrative style offers room for interpretation and speculation which creates a sense of trust between the reader and the narrator. Further, the narrator in Hamid's novel steers away from specific terms – words like 'terrorism', 'terrorists' and 'Muslims' – that have the potential to frame people and essentialise

[643] Nadeem Aslam, *The Blind Man's Garden* (London: Faber & Faber, 2013), 6.
[644] Aslam, *The Blind Man's Garden,* 160.
[645] Aslam, *The Blind Man's Garden*, 159.
[646] Aslam, *The Blind Man's Garden*, 161.

them. This approach in *Exit West* subverts misconceptions associated with these terms and offers a counternarrative to mainstream depictions of political violence and terror. In contrast, Updike's narrator uses Arabic transliterations that have problematic and controversial interpretations in the context of 9/11 and terrorism (such as *jihad*, *shahid* and *kafir*).

While Hamid's novel can be interpreted as merely a novel about migration, the concept of 'co-existence' and 'universality' is at the core of *Exit West*. With reference to Butler's theoretical work on the precariousness of human life,[647] *Exit West* depicts people's physical and emotional vulnerability to political violence whether they live in the Middle East or the West. Having said that, the narrator maintains a third-person point of view that allows the writer to transform the characters from one location to another through the magical portals, while maintaining a close depiction of their feelings and thoughts on their journey of migration. The 'free indirect discourse' allows the flow of the narrative in stream of consciousness, even with the inclusion of various vignettes throughout the novel. Significantly, in a few instances the third-person point of view changes to the first-person – this is a pivotal approach in terms of understanding the context of using 'we' and 'our' instead of 'they' and 'their'. As the novel depicts the impact of migration on the globe, and upon those who never left their home country, the narrator comments: "We are migrants through time".[648] It can be argued that Hamid is expressing a universal point of view in which this narrative technique contributes to emphasising the commonality between people. It also establishes a resistance within the narrative to a polarising view of the Other and bridges the distance between migrants and those who receive them. This approach to 'universality' evokes questions related to 'strategic essentialism'.[649] On one hand,

[647] Butler, *Precarious Life.*
[648] Mohsin Hamid, *Exit West* (London: Penguin, 2018), 209.
[649] The term 'strategic essentialism' is critically debated in postcolonial studies, in which it was first used by Gayatri Spivak. For more analysis of the term in relation to Spivak's argument, see Raksha Pande, "Strategic Essentialism," In *International Encyclopedia of Geography: People, the Earth, Environment and Technology*, eds. Liu, W., and R. Marston (New Jersey: John Wiley & Sons, 2017).

Hamid attempts to strategically essentialise the experience of migration as a universal experience to overcome cultural differences and encourage co-existence. On the other hand, this collective characterisation risks acknowledging the authenticity of the migration experience in relation to migrants and refugees. Nevertheless, it can be argued that this approach to 'universality' in *Exit West* resists essentialising migrants as merely being identified as migrants. Hence, Hamid eliminates the journey of migration and its hardships that often receive much attention within mainstream narratives (media, film and literature), by using the black portals to instantly transform the characters of the novel.

Collectively, the five novels grouped in this study represent the 9/11 novel's perspectives on the meaning of terror in the twenty-first century and its continual shaping by globalization. This study points to the potential expansion of 9/11 fiction and to literature which operates beyond a US-European context. Indeed, this is not to undermine the terror and trauma that have affected people living in the US and the direct victims of the 9/11 attacks, but rather to show how the impact of terror and the resistance to it can highlight the commonality – rather than the difference – between people living in different parts of the world. In this respect, the proposition that is made is to explore and include novels that speak more about the universality of the aftermath of 9/11, and how literary fiction can become a space of eliminating differences between people who belong to various regions and cultures. Further, opening up the discussion by analysing fictional texts that continue to destabilise popular perceptions about terror and terrorism will shed light on how writers of fiction can resist normalising state-political violence and disrupt hegemonic representations of the terrorist. Since this work is limited to novels that are originally written in the English language, it will be valuable to future studies to explore fictional texts that are written in languages other than English, and examine how these texts portray terror, its ramifications and ways of resistance in a post-9/11 context.

9/11 ignited critical debates related to political violence, ideas around democracy, justice, fundamental Islam, and fundamental capitalism. At the same time, 9/11 proved to be a challenge for writers of literary fiction, as they attempted to tackle these debates from a transnational perception and to narrativise healing, trauma and terror. Hence, novels are not only a reflection of history, politics, culture, and society but also a powerful domain of criticism. In this manner, Said writes in the preface of *Orientalism* 25 years after its first publication, that "there is a difference between knowledge of other peoples and other times that is the result of understanding, compassion, careful study and analysis for their own sakes, and on the other hand knowledge – if that is what it is – that is part of an overall campaign of self-affirmation, belligerency and outright war".[650] In this vein, the novels analysed in this thesis illustrate the role of literature in resisting the politics of fear and narratives of polarization. Having said that, the uniqueness of 9/11 is not about this specific moment in history within the western culture, nor it is about the notion of American exceptionalism, but rather it is the manifestation of how political violence that takes place in a specific part of the world can have a major impact on other countries and nations. The consequences of 9/11 have indeed influenced power constructions, warfare, and East and West dynamics. And the novel has the potential to tell the story of how people were/are affected by this, how they can resist terror and xenophobia in a post-9/11 era, and, most importantly, how they can transcend terror and misconceptions through empathy and communication.

[650] Said, *Orientalism*, xiv.

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