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Global Terror

In 2015 the Global Terrorism Index reported that the previous year saw an 80% rise in terrorist attacks worldwide.[1] The rise occurred despite the fragmentation of al-Qaida's leadership and the continuation of worldwide counter-terrorism strategies, not least that led by the United States in its 'war on terror' and subsequent drone campaigns. According to the report, organisations such as Islamic State, al-Qaida, Boko Haram and the Taliban were responsible for the majority of the deaths caused by the attacks. Despite some successes in countering extremism, the rapid rise in violence has been driven in part by an ability amongst militant groups to utilise the mechanisms of globalisation to their advantage. A 2015 US State Department report, for instance, highlighted that 'ISIL showed a particular capability in the use of media and online products to address a wide spectrum of potential audiences … . [Its] use of social and new media also facilitated its efforts to attract new recruits to the battlefields in Syria and Iraq, as ISIL facilitators answered in real time would-be members' questions about how to travel to join the group'.[2] Yonah Alexander and Dean Alexander corroborate this in *Islamic State: Combating the Enemy Without Borders*, noting that 'IS uses social media exceptionally well', and that in 2014 the organisation even 'released its own video game, a modification of the Grand Theft Auto series'.[3]

These reports reflect what Arjun Appadurai has described as 'the major empirical fact of macroviolence in the past two decades'.[4] As he puts it in *Fear of Small Numbers* (2006): 'the maps of states and the maps of warfare no longer fit an older, realist geography. And when we add to this the global circulation of arms, drugs, mercenaries, mafias, and other paraphernalia of violence, it is difficult to keep local instances local in their significance' (40). Appadurai's point is that terror in the twenty-first century is not only global in scale, but also *globalised*. In Lawrence Freedman's terms, 'terrorism [has] appeared as part of the dark underside of globalization. … The result of globalization was the reduced power of states, the movement of capital and people around the world as governments opened up their borders'.[5] He adds that on September 11 2001, 'our advanced technologies and our vulnerabilities were combined to create mass destruction' (224). Moreover, as Jacques Derrida has influentially argued, global terror mobilises the apparatus of globalization against itself like an autoimmune disorder: namely, 'that strange behaviour where a living being, in quasi-suicidal fashion, "itself" works to destroy its own protection, to immunize itself *against* its own immunity'.[6]

If global terror is closely entwined with the networks of globalization itself, global literary texts such as those analyzed in this chapter help to make such networks – and the positioning of terror within them – visible. However, they do this while simultaneously offering a collective resistance to the reductive 'us vs. them' identity binaries that, as political scientist Richard Jackson puts it, have 'been discursively constructed through the official language of counter-terrorism'.[7] An increasing number of literary texts fall into this category, and this chapter by no

means aims to offer an exhaustive list, but those that is discusses are exemplary of the ambitions of an increasing body of similarly globally-oriented texts by authors from around the world.

The chapter will offer a survey of this emerging contemporary genre, analyzing poetry by Suheir Hammad, Imtiaz Dharker and Warsan Shire, theatre by George Brant, Wajahat Ali and Ayad Akhtar, and novels by Teju Cole, J.M. Coetzee and Zia Haider Rahman, before finishing with a case study of Karan Mahajan's critically acclaimed recent novel, *The Association of Small Bombs* (2016). It will identify three key trends that underpin these writers' collective responses to global terror: first, a drive towards poetic *deterritorialization* in poetry that responds to terror; second, a performance of this deterritorialization through a focus on the microcosm of the *domestic* in contemporary theatre; and third, an attempt in recent novels to foreground the role of *narrative* in discourse surrounding terrorism. The texts are radically diverse, but united in a shared and intersecting attempt to prompt their readers into a consideration of the position they occupy within a complex and sometimes hard to discern network of global power, discourse and violence. Before beginning the survey, however, it is necessary to first briefly outline how the texts themselves fit into the broader context of contemporary global literature.

Global Literature

The texts in this chapter can be described as 'global' insofar as they challenge terror

at the same time as they resist reactionary or parochial responses to it, all the while maintaining a measured awareness of their own ambivalent relationship with globalization. On the one hand, many of the works have been both critical and commercial successes in the West, in line with what Sarah Brouilette has identified as an increasing marketability of global writing, which 'can be explained in part as an aspect of the twinned processes of niche fragmentation and market expansion in the global publishing industry'.[8] On the other, they also attempt to challenge the demands of this market expansion, using the market as a platform to disseminate subversive ideas while maintaining a suspicion towards the structures of power upon which this platform is built.

In this basic respect, the texts, like the global terrorism to which they respond, occupy a vacillating position in relation to globalization: they are simultaneously of it and against it. However, unlike both terrorism and public counter-terrorist discourse (most recently evident in President Donald Trump's attempted 'Muslim ban' in the United States), they do not retreat into reactionary 'us vs. them' binaries.[9] Instead, they reach outwards, emphasizing the connections and interrelations between all participants – whether aggressor or victim – in the so-called 'war on terror'. As a result, they work to invoke in their reader something akin to what what Bruce Robbins describes as a progressive 'feeling' of globality, questioning the limits of identity categories such as ethnicity, religion and nationhood, but without completely transcending them.[10] His premise is that

> forms of global feeling are continuous with forms of national feeling. This

> implies that, though the potential for a conflict of loyalties is always present, cosmopolitanism or internationalism does not take its primary meaning or desirability from an absolute and intrinsic opposition to nationalism. Rather, it is an extension outward of the same sorts of potent and dangerous solidarity. (6)

