Precarious Citizens:

A comparative analysis of the representation of Muslims and radicalisation in post-9/11 fiction

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Abstract

The initial understandings and perceptions of the 9/11 attacks were heavily influenced by media coverage of the events and by the early literary responses published in prominent newspapers and magazines. The first wave of fictional writing about 9/11 was largely penned by Anglo-American writers such as Martin Amis, John Updike and Don DeLillo, who rarely challenged the dominant media narrative of American trauma and victimisation and reconfirmed stereotypes about Muslims and extremism. I contend that the election of Barack Obama helped inaugurate a second wave of writing about 9/11 in which non-European and immigrant American characters appear. This shifted the singular focus on American trauma to wider multicultural concerns. I discuss Mohsin Hamid's *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* and Amy Waldman's *The Submission* as representative. However, it was not until Muslim immigrant authors themselves began to write about their experiences after the attacks that a third wave of more nuanced portrayal of both Muslims and Muslim extremism started to occur.

In close analyses of Laleh Khadivi's *A Good Country* and Kamila Shamsie's *Home Fire* I discuss how such works offer complex depictions of cultural/ethnic "strangers/others" (including radicalised ones) who have made western nations their home. Both *A Good Country* and *Home Fire* offer insights into the difficulties faced by second-generation immigrants in everyday life in a county in which they desperately seek to belong but cannot, despite their citizenship. I argue that Shamsie's keen (and informed) eye surveys a broader canvas than Khadivi's. She counters stereotypes with researched psychological acuity and narratological skill. In our contemporary world, so fraught with tensions arising from misunderstandings of difference – religious, national, gendered, etc. – reading fiction about "strange others" and the ways they negotiate the difficult terrain of immigration, may have considerable social value.

Dedication

To my darling daughter Eliz, for all your patience and understanding.

Mummy loves you to the moon and back.

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Contents

Introduction

After 9/11, the subsequent "War on Terror" and other terror attacks across the globe in the name of radical Islam exacerbated already existing racial and religious profiling of Muslims living in the West.[1] In the popular, media fuelled imagination all Muslim men were stereotyped as uncivilised, hostile Arabs and potential terrorists; all Muslim women were victims of abusive fathers, husbands and brothers. Geoffrey Nash suggests that "Coverage given to Islam in the western media has tended to set it apart as a religion, and has all too frequently turned its followers, the Muslims, individually and collectively into oddities or deviants from the norms of modern civilization – the 'barbarians at the gates'" (*Writing Muslim Identity* 9). Peter Morey, in *Islamophobia: The Word and the World*, claims Islamophobia has emerged as the dominant mode of prejudice in contemporary Western societies in the first decade of the twenty-first century (1). Nathan Lean asserts that since 9/11, Islamophobia has spread in the American public and is the "product of a tight-knit and interconnected confederation of right wing fear merchants" who have been trying to convince their fellow citizens that "Muslims are gaining a dangerous influence in the West," further declaring that "bigoted bloggers, racist politicians, fundamentalist religious leaders, Fox News pundits, and religious Zionists, theirs is an industry of hate: the Islamophobia industry" (*The Islamophobia Industry* 10). This "industry" has obviously and significantly affected the Muslim population living in the West. According to ThinkProgress, an American progressive news website active from 2005-2019, conservatives, Republicans and Fox News viewers are more likely to hold views deemed to be Islamophobic. News channels like Fox not only have wide audiences, but they host a variety of programs and

[1] A. Maurits Van der Veen and Erik Bleich note that "coverage of Muslims [in the media] was already negative well before 9/11" ("What Did 9/11 Media Mean or U.S. Media Coverage of Muslims and Islam?" 165).
See also (some examples): Bleich and Van der Veen (2022), Hajar Yazdiha (2020), Nazita Lajevardi (2019), Saifuddin Ahmed and Jörg Matthes (2017), Evelyn Alsultany (2012), Melina Trevino, Ali M Kanso, and Richard Alan Nelson (2010), Brigitte L. Nacos and Oscar Torres-Reyna (2003), John Strawson (2003), Edward W, Said (1997), Edward Mortimer (1981)

up to 15 hours of live broadcasting a day to 2.5 million viewers, and they also have experts who voice their Islamophobic views. Mediatenor, a major global association dealing with content analysis of media messages, reports that prior to the 9/11 attacks, Islam and Muslims were hardly mentioned in international TV news, however 9/11 changed that and militant groups like Al Qaeda or the Taliban became more visible ("Annual Dialogue Report"). A 2013 report by the Council in American-Islamic Relations (CAIR) declares that Islamophobia's inner core (at that time) comprised at least 37 groups whose aim is to promote prejudice against and hatred of Islam and Muslims. The report further details that these groups had access to at least $119 million in total revenue between 2008 and 2011 and "key players in the network benefited from large salaries as they encouraged the American public to fear Islam" ("Legislating Fear" vi). With such vast propaganda against Islam and Muslims, discrimination against Muslims in the West has rapidly increased and spread. The facts of this widespread fear and demonisation of Muslims are perhaps well known. How these media and public sentiments might be reflected in, confirmed *and* challenged fiction about 9/11 and Muslim terrorism is what interests me in this thesis.

The impact of 9/11 was massive, to say the least. It is not surprising, then, that in the decade after the attacks, a large body of fiction, written by westerners, focussed on the events and their aftermath. Better known examples include Frédéric Beigbeder's *Windows on the World* (2003), Ian McEwans's *Saturday* (2005), Jonathan Safran Foer's *Extremely Loud & Incredibly Close* (2005), Martin Amis's "The Last Days of Muhammad Atta" (2006), Jay McInerney's *The Good Life* (2006), Claire Messud's *The Emperor's Children* (2006), John Updike's *Terrorist* (2006), Ken Kalfus' *A Disorder Peculiar to the Country* (2006), Don DeLillo's *Falling Man* (2007), Sherman Alexie's *Flight* (2007) and Joseph O' Neill's *Netherland* (2008). It has been widely argued (and I will return to this) that "Many works of fiction [written by Anglo-American authors] that deal with 9/11 engage with the traumatic

nature of terrorism and the war on terror in its confined domestic context. They are concerned with merely the traumatic effects of the disaster and the apocalyptic obsessions with dystopian end times" (Ahmed Gamal, "Encounters with Strangeness" 95). Others have argued (and the two claims are not mutually exclusive) that many of these novels portray Muslims in stereotypical terms that reinforce existing western prejudices or offer only a narrow and misleading portrayal of Islam. One of these critics is Margaret Scanlan, who blames popular media and post-9/11 novels written by "distinguished American novelists – Don DeLillo, John Updike, and Sherman Alexie" for reinforcing this view of Islam "as a religion of violent fanatics" ("Migrating from Terror" 267). In the immediate years following 9/11, the dominant post-9/11 American narrative was of national victimhood and many of the novels produced in the early years after the attacks were testaments to the mass destruction of the day and the sense of fear and threat it induced in Americans.

As I will discuss later in this thesis, there have been various attempts to group and categorise literary responses to the events of 9/11.[2] I propose that there are three 'waves' of post-9-11 fictional writing, the first from after the attacks to about 2009, the next from about 2010 to the middle of the second decade of the twenty-first century, and the third from about 2016 to the present day. These are obviously not hard and fast dates, and there is some overlap and fluidity in the groups I identify. However, in broad terms each 'wave' of writing shares significant features and thematic concerns and can be situated within a contextualising socio-political milieu. For the purpose of this thesis, I understand 9/11 fiction to be novels written after the events of 9/11 in which the plot focuses on the events of that day and its effect on its

[2] There have been multiple such journal articles. Book-length studies include: Heather E. Pope and Victoria M. Bryan's edition *Reflecting 9/11: New Narratives in Literature, Television, Film and Theatre* (2016), Paul Petrovic's edition *Representing 9/11: Trauma, Ideology and Nationalism in Literature, Film and Television* (2015), Martin Randall's *9/11 and the Literature of Terror* (2014); Kristiaan Versluys' *Out of the Blue: September 11 and the Novel* (2009), Richard Gray's *After the Fall: American Literature since 9/11* (2011), Anne Keniston and Jeanne Follansbee Quinn's collection of essays, *Literature After 9/11* (2008), and E. Ann Kaplan's, *Trauma Culture: The Politics of Terror and Loss in Media and Literature* (2005)

characters and *also* literature that in some way deals with the aftermath in its focus on the effects of events for Muslims living in the West, and on Muslim (homegrown) terrorism.

As the months and years passed, it fell to fiction, and so to novelists, to represent the events of that day and, in doing so, to confirm or contest the mainstream or dominant "master narrative" that was constructed via the media spectacle in the aftermath of the attacks: a narrative of American victimhood, patriotism, melancholic nostalgia – and moral and cultural superiority.[3] Novelists, it has been claimed, are able to conform with or challenge how 9/11 is remembered and understood, and both its individual and collective effect on Americans (see Lee, "Fiction as Resistance"). Arin Keeble writes of the "phenomenal anticipation" that "quickly built up for the literary representation of 9/11" and notes that many 9/11 novels were "written under the pressure of an expectation that literature would provide answers and give meaning to a newly uncertain world" (*The 9/11 Novel* 6). Arguably, fiction has the capacity to elaborate on a particular topic and discuss it in detail with the freedom not available to journalism, and, ironically, in some cases may be perceived as providing a more accurate representation of an event. Fiction does not have word limits or deadlines; novelists have the luxury of taking their time and carefully building their characters and the events they portray. Most readers accept that the novel is a multi-layered creation originating in a writer's imagination but, at the same time, often valorise the ability of fiction to tell a 'greater' truth in emotional or psychological terms. They may thus turn to fiction as a means of understanding the complexity of a personal or collective situation that appears beyond their comprehension. There persists a notion that fiction offers aestheticised versions of the truth, despite – or even because – of the writer's imaginings. This idea is captured in the claims of many writers, such as these: "there is no doubt fiction makes a better job of truth" (Doris

[3] (Däwes) suggests, "[i]n the aftermath of 9/11… literature fulfils a wide range of functions … and creates a site for the simultaneous articulation of multiple, even conflicting perspectives – including those of (imaginary) terrorists" (499).

Lessing); “fiction is the lie through which we tell the truth” (Albert Camus); “Fiction reveals the truth that reality obscures” (Jessamyn West but also attributed to Ralph Waldo Emerson).

These ideas are discussed at length by Peter Lamarque in “Literature and Truth”. As he makes clear, the nature of the ‘truth’ that may or may not be at stake in literature – especially fiction – is not factual. It is emotional, or psychological or philosophical: “If literature is to be valued for its truth, the thought seems to be, then it cannot be ordinary empirical or conceptual truth” (372). What seems to be at stake in such claims is truth understood as a kind of authenticity and honesty that transcends the banalities of the ‘merely’ empirical. Iris Murdoch, in her philosophical writing, makes assertions in this vein. She writes, for example,

> Truth is not a simple or easy concept. Critical terminology imputes falsehood to an artist by using terms such as fantastic, sentimental, self-indulgent, banal, grotesque, tendentious, unclarified, wilfully obscure and so on. The positive aspect of the avoidance of these faults is a kind of transcendence: the ability to see other non-self things clearly and to criticise and celebrate them freely and justly. (*Metaphysics as a Guide to Morals* 86)

The way literary authors represent groups, ethnicities, race and religion have significant ethical and political consequences if readers assume – and I think many do – that literature transcends ‘mere’ politics. What if the “other non-self things” referred to by Murdoch are *human* others distinguished in terms of race, ethnicity or religion, and are *not* portrayed “freely and justly”? There is the potential for literary representations, particularly of such a political and emotional tragedy as 9/11, to have enduring effects on the assumptions of those who read them seeking ‘truth.’

Anne Keniston and Jeanne Follansbee Quinn note, in their introduction to a collection of essays titled *Literature after 9/11* (2008), “there remains a desire to be true – to the calamity

itself, to the feelings of the victims' families, to the collective need to mourn. But 9/11 itself, or more exactly its capacity to be understood in different ways, also obstructs such desires" (Keniston and Quinn 1). The 'truth' these authors are writing about here – seven years after the events – is framed by them as a specifically domestic, American one. However, on the next page they broaden their assessment noting that "[s]uspicion about the Bush administration's attempts to link Iraq, Al Qaeda, and September 11 – coupled with an enduring sense of mourning for the losses of that day – have led to political and historical frameworks for 9/11 that go beyond the initially articulated binary of "us" and "them" (2). Indeed, this may be so *now*, but it was a long time before such sentiments really began to be articulated in Anglo-American fiction about September 11 (however tangentially or directly). For the most part, for many years, the binary remained and was reinscribed in various ways, some subtle and others not. I will argue that from the very outset, and for at least a decade, most literary responses to September 11, with very few exceptions, worked to further confirm the dominant narrative, not to challenge it. Furthermore, the story told by most literary authors in the decade or so after the terrorist attacks cemented the idea that 9/11 was less about (global) politics than religion and, more specifically, a story about Islam and its clash with Christianity or, at least, modernity. This, then, characterised what I identify as the 'first wave' of post-9/11 fiction.

Anglo-American writers, even extremely accomplished ones, seemed unable to effectively engage with or represent the Islamic other in a convincing way. Of Updike's portrayal of the titular character in *The Terrorist*, for example, Richard Gray suggests,

> there is neither [convincing] imaginative involvement, getting inside the skin of [the character], nor anything like a measure of argumentative mediation, the witnessing or explanatory piecing together of personal or cultural motive.

> Quite simply, this brave attempt to imagine the other never really fits together as a meaningful story. ("Open Doors, Closed Minds" 136)

If there is any consensus about the first decade of literary output following the attacks, it is about the blinkered approach of most American/Western responses, reflective of what Gray suggests is the "triumphalist insularity" (*After the Fall* 85) of the United States and its writers, or what Ruth Franklin referred to in 2011 as "the stubborn, inward gaze of the post-9/11 novel" ("Stubborn" n.p.). According to Franklin, the purpose of the 9/11 novel and the post-9/11 novel was not to inform the reader of what had happened on that day, but rather to "tell us what 9/11 *means*" (n.p.).[4] And yet that seemed, and for some still seems, impossible. Gray for example, writing in 2009, states of 9/11, "One possible way of interpreting these events is in terms of trauma: a recalibration of feeling so violent and radical that it resists and compels memory, generating stories that cannot, yet must, be told" ("Open Doors, Closed Minds" 129). Writers grappled with the difficulty of writing the unimaginable (or in the now ubiquitous term, of articulating their own and the collective *trauma*)[5] and their (usually white American) characters struggle with the psychological impact of the events. As Michael C. Frank and Pavan Kumar Malreddy suggest, many such novels use "a New York City setting to describe the condition of living with trauma in the years following 11 September 2001, [and are] written from an exclusively American perspective" ("Global Responses" 94). Franklin asserts that novelists were "bizarrely searching for the answer to the question of 9/11 in America rather than at its global source" ("Stubborn" n.p.). For the most part, it has been argued, they produced books that figure 9/11 as some kind of violent sundering of what was

[4] As also according to Randall, the work of 9/11 does not actively describe that day but rather considers the aftermath of the events (8)

[5] Amir Khadem suggests that "As the most recent, and arguably the most formidable, cultural trauma of the contemporary American society, the terrorist attack on September 11, 2001 is treated by many scholars as an unrepresentable event, creating immense difficulties for writers to respond to, so much that their simplest tool, the language, would fail miserably. This approach to the aftermath of 9/11 is an extension of the general theory of trauma, developed mainly in the 1990s, most notably through the works of Cathy Caruth (1995; 1996), Shoshana Felman (1993; with Dori Laub, 1992), and Kirby Farrell (1998)" (Khadem 181).

before and what came after: "the day was discursively constructed as a moment of temporal rupture" (Jackson, "The 9/11 Attacks and the Social Construction of a National Narrative" 26-27).[6] They are, in Franklin's words, "all fundamentally elegiac – for a person, a place, or just a time gone by" (n.p.).[7] Ten years after the 9/11 attacks, A-J Aronstein wrote that if you are looking for the "greatest work of 9/11 Literature" you still need to wait because "[i]t will be a long time before someone writes it" ("Recovery in Pieces" n.p.). In her assessment of the first decade of writing about or in response to 9/11, Franklin similarly states:

> [The elegiac tone of such novels] is all quite moving and evocative; but it is not entirely satisfying as an answer to the most urgent questions of the day. Ten years later, do we still helplessly regard 9/11 as an 'unimaginable fact,' a deus ex machina of indeterminable cause, rather than the product of a toxic swirl of historical, religious, and political forces? If we do, it could well be because our novelists continue stubbornly to insist on turning their gaze inward, bizarrely searching for the answer to the question of 9/11 in America rather than at its global source. ("Stubborn" n.p.)

Discussion of the insularity of American fiction after the attacks are manifold (and sometimes contested). Michael Rothberg suggests that American writers of this first wave suffered a "failure of the imagination" ("A Failure of the Imagination" 153) and what is required of them is a "fiction of international relations and extraterritorial citizenship" (153). Rothberg challenges Gray's point of writing a "centripetal" account and instead argues for a "complementary centrifugal mapping" that would chart an outward movement of American

[6] Richard Gray asserts, "Certainly, what is notable about those texts that have attempted to confront the dreadful events of 9/11 and its aftermath directly is the presence of, and in fact an emphasis on, the preliminary stages of trauma: the sense of those events as a kind of historical and experiential abyss, a yawning and possibly unbridgeable gap between before and after" ("Open Doors" 130).