Robbins invokes the ‘feeling’ of globality here as a means of pragmatically mapping cosmopolitan ideals onto the complex material reality of the contemporary world. He is of course not alone in this attempt: Kwame Anthony Appiah, for instance, prominently summarizes cosmopolitanism as ‘universality plus difference’, while Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, writing from a position more critical of globalization, has championed the concept of ‘planetarity’, or a sense of the planet that works to ‘overwrite the globe’ in such a way that protects the radical alterity of indigenous voices and ways of life.[11] Meanwhile, Berthold Schoene, focusing on what he describes as the genre of the contemporary ‘cosmopolitan novel’, similarly argues that:

> Inexpert and improvised at best, the cosmopolitan novel shows itself willing to open up to globality, submit to it, and thus possibly assist in shaping future globalisation from within. Its ethos is to home in on the daily life of all of us as the world's one chief purpose and intention, to imagine humanity in global coexistence as determined by yet not wholly incarcerated in, ideological frames, and to conceive of real cosmopolitics as a communal tackling of

global threats beyond the requirement for perfect, enduring unanimity.[12]

The texts under analysis in this chapter all work towards their own version of the kind of pragmatic cosmopolitanism-within-globalization that these thinkers describe (albeit in slightly different ways). However, the term 'feeling' is particularly useful, partly because of its malleability, but also because, unlike 'cosmopolitanism', it places less emphasis on a political *ideal*, and more on the recognition of already existing, but often hard to discern, global discursive structures; an awareness that is necessary *prior* to the difficult work of progressively recalibrating these structures. This is not to say the texts do not *also* advocate cosmopolitan politics, but simply that 'global feeling', as a less overtly political term, helps to foreground the moments of pain, confusion or contradiction in the texts, which precede the '[conception] of real cosmopolitics' that Schoene describes above.

In her article, '"How Do We Write about This?" The Domestic and the Global in the Post-9/11 Novel', Catherine Morley has rightly expressed caution about what she views as a trend, in transnationally-oriented post-9/11 literary studies, to '[suggest] that fiction is no more than a political tool, through which writers can understand (and educate readers about) the United States' place in the world'.[13] However, the political resistance that the texts in this chapter can offer, when considered collectively, remains vital, and I would suggest that it is in part because they are complex enough to *refuse* reduction to mere 'political tools' that this political resistance is lent most impact. The challenge that these texts, when taken individually, pose to 'us vs. them' binaries may at first seem negligible or vague –

little more than a ‘feeling’. However, this feeling can help affect more substantial cultural change when the texts are placed alongside each other, working together, in a form of assemblage or textual constellation, to collectively re-map attitudes about global identity in more open, nuanced and inclusive ways.

Deterritorialization: Global Poetry

Poetry responding to global terror has frequently generated a feeling of globality through its capacity for deterritorialization, understood in the sense of an imaginative collapsing of geographical distance through figurative language. It draws attention to what Richard Crownshaw has described, in his article ‘Deterritorializing the “Homelend” in American Studies and American Fiction after 9/11’, as ‘the interrelation of national traumas’ through an evocation of ‘the extraterritorial, the unhomely in the homely’.[14]

This evocation of the unhomely in the homely is particularly evident in ‘first writing since’ by Palestinan-American poet Suheir Hammad, written in the days immediately following the September 11 attacks. In it, Hammad passionately challenges the reactionary instinct amongst many Americans to retreat into the comforts of parochialism, exceptionalism and Islamophobia. Melding hip-hop and beat poetry, as well as the clear influence of Amiri Baraka, Hammad makes the case that she has ‘never felt less american and more new yorker, particularly brooklyn, than these past days’.[15] She emphasises the distance between Brooklyn and the rest

of America, however, at the same time as she underlines the nation's connectedness to the rest of the world, and the multifaceted ways in which it is implicated in global conflict: 'if there are any people on earth who understand how new york is feeling right now,' she writes, 'they are in the west bank and the gaza strip,' (141) adding later that 'over there is over here' (142). Borrowing a phrase from bell hooks, Kenza Oumlil has argued that Hammad uses her poetry to '"talk[] back" to dominant representations of Palestinian and Middle Eastern women', and that 'first writing since' 'effectively speaks to multiple realities by naming some of the victims of the 9/11 attacks who belong to different ethnic groups'.[16] Michael Rothberg has likewise identified the poem as an exemplar of literary resistance to nationalist isolationism, for the way it 'moves at once above and below the national radar, taking apart assumptions of a prelapsarian American unity in order to assert bonds of local and transnational solidarity'.[17]

This emphasis on the connections between the intimately personal and the globally political is also clearly discernible in the work of Pakistani-born British poet Imtiaz Dharker, particularly in her 2006 collection *The Terrorist at My Table*. In the volume's titular poem, 'The terrorist at my table', Dharker's language subverts straightforward perceptions of time and space in order to make distant conflict feel more immediately palpable within the domestic space of the home. The poem's central action centres upon its first-person narrator comparing the work of writing sentences to the act of chopping onions, a motif to which she returns multiple times: 'On this chopping board,' she writes, the words 'seem more organised, / as if with a little effort / I could begin / to understand their shape'.[18] However, the location of

the ‘kitchen’ within which she is doing this writing/chopping is unstable. Early on, she writes:

> At my back, the news is the same
> as usual. A train
> blown up, hostages take.
> Outside, in Pollokshields, the rain. (22)