[7] Critical works that explore a more 'global' response to 9/11 literature include: Kristine Miller's edited volume *Transcultural Literature and Cultures after 9/11*; Susana Araújo's *Transatlantic Fictions of 9/11 and the War on Terror* (2015) and Daniel O'Gorman's *Fictions of the War on Terror* (2015).

power (153). What he proposes is that 9/11 novels would offer the reader "cognitive maps that imagine how US citizenship looks and feels beyond the boundaries of the nation-state, both for Americans and for others" (158). Pankaj Mishra, in "The End of Innocence", investigates novels by DeLillo, McInerney and Kalfus, amongst other 9/11 fiction, and states he is baffled by how "domesticated" they are and how and they have fallen into "circulated clichés in their fictional accounts of terrorists." Mishra continues:

> Composed within the narcissistic heart of the west, most 9/11 fictions seem unable to acknowledge political and ideological belief as a social and emotional reality in the world – the kind of fact that cannot be reduced to the individual experience of rage, envy, sexual frustration and constipation.[8] (n.p.)

But what of post-9/11 fiction and criticism produced in the *last* decade, since about 2010? Do the characteristics of the writing still conform to the generalised concerns and approaches briefly outlined above? Keniston and Quinn suggest that there is a difference between early and later novels about 9/11:

> The first novels about 9/11 feature formal innovations – self-reflexive meta-narratives, disrupted temporality, multiple viewpoints. Later novels have tended to be more formally conservative, yet these more straightforward narratives grapple with more complex representational challenges, often combining exploration of the subjectivities of characters living "in the shadow of no towers" – to use [Art] Spiegelman's phrase – with dramatization of contested interpretations of 9/11. (*Literature After 9/11* 4)

In *After the Fall,* Gray argues that not all post-9/11 fiction can be characterised as an insular American (or western) response to the trauma of that day. Indeed, he suggests that while many texts can be considered in these terms, some more recent American writing (his

[8] "Constipation" is a gesture to Martin Aim's short story "The Last Days of Muhammad Atta."

book was published in 2011) about or since 9/11 is also, and increasingly, enlivened by "imagining the transnational." This is the tile of a section of his book that considers representations of "the immigrant encounter" (*After the Fall* 90). These texts, he asserts, are "responsive to the syncretic character of the United States [and] go way beyond the bipolar, biracial model" (*After the Fall* 101) that characterises the us vs. them discourse of popular American politics.[9] Nonetheless, as Angeliki Tsetsi parses Gray, the vast majority of (first wave) 9/11 fictions failed not because of a failure of language to articulate trauma. Instead, their problems lay

> precisely in the failure to explore these possibilities [of American pluralism and multiculturalism] and the domestication and assimilation of these diverse elements into familiar structures; in effect, the recurrent attempt to define the nation in relation and contrast to the 'sinister Other' – albeit now replaced by Islam, rather than communism – proves sterile and unproductive, utterly reductionist, at a time when 'everything has changed' and America has become a global nation. ("Richard Gray" 2)

Novels belonging to this second, transitional wave include (Irish) Joseph O'Neill's *Netherland* (2008) and (American) Amy Waldman's *The Submission* (2011), which I discuss at length in Chapter Three. O'Neill and Waldman extend their narrative canvases to include a much wider range of characters beyond traumatised white Americans. They have an important precursor in the form of Mohsin Hamid's *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* (2007), which was the first novel, in which 9/11 features as a central driver of plot and character development, to be written by a non-western author (Hamid is Pakistani albeit he has lived

[9] The novels he discusses include Christine Bell's The *Perez Family*, Susan Choi's *The Foreign Student*, Lan Cao's *Monkey Bridge*, Wayne Karlin's *Prisoners*, dao strom's *Grass Roof*, Khaled Hosseini's *The Kite Runner* and Dennis Johnson's *Tree of Smoke*. He notes of these novels, "only some of them are directly concerned with the crisis of terrorism and counter-terrorism since September 11 … [but] all of them address – with greater or lesser success – the fundamental issues raised by that crisis" (17)

extensively in the US and UK). Importantly, too, the protagonists in Hamid's and Waldman's novels are Muslims living in the US. Their rendition of the experiences of Muslims, after 9/11, are very different from Amis's, Updike's and DeLillo's portrayal of Muslims *as* terrorists.

The significant contribution of my thesis to discussions of 9/11 fiction is in my focus on the ways in which, in recent years, a number of Muslim writers living in the West have begun to respond to the limited representations, in fiction about 9/11 and its effects, penned by (white) Anglo-Americans. They do so by focussing on the *other* Americans (or residents of non-western nations) who were or are *also* victims of 9/11 – or the geopolitical and domestic politics that resulted in, and followed, events on that fateful day: Muslim US and UK citizens, non-European refugees, immigrants, or the children of immigrants/refugees in the West. In the later chapters of my thesis, I will consider fiction that features protagonists who are, or who become, radicalised or commit acts of terror, ostensibly confirming the West's worst fears about Muslims but also challenging these in complex ways. Early examples of such writing include: Yasmin Khadra's *The Attack* (2006),[10] Ed Hussain's memoir, *The Islamist* (2007) and Sunjeev Sahota's *Ours are the Streets* (2011). Later examples – which I designate as belonging to a third wave of 9/11 fiction – include Tabish Khair's *Just Another Jihadi Jane* (2016), Laleh Khadivi's *A Good Country* (2017), Kamila Shamsi's *Home Fire* (2017), Fatima Bhutto's *The Runaways* (2019), Mahir Guven's *Older Brother* (2019) and Hassan Ghedi Santur's *The Youth of God* (2019). While these works certainly do not advocate for or glorify terrorism, they tend to offer more nuanced portrayals of their Muslim characters, including radicalised ones, than was the case in the body of novels so often referred to as 9/11 fiction. I take as a cue for my argument the assertion of Elleke Boehmer and Stephen Morton in their editors' introduction to *Terror and the Postcolonial*

[10] This book was originally published in French in 2005 and a year later it was translated into English.

(2015), although my interests are not really to do with postcolonialism per se but rather the wider legacy of (neo)imperialism practised by the West. They argue for the "interrogat[ion of] the category and experience of terror from the standpoint of the colonised and the abject of history" (12), suggesting the need to consider "he who inflicts terror himself, having once been its victim" (15). To me, it is important to consider 9/11 fiction from a different perspective, from the point of view of the strange other who has also been affected by the events.

My research aims to focus on how cultural/ethnic "strangers/others" (including radicalised ones) – especially those who have made western nations their home – are portrayed in post-9/11 fiction by white Anglo-Americans authors *and* to contrast these novels with fictional representations by Muslim immigrant authors, hoping to shed light on how these ethnic/cultural others might imagine themselves, where they stand, and how they feel in the western country that they have either been born into or have voluntarily chosen to call home.

My thesis consists of five chapters. Chapter One considers the creation of what is often referred to as the "dominant narrative" about 9/11, a narrative curated and constructed via media reportage, US presidential rhetoric and initial literary responses. Nationally and globally, 9/11 was initially 'known' and experienced through highly circulated media images broadcast repeatedly on television screens and newspapers. I argue that initial understandings and perceptions of the 9/11 attacks were also heavily influenced by the early literary responses published in prominent newspapers and magazines.

In the second chapter I analyse the first wave of fictional writing about 9/11. After a brief look at how some scholars have categorised 9/11 fiction and how critics have responded to such categorisations, I discuss a selection of representative fiction penned by western authors that were published in (approximately) the decade after September 11, 2001, paying close attention to their representation of American domestic trauma, and of Muslim characters and

Islam. The texts on which I focus are Martin Amis's "The Last Days of Muhammed Atta" (2006), John Updike's *Terrorist* (2006) and Don DeLillo's *Falling Man* (2007).

In the chapter that follows, Chapter Three, I consider how fictional writing about 9/11 began to change towards the end of the first decade of the twenty-first century, arguing that, in part, this was the result of the new era of politics ushered in by the election of Barak Obama as US president in 2009 and, also, evidences a broadening interest in America's (and Britain's) disenfranchised immigrants and non-white citizens. I consider this to be a transitional 'second wave' of 9/11 fiction and focus closely on Waldman's *The Submission* (2011) as an example. I follow this by introducing some Muslim immigrant authors, representative of what I call the third wave of post-9/11 fiction. I discuss how they have responded to the literature penned by western authors in recent years with an emphasis on their portrayal of Muslim immigrant characters and radicalisation. I argue that while some of this writing is not successful, and falls back into problematic stereotyping, largely due to the lack on insight offered into the psychology of their radicalised Muslim protagonists, it nonetheless represents a significant change in the focus of 9/11 fiction.

In Chapters Four and Five I discuss what I deem to be two more successful fictions about home-grown (Muslim) terrorism written by Muslim immigrant authors. In Chapter Four I discuss Laleh Khadivi's *A Good Country* (2017), a novel that has garnered little critical attention despite quite extensive and generally positive reviews at the time of publication. I consider what I believe are the strengths and weaknesses of Khadivi's portrayal of the radicalisation of her young protagonist, Rez. I pay particular attention to her choice to write the novel in a limited third person voice, largely focalised through Rez, and the effects of this for the reader. In my final chapter, Chapter Five, I turn my attention to Kamila Shamsie's highly successful and award-winning *Home Fire* (2017), which also features a male, teenage, second-generation immigrant Muslim character, Parvaiz, who eventually leaves the UK to join the

jihad in Syria. It is my claim that the novel's success in garnering understanding, and even sympathy, for Parvaiz and his family is the result of Shamsie's complex narration and extensive research. She offers a rewriting of Sophocles' tragedy *Antigone*, in five parts (echoing the playwright's five acts). Each of the five sections is focalised via free indirect discourse through a different character and set in a different location. The result is a nuanced, convincing portrayal of the multiple – often familial, certainly psychological – drivers that set Parvaiz on the road to radicalisation, the misunderstandings and lack of information that exacerbates this, and the pain and loss experienced by his family. By setting placing Khadivi's and Shamsie's novels alongside each other, I put the two texts in dialogue to investigate what the authors have decided to emphasise and how they have done so, in their attempt to portray the delicate psycho-social process of radicalisation.

Chapter One: Creation of the Dominant Narrative: media reportage, presidential rhetoric and initial literary responses

Media Reportage on 9/11

The events on the morning of Tuesday, 11th of September 2001, are well known. Four coordinated attacks by 19 terrorists associated with the Islamic extremist group Al Qaeda, using hijacked passenger airplanes as weapons, were carried out against targets in the United States. In close succession, two planes crashed into the Twin Towers of the World Trade Centre in New York City, both of which subsequently collapsed due to the fierce fires that erupted. A third plane hit the Pentagon military headquarters just outside Washington D.C., and a fourth crashed in a field in Shanksville, Pennsylvania, after a failed attempt by passengers and crew to regain control of the flight from the terrorists. In total, almost 3000 people were killed and more than 6000 injured.

Many agree that initial responses to the tragedy were closely bound up with media representations of the attacks, particularly of the destruction and collapse of the Twin Towers. The American public and others around the globe initially experienced 9/11 as a series of highly-mediated images that were broadcasted repeatedly on television screens around the world.[11] As Brian A. Monahan argues, "much of how we made sense of the attacks, weeks, and months after their occurrence and, in turn, how we have come to understand and act on '9/11,' derives from how the media first constructed and told the tale" (*The Shock of the News* 9). The way the mainstream media packaged and presented the attacks, he asserts, constructed a reality

[11] According to Douglas Kellner, "[t]he 9/11 terror spectacle unfolded in a city that was one of the most media-saturated in the world and that played out a deadly drama live on television. The images of the planes hitting the World Trade Center towers and their collapse were broadcast repeatedly, as if repetition were necessary to master a highly traumatic event" (Kellner 43-4). See also Fallon (2019) and Maulden (2015).

that "tilted the balance in favour of certain interpretations and, by extension, determined the social and political response to the attacks" (9). He continues:

> As a result, September 11 became a story primarily about patriotism, loss, and heroes and, for the most part, not a story about US foreign relations, US military policy, poor interagency coordination, government inefficiencies, or other interpretive frames. … '9/11' now represents a well-stocked reservoir of images, symbols, and rhetoric from which political elites, public officials, news workers, and other social actors continue to draw in order to invoke certain sentiments or assumptions in their audiences, promote a particular version of reality, and buttress or advance agendas and ideologies. (10-11)

Birgit Däwes similarly asserts that "the news networks' endlessly repeated loops 'hijacked our imagination' [quoting Ulrich Baer] and were turned into a visual master narrative, which has dominated the discourse of remembering 9/11 long after the attacks themselves" ("Close Neighbors" 497).

It has been convincingly argued that television was the primary source of information about the attacks on the fateful day itself and those that followed it.[12] 9/11 was not only unprecedented but totally unexpected; no one anticipated such an attack on American soil. During this time of uncertainty, and while President Bush was shuttled around the country on Air Force One for safety, it was the news crews who scrambled to report events. Television became the immediate source of information and the public tuned in to news channels for clues on not only on what was happening but also to try and understand why the attacks had taken place. What happened in Manhattan on that day, insists Thomas Stubblefield, "were images as much or more than actual events" (*9/11 and the Visual Culture of Disaster* 3). Katalin Orbán

[12] See for example: Altheide (2009), Finnegan (2007), Abel (2005), Millar and Frank (2012), Zelizer and Allen (2002).

describes 9/11 as a "constitutively visual event that can (and did) become a real time global media spectacle" (qtd. in Stubblefield 4). The artist Damien Hirst even expressed admiration for what he claimed was the ability of the terrorists to create a "visually stunning" artwork, despite the "wickedness" of their acts (qtd. in Allison, "9/11 Wicked but a Work of Art" n.p.).

Figure 1: images of newspaper front pages from September 11, 2001.

Initial newspaper coverage of the events was also highly visual, patriotic, and emotive as the pictures above evidence (Figure 1).[13] Brian A. Monahan writes of the coverage that "the dominant narrative through which events were communicated to the public was transformed into a dramatic tale that closely mirrored popular fiction that detailed journalistic inquiry" (*The Shock of the News* xii). He suggests that, in consequence, "a deeply significant historical moment [was] reduced to sentiments that seem to have been lifted from the tagline of a Hollywood movie poster" (xvi).

Reporting on the results of a survey of newspaper editors one year after 9/11, George Kennedy and Esther Thorson state that "[s]eventy-three percent of the newspaper executives and 77% of the broadcast executives reported more use the American flag and other patriotic

[13] Source of images: Paranick (2021).

symbols in the news after 9/11" ("Hometown News" 15). The attacks were compared with Pearl Harbour, the event that initiated the US's entry into World War Two as one of the Allied forces. Leonard Jr. Downie and Robert G. Kaiser elaborate:

> on September 11, 2001, and for some time after, Americans remained glued to their televisions, turned in record numbers to online news sites and bought millions of extra copies of their newspapers to help absorb and cope with the horrors of shocking terrorist attacks on the United States. In the weeks that followed, good reporting allowed Americans to participate vicariously in the investigations of the terrorists and the government's planning for retaliation. Journalists could educate Americans about Islamic extremists, the history of Afghanistan, the difficulty of defending the United States against resourceful and suicidal terrorists, and much more. Journalism defined the events of September 11 and their aftermath. In those circumstances the importance of journalism was obvious and much discussed. (*News About the News* 4)

The authors, without any irony, assert that "good reporting" allowed people to "participate vicariously in … the government's planning for retaliation." That retaliation took form, of course, as the War on Terror, the effects of which are still writ large globally today. But that "good reporting" was far from neutral or objective. Indeed, as Ross Perigoe and Mahmoud Eid attest, "The great surprise [of the attacks] afforded a unique opportunity to see daily journalism bereft of its veneers of detachment, objectivity, and neutrality" (*Mission Invisible* 4). Charles N. Davis claims that "Less than 24 hours after the events of Sept. 11, the federal government was hard at work scrubbing information from Web sites, stonewalling requests for paper records and denying journalists access to the most basic information" ("The Signs Were There" 39). He details the extent to which the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) was amended, and the Presidential Records Acts introduced, to "clampdown" (40) on the release of information

of all kinds. Many journalists, without alternatives, repeated the government's take on events and supported the attempt to "educate" the American population. Detailed discussion of this, is outside the scope of my thesis, but the facts of governmental blockage of and manipulation of information to the media, and so to the general public, is important because this surely impacted on the ways in which novelists went on to represent the events, even if they attempted to supplement or even challenge media accounts.