Pollokshields is a district of Glasgow, Scotland, which perhaps explains the rain, and the word ‘news’ implies that the terrorist act described is simply one reported on the television, switched on in the background. A few lines on, the narrator lays a tablecloth, and we are informed that ‘beneath it, Gaza is a spreading watermark’ (22). The tablecloth may be a present from Palestine, a watermarked product of Gaza. Or the watermark may be an ageing stain on the table itself: if so, its covering up with a tablecloth can be interpreted in a number of ways (it could, for instance, symbolise the act of Israeli colonial settlement, or, alternatively, an insufficient global acknowledgement of the violence that accompanies it). What is most important here, however, is that the stanza brings the global terror on the news one step closer to the rainy domesticity of Pollokshields, until now seemingly a world away from the Gaza Strip. This deterritorialization is underscored in the final stanza, which reads ‘Outside, on the face of Jerusalem, I feel the rain’ (23). The reference might be, literally, to the city of Jerusalem, or it might be to the poem and song by William Blake. (The latter is, of course, famously about England rather than

Scotland, but again – bearing in mind that Dharker lives in London – this serves only to further blur the line between 'over there' and 'over here').

This blurring of national boundaries also characterises the work of British-Somali poet Warsan Shire. Often not explicitly concerned with terror, poems such as those in her 2011 collection *Teaching My Mother How to Give Birth* depict relentlessly horrific acts of violence by men against women in a conflict-ravaged Somalia, as well as the subtler discrimination against (again, particularly female) Somali refugees in London. In the prose poem 'Conversations About Home (at the Deportation Centre)', for instance, terror, sexual violence, nationalism and displacement intersect with each another nightmarishly as the narrator describes her journey across North Africa to Europe:

> I want to lay down, but these countries are like uncles who touch you when you're young and asleep. Look at all these borders, foaming at the mouth with bodies broken and desperate. I'm the colour of hot sun on the face, my mother's remains were never buried. I spent days and nights in the stomach of the truck; I did not come out the same. Sometimes it feels like someone else is wearing my body.[19]

Less overtly concerned with terror than the poems of Hammad or Dharker, here Shire places herself into the position of a female refugee from the ongoing Somali civil war, a conflict driven in part by the sectarian violence of the Islamist militant group al-Shabab. The plight of refugees from the conflict, crossing borders that are

'foaming at the mouth with bodies broken and desperate', is shown to intersect with exactly the kind of aggressive polarisation of identity in the wake of terror that Hammad describes as being at play in post-9/11 America, albeit this time manifesting in a detention centre in the UK. Both sectarian violence in Somalia and the persecution of refugees in Britain and the United States are, the poem demonstrates, driven by a binary 'us and them' discourse, violently excluding those whose who might be considered 'other' to the officially sanctioned cultural group, or whose identities are too hybrid to easily fit into such reductive categories at all. Like the poets discussed above, Shire's vision is one that is both global and deterritorializing. Indeed, as she herself puts it in her poem 'what they did yesterday afternoon':

> *i come from two countries*
>
> *one is thirsty*
>
> *the other is on fire*
>
> *both need water.*
>
> later that night
>
> i held an atlas in my lap
>
> ran my fingers across the whole world
>
> and whispered
>
> *where does it hurt?*

it answered

everywhere

everywhere

everywhere.[20]

Published as part of 'Riot Pieces', a collaborative online project in which writers and artists responded to the riots that took place in Britain in the summer of 2011, the poem connects the violence of that day of social unrest to the violence of sectarian conflict in East Africa. The narrator, like Shire herself, is a product of both worlds. Although the two locations of violence here might seem distant and unrelated to casual observers of the news, in these lines they are intertwined, and once again the separation of 'us' from 'them', or 'over here' from 'over there', in contemporary discourse becomes harder to sustain.

The Domestic: Global Theatre

Global responses to terror in drama have, like in poetry, aimed to bring a feeling of globality to their audiences through deterritorialization, but they have often tended to do so through the trope of the domestic (or what might be characterised as a literalization of Crownshaw's evocation of the 'unhomely in the homely'). One of the clearest examples of this is in George Brant's *Grounded* (2013), a one-person play in monologue form that involves a pregnant female fighter pilot telling the story of her forced – and from her point of view unwelcome – reskilling as a drone operator. The

story she narrates takes place in California, the location switching between her mundane daily shifts manning a drone at a local military base, and her increasingly estranged marriage at home, as she and her husband prepare for their coming baby.

Despite being set entirely in the United States, the play examines the emotional distancing that occurs when the violence of warfare is mediated through a screen, and enemy combatants in far-away parts of the globe are increasingly encountered only as distorted, two-dimensional assemblages. 'It's not fair / Not really,' the Pilot says at one point, 'We should make an announcement: / Attention People of the Grey Desert / Everything is Witnessed / The Moment You Step Outside You are Under Suspicion / That would be fair'.[21] *Grounded* offers an expansive, outward-looking vision of America's place in – and impact upon – the world. The play gradually builds towards a denouement where the Pilot is pressured into firing a missile at a suspected terrorist, despite a small child (presumably his own) being in close proximity to him: she is ultimately unable to go through with it, but is quickly overridden by her superiors. What is most striking in this moment, however, is the momentary, disorienting collapse of distance that occurs when the Pilot describes the child on the screen as her own:

> The team cheers as my daughter dies
>
> As her arms and legs fly off in separate directions
>
> As her pulp is mixed with the car and the Prophet and the sand
>
> As her pulp dissolves into the grey
>
> There is only the grey now

Only the grey. (70)