Parallel with this limitation of certain kinds of information, following 9/11, according to Byron T. Scott, American newspapers "developed a kind of traumatic amnesia that pretended nothing else was going on in the world" ("Challenges to the Unpatriotic" 56); journalists were "expected to be patriots as well as professionals" (60). This patriotism was particularly expressed in the vilification of Muslims, even in relation to other minority religious 'others.' In a wide-ranging survey that used "computer-assisted, lexicon-based coding of over 850,000 articles across the 20-year period of 1996–2015 … in 17 national and regional US newspapers," compared to a "representative baseline of articles," Erik Bleich and A. Maurits van den Veen found that "the tone of American newspaper articles mentioning Muslims has indeed been consistently and substantially negative, compared both to a representative set of articles and to stories containing references to Hindus, Jews, or Catholics" ("Media Portrayals of Muslims" 19, 22). These findings are consistent with those conducted by many others.[14]

Ron Charles argues that the newspaper accounts seemed insufficient: "readers wanted more – so much more. Journalists and scholars, politicians and photographers, along with spiritual leaders, self-help gurus and conspiracy theorists, all rushed to their computers. Dozens of 9/11 books appeared before the end of the year [2001]; as many as 150 more by

[14] Bleich and van den Veen argue that the events of 9/11 were not the cause of such negative stereotyping, which was already evident prior to the attacks, but it certainly exacerbated this ("Media Portrayals of Terrorists" 24). See, for example, Saifuddin and Matthes (2017), Jackson (2010), Mertens and de Smaele (2016), Trevino et al. (2010), Nacos and Torres-Reyn (2007).

the first anniversary" ("How 9/11 Altered the Fiction Landscape" n.p.). As Charles notes, however, there were concerns about whether it was appropriate, or possible to fictionalise the attacks: "Literary novelists, so many of whom lived in New York and couldn't get the ash of death out of their clothes, faced a barrage of practical and theoretical threats to their creative enterprise (n.p.)." The first literary responses came in the form of short, often-biographical creative non-fiction written by novelists (to which I will return) and poetry, often intensely lyrical, elegiac and confessional. It is not my intention to discuss 9/11 poetry, but it is worth noting, as Ann Keniston claims, "[t]hat poetry seemed suddenly crucial to the national experience of processing the attacks" ("Not Needed, Except as Meaning" 659) not least because of its brevity and immediacy. Moberly Luger asserts that "[i]n the wake of 9/11, nearly a dozen anthologies [of poems] were published that responded to the attacks. Newspapers, magazines, and websites teemed with poetry" ("Poetry as Monument" 183).

Presidential Rhetoric

The governmental response to the attacks was immediate and had a significant impact on news coverage and on the perceptions of Americans. Patricia Leavy discusses the extent to which "9/11 reporting … reinforced and legitimized the 'official story' constructed by the Bush administration" ("Writing 9/11 Memory" 86).[15] She argues that

> journalists reported on the event within a socio-political context in which dissent was viewed as unpatriotic and there was great pressure on journalists to model hegemonic patriotism. Within this context, it is my central argument that the American press constructed a narrative that contained the concepts of heroism, evil, and patriotism that were later transplanted to support a range of

[15] See also: Izard and Perkins (2011), Monahan (2010), Ross (2006), Hess and Kalb (2003), Norris et al. (2003).

> political causes. The media was further pressured in the post-9/11 weeks by a political climate in which dissent was labelled as unpatriotic (a public sentiment they helped to legitimize through their uncritical coverage of the event). (86)

Leavy notes, further, that the dominance of the official narrative "was achieved at the expense of circulating alterative narratives that might have promoted public dialogue instead of threatening democracy" (86). Richard Jackson argues in the same vein, that "the nation's most powerfully symbolic actors" were given "almost unprecedented access to the media, which in turn, largely repeated the administration's message uncritically and without interpretation" ("The 9/11 Attacks and the Social Construction" 29). As an entry point to this "official narrative" I will briefly consider some of the major speeches made by George W. Bush, then president, in the weeks following immediately after the tragedy.

Presidential rhetoric is carefully crafted to either hide or raise awareness of causes considered significant and strategic at specific moments in a nation's history.[16] A painstakingly tailored example of it are US presidential addresses. In the voice of the highest authority figure in the nation, these speeches serve to address the American public, communicate the presidents' views, present the president's vision of the nation, and convince the populace to share this. How the president addresses a specific situation and portrays the 'actors' within it – especially, in this study, Muslims and Islam – not only affects how this group and their religion are perceived and treated in the mainstream society but also shapes public opinion. After the horrific events of 9/11, all eyes were on President George Bush to see how he would address this dreadful tragedy and reassure the American public.

Prior to the events of 9/11, many Americans raised concerns about President Bush's leadership, however 9/11 gave him a chance to rebuild his image, prove his leadership and

[16] See, for example Zarefsky (2004), Edwards (1996).

assure the public that he was the man to lead the nation. A CNN/USA Today/Gallup poll, conducted on 21-22 September 2001, indicated that 90% of Americans approved how President Bush, who had only been in office for eight months, was handling his job (Moore, "Bush Job Approval" n.p.) This was up 35-40 percentage points and remained in the upper 80%s in the months that followed. In the two days after the attacks, Bush only made a few addresses to the nation: an evening address on September 11 and a few brief, off-the cuff comments and press releases. 9/11 had damaged the collective national identity of Americans; people were shocked, confused, and anxious and expected their leader to respond and assure them that those responsible would suffer the consequences of their actions. Americans saw the threat of terrorism at their doorstep and consequently rallied behind their government and quicky supported President Bush on taking military action in the war on terrorism. From the outset, Bush named the terrorists in terms of ethnicity. Debra Merskin states that in a post-9/11 world "a face has also been put on terror and it is Arab" ("The Construction of Arabs as Enemies"157). Leti Volpp makes a similar claim: "September 11 facilitated the consolidation of a new identity category that grouped together persons who appear to be 'Middle Eastern, Arab, or Muslim.' [...] What has solidified this identity category is a particular racialization, wherein members of this group have been identified as terrorists, and disidentified as citizens" (*The Citizen and the Terrorist* 147).

In his first address to the nation delivered on September 11, President Bush used the adjective "evil" to describe the terrorists and what they did: "Thousands of lives were suddenly ended by evil, despicable acts of terror"; "Today, our nation saw evil, the very worst of human nature"; "The search is underway for those who are behind these evil acts." He then proceeded to recite Psalm 23: "Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I fear no evil, for You are with me," and described America as a great nation whose freedom had come under attack ("Statement by the President"). According to Merskin's analysis, this brief

statement "laid the foundation on which his future rhetoric would build, solidifying the evil enemy image" (166). Cumulatively, this rhetoric constructed "Islam as a security issue" (Erdoan A. Shipoli, *Islam, Securitization* xi) by associating Islam with terrorism. As Carol K. Winkler attests,

> Terrorism functions as a signifier of American identity, defining what the nation stands for and against. The term divides those who are civilized from those who are uncivilized, those who defend economic freedom from those who would attack America's way of life, and those who support democracy from those who would disrupt it. (*In the Name of Terrorism* 2)

In President Bush's second statement, delivered a day later, he used stereotypical shadow images in reference to the enemy ("Remarks by the President" n.p.). He also reminded the nation that American's "[f]reedom and democracy are under attack," and that 9/11 threatened "all freedom-loving people everywhere in the world" ("Remarks by the President"). In this statement, made during a photo opportunity with the national security team, he added that what was at stake was a "struggle of good versus evil" and insisted that the good (Americans) would prevail. In his third statement, at a Washington Prayer Service, delivered on 14th September 2001, President Bush claimed his aim was to "rid the world of evil" ("President's Remarks" n.p.). He called for a war on evil and clearly stated that this war "will end in a way, and at an hour, of our choosing." Bush reminded Americans that they are free, and they were attacked because their nation is "freedom's home and defender," thus concluding that America had no other choice but to defend themselves from the forces of evil. Bush used words like "us, them, they, evil, those people, demons," "wanted: dead or alive" in relation to people of Arab and Middle Eastern descent. A few days later, on September 20, 2001, he famously addressed a joint session of Congress and the nation with the words: "Every nation in every region now has a decision to make: either you are with us or you are with the terrorists"

("President Bush Addresses the Nation" n.p.). "Us" (and the US) was associated with a particularly western way of life (capitalist, neo-liberal), set of beliefs, and religion – Christianity – as Bush's frequent references to and quotations from the Bible implied.[17] James Maggio claims that the "theme of freedom being linked to God's providence became a mantra of the Bush Administration" ("Presidential Rhetoric of Terror" 822).[18] Michelle C. Bligh, Jeffrey C. Kohles and James R. Meindl argue along the same lines:

> Many Americans perceived the events of 9/11 as an attack not only on the Pentagon and the World Trade Centre but also as an attack on their fundamental values and beliefs. The President himself reflected this perspective in his 'Enduring Freedom' speech [October 7, 2001], in which he noted that in the incipient war, 'we defend not only our precious freedoms, but also the freedom of people everywhere to live and raise their children free from fear.' These comments are indicative of the collective response to the attacks as an assault on the American 'way of life,' suggesting that the events of 9/11 threatened the very ideology that America represents to many. As President Bush commented on the day of the assaults: 'Today, our fellow citizens, our way of life, our very freedom came under attack.'("Charisma under Crisis" 212)

According to David Zarefsky, presidential rhetoric is rarely based on empirical cause and effect; instead, he argues, a "key function of presidential rhetoric is to define social reality" ("Presidential Rhetoric" 607). It is this 'reality' that is then highly-likely to be reproduced in

[17] Bush: "Freedom and fear, justice and cruelty, have always been at war, and we know that God is not neutral between them" ("Adress to a Joint Session" n.p.).