In the aftermath of the attack, the Pilot's emotional bond with her own child has become intimately entwined with that of the father and child on her screen. The 'us vs. them' identity binaries so common to discourse surrounding the war on terror has disintegrated, and everyday understandings of what terrorism is are turned on their head. As Elise Morrison argues, '*Grounded* propose[s] that the ongoing wars in the Middle East and […] offer opportunities, imperatives even, to recognize our interconnectedness to and collective responsibility for human suffering of many kinds. The Pilot's tragic story destabilize[s] divisions between guilt and innocence, watcher and watched, familiar and foreign in which justifications for global surveillance programs and drone strikes are grounded'.[22]

Wajahat Ali's *The Domestic Crusaders* (2004) is also set in the United States, once again, as its title suggests, utilizing a domestic setting. The play is a comedy drama that focuses on inter-generational relations in a Pakistani-American family, as they gather to celebrate the twenty-first birthday of the family's youngest son in his parents' house (which is light-heartedly dubbed by some amongst them 'Little Kabul').[23] Throughout, Ali presents the audience with a diverse range of characters, with the younger ones in particular demonstrating a cultural hybridity similar to that explored by Suheir Hammad in 'first writing since': they switch between American pop song lyrics and Urdu idiolect sometimes within the space of a sentence. The family share their experiences of life as Muslims Americans in a post-9/11 United States, often relating instances of discrimination, but also expressing

alarm about terrorism. While clearly feeling the effects of post-9/11 media discourse, for most of the play's duration, terror itself remains a news item, seemingly as distant from this American family as from most others. For instance, during a scene comically titled 'Big Trouble in Little Kabul' (a play on the 1980s Kurt Russell action film *Big Trouble in Little China*, another gesture towards the family's cultural hybridity), the elderly grandfather, Hakim, actively distances himself from Osama bin Laden:

HAKIM	Yesterday at the flea market, I was picking my fruits—as usual. One white man was next to me. He was with his son—just a boy, probably eight or so. The boy looked up at me and asked, "Are you related to Osama bin Laden?"
FATIMA	What? No way!
HAKIM	Hanh, I heard it. My own ears—and *Allah thera shukar* I'm not deaf yet.
KHULSOOM	What did you tell him? I would have said, "Yes, yes I am."
HAKIM	You want to get your father-in-law arrested, Beti? He's just a kid—I said no, no, I'm not. He is a terrorist who doesn't know the first thing about the religion of Islam. I am a proud Musalman, Alhamdulilah, born and raised in Hyderabad Deccan, India. (16–17)

Despite his active dissociation from it here, the reality of distant political violence is (like in *Grounded*) quite literally brought *home* at the end of the play, when Hakim reveals that he long ago partook in a brutal wave of retaliatory violence against Hindu oppression in India, two days after Partition in 1947. Recounting the bloody tale in painful detail, he says: 'Many were in tears, speaking in any tongue they knew, praying to their Gods, my God, begging me to spare their life. I took my gun and kept shooting until all my rage and anger were emptied into their dead bodies. We left them to rot by the river. If I had a thousand bullets it would not have been enough' (99–100). What, more than anything, lends the description of this violence its dramatic impact, however, is not its explicit detail so much as the sorrowful comment that Hakim makes at the end of his long story: 'The physical pain is nothing,' he says, 'I would give anything, my entire life twice over, just for the memories to go away. Just to forget the screams. But I cannot. And, whether you like or not, it is a part of me, so it is a part of you' (101). To borrow Hammad's words once again, Ali here shows his audience that 'over there is over here'.

The domestic is again the scene in Ayad Akhtar's Pulitzer Prize-winning *Disgraced* (2013), albeit this time taking place in a luxury apartment in New York's Upper East Side. The play primarily revolves around a small dinner party in the home of a high-flying corporate lawyer, Amir, and his aspiring artist wife, Emily. Amir is of Muslim descent, but fiercely atheist and harshly critical of Islam. Emily, on the other hand, admires the religion, and draws on its influence in her art (although sometimes to the point of orientalist fetishisation). Tensions mount during the dinner party as their guests, Isaac and Jory, press an increasingly drunken and irate

Amir to explain the reasons for his antipathy towards the religion of his family. Eventually, when the discussion turns to terrorism, he lets slip that 'watching the news and seeing folks in the Middle East dying for values you were taught were purer – and truer … you can't help but feel just a little bit of pride' (54). The scene unfolds as follows:

ISAAC Pride?

AMIR Yes, pride.

Beat.

ISAAC Did you feel pride on September 11th?

AMIR (*with hesitation*) If I'm honest, yes.

EMILY You really don't mean that, Amir.

AMIR I was horrified by it, okay? Absolutely horrified.

JORY Pride about what?

About the Towers coming down?

About people getting killed?

AMIR That we were finally winning.

JORY *We?*

AMIR Yeah … I guess I forgot … which *we* I was.

Like Hammad in 'first writing since', Amir is caught between conflicting identities. While George W. Bush famously declared, following 9/11, that 'either you are with us, or with the terrorists' (a binary that has only been amplified under the first

weeks of Trump's presidency), in *Disgraced*, Akhtar lays bare the perfidy of this claim.[24] Amir, like thousands of other people of Muslim descent across the United States, is made to feel partially excluded from the former category and, in turn, is perceived as sympathising with the latter. Indeed, it becomes apparent that he has started believing this himself: although admitting his impulsive feeling of 'pride' is wrong, he claims that the feeling 'comes from somewhere. And that somewhere is Islam' (56). His disgust towards Islam, and in turn towards himself, ultimately becomes a kind of self-fulfilling prophecy. After it is revealed that Emily has had a brief affair with Isaac (who is also her art dealer), Amir bursts into violence, hitting her multiple times in the face: an incident that brings full circle his own drunken suggestion, earlier on in the play, that Islam encourages violence against women (50).