[18] In Bush's "Islam is Peace" speech, on Sept 17 2001, he announced that "America counts millions of Muslims amongst our citizens, and Muslims make an incredibly valuable contribution to our country. Muslims are doctors, lawyers, law professors, members of the military, entrepreneurs, shopkeepers, moms and dads… . This is a great country. It's a great country because we share the same values of respect and dignity and human worth. And it is my honor to be meeting with leaders who feel just the same way I do. They're outraged, they're sad. They love America just as much as I do" ("Islam is Peace" n.p.). In short, "good' Muslims are assimilated, with Americans "like us," who love this "great country."

news media (especially during a crisis) and often becomes the 'truth' for a populace: "Because of his prominent political position and his access to the means of communication, the president, by defining a situation, might be able to shape the context in which events or proposals are viewed by the public" (Zarefsky 611). And a key aspect of the reality defined by Bush related not only to the "us" of Americans but the "them" of terrorists – as not only those who hated American freedom and the American way of life, but as *bad* Muslims. In his 20th September address to Congress and the nation he not only clearly spoke of "the enemy" but specified their nationality and religion:

> The leadership of al Qaeda has great influence in Afghanistan and supports the Taliban regime in controlling most of that country. In Afghanistan, we see al Qaeda's vision for the world. Afghanistan's people have been brutalized –many are starving, and many have fled. Women are not allowed to attend school. You can be jailed for owning a television. Religion can be practiced only as their leaders dictate. A man can be jailed in Afghanistan if his beard is not long enough. The United States respects the people of Afghanistan – after all, we are currently its largest source of humanitarian aid – but we condemn the Taliban regime. It is not only repressing its own people, it is threatening people everywhere by sponsoring and sheltering and supplying terrorists. By aiding and abetting murder, the Taliban regime is committing murder.
>
> The Taliban must act, and act immediately. They will hand over the terrorists, or they will share in their fate. I also want to speak tonight directly to Muslims throughout the world. We respect your faith. It's practiced freely by many millions of Americans, and by millions more in countries that America counts as friends. Its teachings are good and peaceful, and those who commit evil in the name of Allah blaspheme the name of Allah. The terrorists are traitors to

> their own faith, trying, in effect, to hijack Islam itself. The enemy of America is not our many Muslim friends; it is not our many Arab friends. Our enemy is a radical network of terrorists, and every government that supports them. ("President Bush Addresses the Nation" n.p.)

To be sure, in this speech Bush didn't paint *all* Muslims as bad, just extremists who are "traitors to their own faith." It is highly likely that at this stage Bush didn't want to alienate Islamic or Arab "friends" and "friendly nations" who might assist America in bringing the Taliban to its knees. The problem is that for many mainstream Americans, *all* Muslims were potentially bad Muslims. They were not able to distinguish the "good" ones from the "evil" ones on the basis of appearance, accent, skin colour, religious or cultural attire, and so on. *Any* Muslim was a potential terrorist in the mind of many mainstream Americans. A few months later, in his "Axis of Evil" speech, delivered to a nationally televised joint session of Congress on 29th January 2002, George W. Bush went even further and identified the allies of "the enemy," naming North Korea, Iran and Iraq. Whole populations of Muslim people, worldwide, were declared complicit with evil ("President Bush's 2002 State of the Union Address" n.p.).

Initial responses by Anglo-American literary writers

Given the political climate in the aftermath of the attacks, fuelled by presidential rhetoric and journalism slanted by patriotism and a lack of information other than that promoted by the US government, it is not surprising that the first literary responses to 9/11, published as short creative non-fictional pieces penned by well-known authors in major newspapers, tended to reconfirm what was fast becoming the dominant narrative about the attacks, America/Americans (and its British and other Western allies) and the enemy other. 9/11 was such a "visual spectacle" that "literary authors, experts at exploring the human condition through the written words" were invited to "interpret or narrate the trauma" (Keeble "Why the

9/11 Novel Has Been Such a Contested and Troubled Genre" n.p.). Charlie Lee-Potter argues that in the early days after the attacks, "many novelists rehearsed their later fictional responses by acting as journalists, writing commentaries, essays and fragments of prose for the newspapers and magazines that queued up to commission salving words" (*Writing the 9/11 Decade* 3). She makes the further claim that these writings revealed an "aversion to complexity" and that "each of them fumbled in one form or another for the nostrum that in the end, love will overcome" (3). Those who didn't conform "risked vilification and even threats of violence" (7).

In the days and weeks after the fall of the Twin Towers, two major international newspapers, *The New Yorker* (USA) and *The Guardian* (UK) published commentary on and responses to the attacks by well-known authors of fiction or creative non-fiction. Brief, and often intensely personal, these are some of the first published literary responses to the terror attacks (in English). *The New Yorker*'s September 16 "Talk of The Town" magazine, called "Tuesday, and After," included contributions from various New York writers: John Updike, Jonathan Franzen, Denis Johnson, Roger Angell, Aharon Appelfeld, Rebecca Mead, Susan Sontag, Amitav Ghosh, and Donald Antrim. They variously tried to capture the American heartache and to write about their disbelief, shock and distress in a language that is both raw and figurative, direct and imaginative. As noted above, many write about the events as a kind of rupture or split between an innocent 'then' and a traumatised 'now': "In the space of two hours, we left behind a happy era of Game Boy economics and trophy houses and entered a world of fear and vengeance" writes Jonathan Franzen ("Tuesday, and After" n.p.). Roger Angell says, "The next morning, you both awoke bereft and older – the whole country felt this way – and in need of revision. This week has been different but the same: how innocent we were back then in the sixties and back last Monday" ("Tuesday, and After" n.p.). Common, too is the idea that the horror of the events is unthinkable, unimaginable and impossible to articulate

directly. The art and craft of creativity was needed to say what normal thought, everyday language or realistic photographs could not.[19] "But what can one say when what is happening blunts the few thoughts that one has?" writes Aharon Appelfeld ("Tuesday, and After" n.p.). Overwhelmingly, and perhaps inevitably, the emphasis was on American loss and shock. Most of the essays are elegiac in tone, and decidedly insular insofar as they look inward, depicting Americans as helpless, underserving victims. Not much is said about the terrorists, but what is said is telling.

"Tuesday, and After" opens with words by John Updike, one of the best-known American fiction writers at the time, and one whose novel, *Terrorist* I discuss in my next chapter: "Suddenly summoned to witness something great and horrendous, we keep fighting not to reduce it to our own smallness" (n.p.). He describes himself watching as the south tower as it "fell straight down like an elevator, with a tinkling shiver and a groan of concussion" and recalls seeing "the footage of hellbent airplane, exploding jet fuel, and imploding tower" which was "played and replayed, [like] much rehearsed moments from a nightmare ballet" (n.p.). He characterises the terrorists as "[d]etermined men who have transposed their own lives to a martyr's afterlife" (n.p.) (It is widely believed that according to the Islamic hadith corpus and Quran, religious martyrs, and those who participate in military *jihad*, will be rewarded in paradise after death).[20] While Updike's comment doesn't directly name the terrorists as Muslim, the mention of "a martyr's afterlife" points towards this. In the piece that follows,

[19] Artist Ejay Weiss captures this in his diary entry for the day, suggesting that visual art may be able to "render" and convey what words are unable to: "The unthinkable and unimaginable has occurred. /A horror of devastation and death – / A void / A violence beyond grasp" (Weiss, "Rendering the Unthinkable").

[20] According to Shaykh Waleed Al-Firyaan, the hadith of al-Miqdam ibn Ma'di Karb states that the Prophet Mohammed said: "The martyr (shahid) has seven blessings from Allah: he is forgiven from the moment his blood is first shed; he will be shown his place in Paradise; he will be spared the trial of the grave; and he will be secure on the Day of the Greatest Terror (the Day of Judgement); there will be placed on his head a crown of dignity, one ruby of which is better than this world and all that is in it; he will be married to seventy-two of al-hur al-'iyn [pure women or virgins]; and he will be permitted to intercede for seventy of his relatives" ("Islam Question and Answer"). For a refutation that this widespread belief is verified in the Quran, see Ibn Warra, "Virgins? What Virgins?"

Jonathan Franzen is more overt in evoking the nationalities and religion of the terrorists: "Never mind whether certain Palestinians were or were not dancing in the streets," or "some of these glad artists were hiding in ruined Afghanistan," he writes. "Somewhere – you can be absolutely sure of this – the death artists who planned the attack were rejoicing over the terrible beauty of the towers' collapse" (n.p.). He continues,

> I'm trying to imagine what I don't want to imagine: the scene inside a plane one moment before impact. At the controls, a terrorist is raising a prayer of thanks to Allah in expectation of instant transport from this world to the next one, where houris [virgins] will presently reward him for his glorious success. ("Tuesday, and After" n.p.)

Denis Johnson, in the piece that follows, rationalises the events by evoking America's enemies. For example, he writes that *"*[t]ravelling in the Third World, I've found that to be an American sometimes means to be wondrously celebrated." Sometimes, but not always, he notes. "On the other hand," he continues, *"*I think we sense – but don't care always to apprehend – the reality that some people hate America. To many suffering souls, we must seem incomprehensibly aloof and self-centred, or worse" ("Tuesday, and After" n.p.). While he appears to acknowledge the American hubris and actions that may have generated such hatred, he does so by evoking what "some people" might think of the USA and how "those people" have acted as a result. His, then, is an early version of what would soon become the official rhetoric in which "us" and "them" were opposed in binarily moral terms:[21]

> For nearly a century, war has rolled lopsidedly over the world, crushing the innocent in their homes. For half that century, the United States has been seen, by some people, as keeping the destruction rolling without getting too much in

[21] This is succinctly captured in US President Bush's repeated phrase: "Either you are with us, or you are with the terrorists."

> the way of it—has been seen, by some people, to lurk behind it. And those people hate us. The acts of terror against this country – the hijackings, the kidnappings, the bombings of our airplanes and barracks and embassies overseas, and now these mass atrocities on our own soil – tell us how much they hate us. They hate us as people hate a bad God, and they'll kill themselves to hurt us. ("Tuesday, and After" n.p.)

While the whole country and the world was in shock after the 9/11 attacks, intellectuals like Robert Jensen, Ward Churchill, Bill Maher,[22] Noam Chomsky[23] and Susan Sontag published often controversial – and to some, outrageously unpatriotic – questioning opinions. 9/11 resulted in a surge of national pride in the US and sparked the beginning of a "new, more difficult debate over the balance among national security, free speech and patriotism" (Carter and Barringer, "A Nation Challenged" n.p.) – nonetheless the free speech of some who challenged the official narrative was deemed to be unacceptably unpatriotic.

One earlier contributor to this "alternative narrative" was Robert Jensen, a professor of journalism from the University of Texas at Austin, who published an article in the *Houston Chronicle* three days after 9/11, calling it a "day of sadness, anger and fear"; however he stated that his anger was "directed at the leaders of this country" and his fear was "not only for the safety of Americans but for innocent civilians in other countries." Although he condemned the 9/11 attacks, he also voiced disapproval of the US government: "this act was no more despicable than the massive acts of terrorism – the deliberate killing of civilians for political purposes – that the U.S. government has committed during my lifetime" ("U.S. Just as Guilty of Committing Own Violent Acts" n.p.). The University of Texas president, five days later, wrote a letter to the newspaper defending Jensen's "right to free speech," but he at the same

[22] Bill Maher was a TV presenter for the "Politically Incorrect" show. In his September 17, 2001 episode, Maher made controversial comments about 9/11 attacks, where he condemned the United States Foreign policy.
[23] Noam Chomsky *9-11* (2001).

time made it clear that it was Jensen's own point of view and that "he does not speak on the behalf of university." He went on to state that "Jensen is not only misguided but has become a fountain of undiluted foolishness on issues of public policy" and that he was personally "disgusted" by Jensen's opinion (qtd. Nichols, "War of Words" n.p.). In an article written some years later, Jensen says that after 9/11, many people started to purchase books on Islam, and although in his opinion there was "nothing wrong with wanting to know more about Islam," he believed it would prove more useful to try and learn more about US foreign policy given that 9/11 was a political rather than religious event. In the same article, he defends his earlier comments in The *Houston Chronicle* stating that he knew he was offending the majority of Americans, but his goal "was to reach out to progressive people who might be struggling for a way to understand the events of the day, to give them an analysis that would be otherwise hard to find in the mass media, to let them know that they were not alone," and his intention was to "help build an anti-war movement that could derail the expected US military response ("September 11 and the Failures of American Intellectuals" 82).

Susan Sontag was another writer who challenged the developing dominant narrative soon after 9/11. Her untitled 460-word contribution to *The New Yorker* feature was controversial – and to some unforgivably unpatriotic (as were Noam Chomsky's various essays and interviews, collected under the title *9-11*, and published a few months later).[24] Sontag's essay drew fierce public criticism most likely because she was a widely-recognised intellectual. She supported Salman Rushdie in the early days of Ayatollah Khomeini's death sentence against him and this made her a potential target of Islamic extremists, but she was equally critical of American foreign policy and what she referred to as the Bush Government's patriotic

[24] 9/11 caused a surge of national pride in the US, resulting in "immediate, visibly evident increases in expressions of national identification and unity throughout the United States" (Li and Brewer 732). The words of Sontag and Chomsky flew in the face of popular opinion, resulting in them being labelled "anti-American" (Escobar" n.p.). As Ray Haberski notes, "Generally, many intellectuals and pundits thought Sontag stood as the exemplar of anti-Americanism at a moment of frenetic American patriotism" ("Susan Sontag and the 9/11 Haze" n.p.).

media's "self-righteous drivel and outright deceptions" ("Tuesday, and After" n.p.). She decried "the sanctimonious, reality-concealing rhetoric" that was fast becoming the dominant (Western political and media) narrative about the attacks:

> The voices licensed to follow the event seem to have joined together in a campaign to infantilize the public. Where is the acknowledgment that this was not a 'cowardly' attack on 'civilization' or 'liberty' or 'humanity' or 'the free world' but an attack on the world's self-proclaimed superpower, undertaken as a consequence of specific American alliances and actions? How many citizens are aware of the ongoing American bombing of Iraq? And if the word 'cowardly' is to be used, it might be more aptly applied to those who kill from beyond the range of retaliation, high in the sky, than to those willing to die themselves in order to kill others. In the matter of courage (a morally neutral virtue): whatever may be said of the perpetrators of Tuesday's slaughter, they were not cowards. (Tuesday, and After" n.p.)

Sontag was, as Patricia Keeton suggests, something of a lone voice at the time, writing against the mainstream media's characterisation of the US "as a victim rather than an aggressor." As Keeton notes, "[h]er piece was vilified in the media" ("Reevaluating the 'Old' Cold War" 114). It caused an outrage, and she was widely criticised for her opinions. Madeleine Elfenbein notes that Sontag was:

> among a tiny minority of public figures [taking this stance], who would shrink to virtually nil when they saw what happened to her. She was called 'deranged,' 'an ally of evil,' and 'a despicable woman'; former New York City Mayor Ed Koch declared she belonged in the ninth circle of hell. ("The Years of Magical Thinking" n.p.)

Daniel Lazare elaborates:

> Andrew Sullivan described her piece as 'deranged' and Charles Krauthammer said Sontag was morally obtuse, while Rod Dreher, a columnist for the *New York Post*, expressed a desire 'to walk barefoot on broken glass across the Brooklyn Bridge, up to that despicable woman's apartment, grab her by the neck, drag her down to ground zero and force her to say that to the firefighters'. ("The New Yorker Goes to War" n.p.)

David Talbot similarly writes, "She was called an 'America-hater,' a 'moral idiot,' a 'traitor' who deserved to be driven into 'the wilderness, never more to be heard'" ("The 'Traitor' Fires Back" n.p.).

As these comments suggest, Sontag received fierce criticism for her essay, due to the assessment of many that it was ill-timed, insensitive, and lacked respect for public emotions and grief, which could be the reason why, in an interview with Talbot in *Salon,* she attempted to defend her *New Yorker* essay. In the interview she stated that she was surprised by the hostile reaction to it: "I did not think for a moment my essay was radical or even particularly dissenting. It seemed very common sense" ("The 'Traitor' Fires Back" n.p.). When asked about her position on "the war against terrorism" she replied that as a secular person and as a woman she was "appalled by the Taliban regime" and "I would love to see that government overthrown and something less appalling put in its place" but she did not think that bombing was the answer. Sontag stated, "there's a great disconnect between reality and what people in government and the media are saying of the reality" and that "what is being peddled to the public is a fairy tale. And the atmosphere of intimidation is quite extraordinary" (n.p.). When asked to explain what she meant by the phrase "the hijackers displayed more courage than those, presumably in the U.S. military, who bomb their enemies from a safe distance," she replied that she did not use the word "courage" and in fact she had been very careful in choosing

her word; she said she believed that they should not be called "cowards" and "I believe that courage is morally neutral" (n.p.). Interestingly, and importantly, the charges laid against Sontag by so many were framed not in the political and ethical terms she used, but in very specific religious ones. Consider this, for example, from "Open Letter to Susan Sontag," penned by Melissa Byles and published in *Off Course*, a University of Albany literary journal:

> [I]s not 'cowards' an apt word for fanatics of all sorts? Obviating life's perplexing ambiguities, the difficult problems of being in the world and of living with others, in the name of a simple faith in a beyond – in this particular case, a faith which promises those young men who blow themselves up for Allah eternal delights in a paradise where flow rivers of milk, wine and clarified honey, with beautiful maidens whose virginity is ever renewed, like the moon – may we not properly call such contempt for life and such simple faith cowardly? ("Open Letter" n.p.)