No clear explanation is given for the brutal attack, and to Akhbar's credit there is no formulaic suggestion that Amir has been pushed to an act of domestic 'terror' by post-9/11 discourse. However, the incident does mark the breaking point of a series of intersecting tensions that have building between all four of the play's main characters throughout its duration, and none of them emerge completely virtuous. Amir is, of course, solely responsible for his actions, but what we see in him throughout is an internalisation of 'us vs. them' binary at the heart of public discourse surrounding the war on terror: by identifying with global Muslim suffering at the same time as he despises Islam itself, he occupies an untenably split position, in which he tries to disconnect his present New York life from his Pakistani family history. What Akhtar does through his play, like both Brant and Ali, is to

reveal the inescapabilty of the connection between the local and global: it is, ironically, precisely Amir's attempt to *suppress* his connection to Islam, rather than Islam itself, that leads him to fall prey to his own stereotype about Muslim men. In this way, Amir's predicament resembles the reactionary retreat into violent rage that characterises not only Islamist terror itself, but also the anti-terror rhetoric of global media and political discourse (not least those who have since gone on to elect Donald Trump to the United States Presidency).

'Counternarrative': Global Novels

The novel has been by far the form to which literary writers have most frequently turned to grapple with the problems of global terror (or at least the form with the biggest market for such texts), and as such it is more difficult to identify a single prominent trend. However, a pattern that connects many novels in their various responses to global terror is a drive to foreground, and in turn challenge, the role that *narrative* plays in the perpetuation of a binary 'us vs. them' media and political discourse. As Adam Hodges and Chad Nilep have succinctly argued in *Discourse, War and Terrorism*, in the aftermath of terror attacks since 9/11, it is '[l]angauage, entwined with power, that frames and positions the [official] response'.[25] Globally-oriented contemporary novels, however, have countered this official response, repeatedly attempting to bear witness to the complexities of post-9/11 global identity, and in doing so to contributing towards a reshaping of hegemonic discourse in more nuanced, ethical and inclusive ways. To borrow Don DeLillo's

memorable term, they collectively help construct a 'counternarrative' to both terror and the reactionary response to it.[26]

The body of work that falls into this category is increasingly large, including novels by Nadeem Aslam, Mohsin Hamid, Hari Kunzru, Salman Rushdie and Kamila Shamsie, and this is reflected in a growing number of academic studies into the field.[27] Teju Cole's acclaimed *Open City* (2011), J.M. Coetzee's *Diary of a Bad Year* (2007), and Zia Haider Rahman's *In the Light of What We Know* (2014) are particularly apposite examples, as they all use highly self-reflexive narrative styles to challenge their readers to think about the subtle prejudices at play in even the most apparently liberal or cosmopolitan of Western worldview. Cole does this by encouraging his reader to identify with his erudite, left-leaning Nigerian-American protagonist, Julius, who thinks ethically and critically about the structures of global power that acts of terror are located within, but who has also possibly failed to fully acknowledge his own implication in these structures. The reader is lulled into a complacent agreement with Julius' worldview, but shocked into reconsidering this identification when it becomes apparent that he may have raped an old friend of his in Nigeria many years earlier. 'What does it mean,' Julius narrates towards the end of the novel, 'when, in someone else's version, I am the villain?'.[28] The question is clearly directed (on Cole's part) outwards at the reader, and in this respect makes the novel particularly comparable to Brant's *Grounded*. As Pieter Vermeulen has written, the novel 'forcefully reminds its readers that empathy and intercultural understanding alone cannot achieve the changes to which cosmopolitanism is committed, and that they can only point readers to the world outside—to a global

landscape riven by injustice and inequality'.[29] In doing so, the novel offers a take on post-9/11 cultural memory that prompts the reader into embracing what Lucy Bond has described as a productive 'move towards a *montaged* memorial culture that is inclusive of a variety of perspectives, agendas, and interpretations, and global in its orientation'.[30]

Coetzee's *Diary of a Bad Year* asks similar questions, presenting its reader with a narrative that is quite literally multi-tiered: that is, divided into at first two, and then three strands, spread across each page with a line dividing them. The novel ties personal drama with global politics – including, prominently, the politics of the war of terror, and its multi-tiered narrative dramatizes the global interconnectivity that Judith Butler discusses in *Precarious Life: The Power of Mourning and Violence*, when she writes that 'no "self," including no national subject, exists apart from an international socius'.[31] The first narrative strand constitutes a series of entries in the diary of the novel's protagonist, a prolific ageing writer who is referred to, self-reflexively, throughout as 'JC' (or, sometimes, 'Señor C').[32] Although the diary touches on a wide range of topics, it is in entry number five, 'On terrorism', that the novel offers its most overt hint at the role of narrative in countering the binary discourse of the war on terror. Discussing the perceived curtailments upon free speech inherent to counter-terror legislation in many Western countries in the years following 9/11, JC takes comfort in the ability of literary language to offer resistance through its hermeneutic slipperiness: 'The masters of information,' he writes, 'have forgotten about poetry, where words may have a meaning quite different from what the lexicon says, where the metaphoric spark is always one

jump ahead of the decoding function, where another, unforeseen reading is always possible' (23).

However, Coeztee himself is slightly more cautious in his approach: the fact that the diary is merely one of the two narrative strands set out on that particular page immediately prevents the reader from straightforwardly taking this position as given. If diary entries in novels often signal unreliable narration anyway, then the introduction of an extra degree of distance here between the narrator and the reader encourages the latter to think critically about what is being said. As Susana Araujo puts it in *Transatlantic Fictions of 9/11 and the War on Terror*, '[t]he sections that divide the text into different voices split, segregate, and segment the overall body of the text, denying it unity or tranquillity. Faced by the violence of the arguments it incorporates, the body of the text shudders, twitches, and hurts' (159). The novel's structure invites a questioning of every claim that its narrator makes, including those like the above that appear to champion the text's own capacity to challenge dominant narratives. Paradoxically, however, it is precisely this invitation of doubt – what Araujo describes as the text's 'denying [… of] unity or tranquillity' – that in fact does most to underscore the claim that JC makes. It is precisely because the narrative lays open JC's claim to question that it most effectively goes about putting the assertion into effect. In doing so, however, it warns that such resistance is not a given, but rather a difficult ideal towards which literature must strive. If Coetzee guardedly agrees with JC's claim, he does so while warning that literary resistance to global counter-terrorist discourse is not an end itself, but merely one important means of helping to get such a resistance initiated.

Like *Open City* and *Diary of a Bad* Year, Zia Haider Rahman's 2014 novel, *In the Light of What We Know*, also uses narrative as a means of resistance, this time in a slightly more subtle way. Global in form, its narrative jumps between Britain, the United States and Bangladesh to highlight the network of complex interconnections within which global terror is located, casting into sharp relief the failure of existing political language to satisfactorily account for what Jackson describes as 'the ways in which language is employed to establish clear boundary markers of identity, to make it clear that "we" are different to "them"' (61). It is a novel that responds to global terror only insofar as it places global terror in the context of a multitude of other global thematic concerns (not unlike Jonathan Franzen's *Freedom* [2010], or Jennifer Egan's *A Visit From the Goon Squad* [2010]). Rahman challenges the 'us vs. them' binary through the motif of cartography, repeatedly drawing attention to the way in which narrative can itself function as a means of figuratively mapping the world (or subverting dominant mappings of it). This is signposted early on in the novel: in a moment strongly evocative of Edward Said's notion of 'imaginative geographies', the central character, Zafar, draws the narrator's attention to the parallels between language and mapping via a comparison of the problems faced by translators of both poetry and cartography:

> Both of them face the same problem, namely, that they cannot capture everything exactly and they have to give up some things in order to convey anything at all. In going from the curved surface of the earth to the flat surface of a map, the cartographer would ideally want to preserve a number

> of aspects such as relative distances …, relative areas …, angles …; and so on.[33]

Moreover, he says:

> Maps, contour maps and all maps, intrigue us for the metaphors they are: tools to give us a sense of something whose truth is far richer but without which we would perceive nothing and never find our bearings. That's what maps mysteriously do: they obliterate information to provide some information at all.

As with Coetzee's paradoxical claim about poetic language in *Diary of a Bad Year*, the trope of mapping here actually serves an even broader function than Zafar intends. His connection of it to poetry encourages the reader to think about alternative ways in which the contemporary globe might be 'mapped' through language and narrative. Indeed, one of these ways is through its style, which at times closely resembles that of W.G. Sebald, and particularly the latter's final novel, *Austerlitz* (2001). As with Sebald's writing, Rahman's language works as a kind of network (or, to borrow a Sebaldian term, 'quincunx'), via which complex issues of cultural memory and history are explored obliquely, never settling into anything as solid as a clear-cut statement of meaning.[34] As Zafar puts it when describing his return, after many years, to the small village of his birth in Bangladesh:

> A memory inside me was trying to wrestle its way through to consciousness. But to know that you once saw the same things, a landscape, a hamlet and a house, in an altogether different way from how you see them now, and to know this without being able to recall the former memory itself, can cause a disembodying sensation. It is as if over time the self has divided in two, a mitosis of the man and his memory, that leaves the boy parting from his infant self, and later the adult from the youth, like the image of human evolution, from primate on all fours, through the savage half man, bent double, to the proud heir to earth, Homo sapiens, who walks tall, each man abandoning his predecessor, each stage only preparation for the next, and in the end childhood left behind, put away. (87–8)

As James Wood puts it in a glowing review of the novel, it is in passages such as this that the 'description of the complexity of the event is also a way of thinking about that complexity'.[35] The long, cascading sentences are part of the novel's point: as in both *Open City* and *Diary of a Bad Year*, the form that its narrative takes is just as important as the action it is describing. What is more, the action, related in this way, is in this scene reminiscent of the splitting of self – or 'mitosis of the man and his memory' – that occurs in Akhtar's *Disgraced*. The result here is, of course very different (Zafar is not pushed to violence), but the irony of the split is similar: Zafar, like Akhtar's Amir, is a product of a globalized world, but simultaneously estranged from the world of their past. Their globality disconnects them from parts of the world at the same time as it connects them to others. Indeed, the 'disembodying

sensation' that Zafar experiences (which itself might also be compared to Warsan Shire's line, 'Sometimes it feels like someone else is wearing my body'), constitutes a moment of global 'feeling' not so much because he is suddenly and sentimentally reconnected with the world of his past, but precisely because this encounter with his past sparks in him a heightened awareness of the global identity he has come, ineluctably, to inhabit.

Like the other texts discussed in this chapter – or rather, together in active conjunction with them – *In the Light of What We Know* contributes towards a remapping of post-9/11 global identity that accounts more thoroughly for its nuance and complexity than is often the case in contemporary public discourse. In line with Richard Gray's analysis of post-9/l1 novels that 'Imagine the Transnational' in his book*, After the Fall: American Literature Since 9/11*, Rahman's narrative, and the growing body of like-minded global texts to which his narrative belongs, 'go way beyond bipolar, biracial models,' becoming instead 'a lexical equivalent of the immigrant encounter, transforming their literary environs just as they are transformed by them' (89). It is this process of mutual transformation – between text and globe – that underlines the diverse ways in which all of the works I have discussed so far work to challenge global terror at the same time as they resist the binary discourse that characterises hegemonic global responses to terror. While individually, the texts can do little more than offer their readers a productive a self-reflexive 'feeling' of globality, together they offer a collective, intersecting imaginative network that can contribute towards a progressive, nuanced and inclusive remapping of the world, in which the binaries at play in the discourse of

the war on terror are productively challenged. In the final section of this chapter, I use Karan Mahajan's *The Association of Small Bombs* as a case study to reinforce my analysis of the trends I have sketched out so far.

Case study: Terrorists in Karan Mahajan's *The Association of Small Bombs* (2016)

'A good bombing begins everywhere at once', Mahajan's novel declares in its opening paragraph.[36] The narrative itself, however, begins with a bombing in a specific time and place: the 1996 Lajpat Nagar blast in Delhi. The narrative emerges from, and revolves around, the attack and its long-term impact on two families, the Muslim Ahmeds and the Hindu Khuranas, and examines the strain put on relationships both within and between the families by increased anti-Muslim feeling in the discourse surrounding terror attacks in the Hindu-majority city; a feeling that in turn exacerbates the terrorist threat by pushing some Muslims towards extremism. In response to both of these kinds of discursive 'feeling', *The Association of Small Bombs*, like the other texts discussed in this chapter, generates a more expansive and inclusive 'feeling' of globality, challenging the reductive 'us vs. them' binaries inherent to both terrorist and counter-terrorist discourse. While again drawing on tropes such as deterritorialization and the domestic, as well as utilizing a multi-perspective narrative structure, Mahajan's novel also offers something new: namely, extensive representation of terrorists themselves.

Although there are examples of post-9/11 texts that attempt to imagine themselves into the minds of men driven to violent extremism (John Updike's

Terrorist [2007], Don DeLillo's *Falling Man* [2007], Martin Amis' 'The Last Days of Muhammed Atta' [2006], Nadeem Aslam's *The Wasted Vigil* [2008]), these representations, although by no means without merit, tend on the whole to be rather two-dimensional. On the other hand, a number of other texts have attempted to represent figures either mistakenly suspected of terrorism (Kamila Shamsie' *Burnt Shadows* [2009]), or whose status as terrorists is ultimately left open to question (Mohsin Hamid's *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* [2007]). Mahajan's novel is – so far, at least – relatively unique in that it contains a range of characters who are unquestionably terrorists, but whose backgrounds, motivations, and worldviews are complex and varied, and resist easy placement within the discursively constructed category of the 'evil terrorist' (Jackson 59).

This is most evident in the novel's depiction of the seemingly never-ending trial (which spans the entire seven years of the narrative) of the men suspected of being behind the Lajpat Nagar bombing, but with little evidence to support their prosecution, the implication being that the majority of the men on trial are, actually, completely innocent. At their first appearance at the trial, Deepa and Vikas Khurana are joined by Sharif and Afsheen Ahmed, and all of them are united in their desire to see vengeance enacted upon the men. However, when the men eventually appear before them in court, they all feel a sense of anticlimax:

> [W]hen the four victims, or kin of victims, sat in the court and saw the terrorists, observed the state of the room in which they were being prosecuted - the cobwebs blousy in the corners, the guano dissolving the

> floor, the twitchy fan barely containing the fire of the afternoon - they became dispirited.
>
> ...
>
> The men — bearded, gaunt, fair, dressed in sports windbreakers (as if they'd come from cricket practice) — looked middle-class, harmless. Unlike the criminals the Khuranas had seen in the court complex, they were not even handcuffed. (67)

Such is her disappointment at the spectacle before them, that Deepa is led to wonder: 'Were these the people who had killed her children? … Their personalities did not add up to a bomb' (68). This is partly because most of the men before them are, in fact, highly unlikely to be guilty (we are told that Muslim men are rounded up on spurious evidence and then incarcerated sometimes for years on end). But it is also because the sensational, two-dimensionally evil figure of the terrorist in contemporary media discourse is inevitably at odds with the banal reality of a suspected terrorist in the flesh, and the reader is aware that at least one of the men *is* a terrorist, or at least closely affiliated with the terrorist organization responsible for Lajpat Nagar. This is Malik, a by-all-accounts gentle and thoughtful young man with a disdain for violence, but who also happens to be a longtime close friend of the man who planted the bomb – Shaukat 'Shockie' Guru – as well as a loose (though jaded and unenthusiastic) member of the organization himself, and as such refuses to utter a word while in custody.

Mahajan at no point encourages his reader to absolve Malik of responsibility

for his indirect part in the attack, nor for his refusal to help bring its perpetrators to justice. However, he does force the reader to bear witness to Malik's humanity, and, in turn, his suffering. Without sentimentality, we are told that after his arrest, Malik 'was tortured for ten days straight', and he appears in court '[g]aunt, underslept, [and] hungry' (62). As the trial begins, we are told that:

> Malik and the others stood in front of the judge, facing him, but all Malik could think about was his hunger. He had been fed his breakfast at six a.m. as usual, but had been given his "lunch" at seven thirty a.m. That was because you could not eat outside the jail. He was dying of thirst and hunger. "Barbarous actions … Civilization … The killing of innocents, " the judge said.
>
> "Bread. Pizza. Chow mein," Malik thought. (63)

The hypocrisy of the trial is clear: Malik and the men around him are accused of barbarity and crimes against 'civilization', while themselves being subjected to terrifying beatings, starvation, and the grounds for their arrest (guilty or not), is questionable, driven at least in part by religious discrimination. We empathize with Malik's suffering without condoning or forgiving his role in the suffering of others. What is more, there will be a palpable resonance here, particularly for readers in the West, with the role played by the 'extraordinary rendition' of terrorist suspects during the war on terror, particularly during the Bush administration, but also, potentially, again under President Trump.[37]

There is an element of transnational historical resonance here that, as with

the deterritorialization exhibited in Dhaker's poem, or in the revelation that Hakim makes at the end of *The Domestic Crusaders*, works to collapse binary language of 'us and them' in the context of public discourse surrounding contemporary global terror. Malik and the Muslim men on trial are shown to be the pre-9/11 kinfolk of those who Judith Butler, writing on 'Indefinite Detention' in *Precarious Life*, describes as 'populations that are not regarded as subjects, humans who are not conceptualized within the frame of a political culture in which human lives are underwritten by legal entitlements, law, and so humans who are not humans' (77). For Deepa Khurana, Malik and the other men are a disappointing spectacle due to the fact that their banality doesn't equate with her conception of a terrorist, but for the reader, knowledge about the treatment to which he has been subjected renders his humanity starkly visible. It makes an ethical demand upon the reader to recognize the precariousness of Malik's life: or in other words, an identification precisely with the banality of his utterly relatable desire for nothing more than 'Bread. Pizza. Chow mein' (63).

This humanization of terrorists is present also, finally, in the novel's depiction of the bomber himself, 'Shockie' Guru (loosely based on real-life terrorist Shaukat Hussain Guru, who was convicted for an attack on the Indian Parliament in 2001). While, as I have suggested above, representations of terrorists in post-9/11 fiction tend to either represent them as hyper-religious fundamentalists (as in DeLillo's *Falling Man* and Aslam's *The Wasted Vigil*), or men driven to political violence through deep-seated personal anger (Updike's *Terrorist,* Salman Rushdie's *Shalimar the Clown* [2005]), in the figure of Shockie, Mahajan offers something more

three-dimensional: namely, a jaded, cynical man going about a job that he happens to be extremely good at (he has a reputation for being 'a genius of terror' [47]). Neither a religious hardliner nor an emotionally troubled figure looking to vent personal frustrations, Shockie's motivations cannot be easily diagnosed. He has no illusions about the cruelty of his actions, and carries them out despite feeling a twang of sympathy for his victims: 'there was no pleasure in it. It was all anticlimax. And he could see the faces of the framing shop owner and the owner of Shingar Dupatte, how they would react when the bomb went off; and he felt sad, the way one always did when one knew the victims even a little' (51). Likewise, shortly before planting the bomb, he displays a complex ambivalence in his thoughts about the city around him, and his place within it:

> Delhi — baked in exquisite concrete shapes — rose, cracked, spread out. It made no sense — the endlessness, the expanse. … Delhi never ended. the houses along the road were like that too: jammed together, the balconies cramped with cycles, boxes, brooms, pots, clotheslines, buckets, the city minutely re-creating itself down to the smallest cell. From one balcony, a boy with a runny nose waved to another. … Delhi. Fuck it. I love it too. (41)

Again, although Shockie's crime remains horrific, Mahajan refuses to reduce him to a formulaic caricature: he is a multi-faceted character who, despite his criminality, we are at times encouraged to empathize with. The description of Delhi above, written from Shockie's perspective, is not that of a fanatic, but could just as easily have come

from a busy Delhi office worker having a short moment of reflection on a lunch break.

While the depictions of terrorists in many novels since 9/11 tend to focus on the exceptionality of the terrorist act, tracing the gradual movement of innocent young men towards their initial act of political violence, in Shockie we are presented with a figure for whom terror is simply the norm: he has bombed before, and he will bomb again, taking a moment to appreciate the city in the meantime. What is more, it is the reader's potential identification with Shockie that is perhaps his most disturbing feature: terrorists, we are prompted to acknowledge, may well be inhumane, but they are not inhuman. Rather, they are people as complex and multifaceted as anybody else. Indeed, in line with Shockie's fascination with the city, we are reminded later on that 'Mohammad Atta, the famous World Trade Center hijacker, had been a student of urban planning' (226)

This, of course, is by no means to absolve Shockie or any of the other terrorists in the novel of the crimes they commit, but rather to take a step towards finding more honest and constructive discursive strategies for countering terror than currently exist in much of the public discourse of counter-terrorism: strategies that, in particular, avoid resorting to aggressive anti-Muslim discrimination. In this way, Mahajan's novel offers one contribution to a growing and vital body of literary writing that is working to resist global terror by generating a 'feeling' of globality, and in doing so contributing towards a collective re-imagination of the very 'globe' of which it is a part.

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[32] J.M. Coetzee, *Diary of a Bad Year* (London: Vintage, 2008), p. 227.
[33] Zia Haider Rahman, *In the Light of What We Know* (Basingstoke and Oxford: Picador, 2015), p. 25. For a detailed discussion of Said's 'imaginative geographies', see: Derek Gregory, *Geographical Imaginations* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1994).
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