Whether or not the suicidal terrorists should or should not rightly be called "cowards" is beside the point. What is crucial here is the resort to a crude caricature of Islamic belief, much like that used by Jonathan Franzen, as a means of describing the terrorists' motivations and a complete refusal to engage with the thrust of Sontag's argument – her critique of American global imperialism. In an article published after Sontag's death, Megan Riley McGilchrist described Sontag's statement in the *New Yorker* as an act of courage: "She was one of the country's most intelligent and courageous moral voices, nowhere more conspicuously so than in events associated with what we have come to view without irony as the post-9/11 world" ("Meanwhile" n.p.).

Linguist and author Noam Chomsky was another dissenting voice. In his collection of essays/interviews published in November 2001, simply titled *9/11*, Chomsky takes a similar line to Sontag and sets the attacks in a wider context of American global intervention. The

editor to the second edition of the book, *9/11: Was There An Alternative?* describes it as "conceived, produced and published as an act of protest" (i). Chomsky talks about the CIA's involvement in arming and training Afghanistan's mujahideen during the 1980s. He also points to the US government's hypocrisy in defining the word terrorism as the use of violence for political or psychological goals rather than monetary gain, arguing that the US government had used similar tactics for decades, even if not always directly. As with Sontag's short essay, Chomsky's work was immediately reviled by many in the West as offensive and anti-American. In a 2002 article tellingly titled "America's Dumbest Intellectual," for example, Stefan Kanfer appears to speak for many Americans, and mainstream US media: "For Chomsky, turn over any monster anywhere and look at the underside. Each is clearly marked: MADE IN AMERICA" (n.p.). Kanfer continues:

> On the rare occasions in *9/11* when Chomsky expresses condolences for the victims of the terrorist attack, he immediately goes on to excoriate the U.S. "The atrocities were passionately deplored, even in places where people have been ground underfoot by Washington's boots for a long, long time," he typically says. Chomsky rolls on in this manner. The West is the Great Satan, the Third World its eternal victim. The World Trade Towers were a symbol of America's gluttony and power. In effect, we were asking for it and are now unjustly using it as a *casus belli* [an act/situation that justifies war]. (n.p.)

Christopher Hitchens also voiced his disbelief at how Chomsky "should write as if the mass of evidence against Bin Laden has never been presented or could not have been brought before a court" ("Chomsky's Follies" n.p.). As with the angry responses to Sontag's comments, many of Chomsky's detractors ignore his arguments about global politics in favour of blunt assertions about religion. Anab Whitehouse offers a glaring example of the ways in which critics of Chomsky routinely exchange the words "attackers" or "terrorists" with the word "Muslims":

"Professor Chomsky's … words [in *9/11*] often seem to be remarks of equanimity and detachment in which, apparently, among other things, it doesn't matter whether *Muslims* did, or did not, attack the United States on 9/11" (*Educational Horizons* 318; my emphasis).

Examples of such reactionary responses to these early challenges to the dominant narrative about 9/11 have multiplied. Suffice to say, as Simon Schama did in *The Guardian*, "the shroud of mass reverence which enveloped everyone and everything after 9/11 […] has succeeded in making secular debate about liberty into an act of indecency, disrespectful of the dead and disloyal to the flag" ("The Dead and the Guilty" n.p.). The issue at stake, of course, is that 9/11 – at least for many (westerners) in the decade after – could not be thought about in "secular" terms. It was fundamentally about religion, in terms that pitted 'the free world' against Islam. Kathryn Lee, drawing on Frederic Jameson's well-known essay "The Dialectics of Disaster" (2002) suggests precisely this:

> By emphasising that this attack has been carried out by non-American terrorists, the media and government succeeded in not only making people fearful and therefore compliant but also getting Americans to see themselves as a unified group who must strike back at the external enemy who had caused them all so much pain. This performance of trauma required there to be an 'other' which was clearly marked: the face of Muslim men with beards became synonymous with the concept of terrorist." ("Fiction as Resistance" 11)

According to Uzma Jamil, because of 9/11, Muslims

> can only be seen and heard if they are interpreted and mediated by the west through its privilege to both set the terms of the discourse of the war on terror and to define them as particular types of Muslims through it. The subject positions available to Muslims in this hegemonic discourse are linked to the way in which terrorism is defined as an 'Islamic' problem because Muslims carried

> out the 9/11 attacks. Terrorism is explained as a religious problem, rather than as a political issue, by linking it to the religion of the attackers. By association then, all Muslims have this 'inherent' tendency to be potential terrorists because they are Muslims. Their actions can be explained solely and exclusively through reference to their religion, which is also perceived as 'inherently' violent. Quranic verses are often presented as literal evidence of this Muslim propensity for 'Islamic' terrorism. ("Reading Power" 33)

While Sontag resisted this narrative in the immediate aftermath of 9/11, and Chomsky did the same a couple of months later, the overwhelming initial response of American writers to the terrorist attacks was in line with that of most of the patriotic public: "Muslims – all Muslims everywhere – must take moral responsibility for the 9/11 attacks because they are all Muslim" (Jamil, "Reading Power" 33).

The day after 9/11, the British newspaper *The Guardian*'s literary commentator was Ian McEwan, who would later pen his own 9/11 novel, *Saturday* (2005). In "Beyond Belief" published on 12 September, he started by saying that the reality of what had occurred, and the world had witnessed was "beyond" anything that could be produced by Hollywood movies or that Tolstoy, Wells or DeLillo could ever have imagined and delivered to their audience. The events had become "a spectacle," he acknowledged, transmitted far and wide to a global audience. McEwan spoke of his hunger, and that of others, for more news immediately following the attacks: "Never had those words, flashed by all the channels – Breaking News – meant so much. And so much, so many people, were breaking" ("Beyond Belief" n.p.). He continued, writing of his shock, "[t]here was barely time to contemplate the cruelty of the human hearts that could unleash this" ("Beyond Belief" n.p.). He wanted his readers to imagine the horror that those trapped in the World Trade Centre felt, and his words delivered his sense of shock and disbelief. He concluded this piece by saying "Our civilisation, it suddenly seemed,

our way of life, is easy to wreck when there are sufficient resources and cruel intent. No missile defence system can protect us" ("Beyond Belief" n.p.). His use of the collective pronoun, "our" is very important, along with the noun it qualifies, and asserts is unprotected: "civilisation,"[25] Western civilisation, of course.

McEwan published a second piece for *The Guardian*, a few days later (15 September), titled "Only Love and Then Oblivion." He began by describing (as many would do in the weeks and months after) the emotional responses experienced by an unidentified plural group (signalled as "we" or "us") who are "together" in "our" grief: "Emotions have their narrative; after the shock we move inevitably to the grief, and the sense that we are doing it more or less together is one tiny scrap of consolation" ("Only Love" n.p.). The other "consolations" he writes of are love and (empathetic) imagination. Of the former, he writes that love is all "they [the victims] had to set against their murderers," all they could say in the face of "some holy fool, who believes in his place in eternity." Of the latter he suggests that "empathy [is the ability] to think oneself into the minds of others," and insists that this is precisely what the 9/11 terrorists were unable to do: "The hijackers used fanatical certainty, misplaced religious faith, and dehumanising hatred to purge themselves of the human instinct for empathy. Among their crimes was a failure of the imagination." The capacity to imagine – that which surely characterises writers of fiction – is raised to the status of a moral virtue by McEwan:

> If the hijackers had been able to imagine themselves into the thoughts and feelings of the passengers, they would have been unable to proceed. It is hard to be cruel once you permit yourself to enter the mind of your victim. Imagining what it is like to be someone other than yourself is at the core of our humanity.

[25] See Martin Randall, *9/11 and the Literature of Terror* for a suggestive account of how McEwan's essay may be productively read in relation to his novel, *Saturday*, "in which the author's writing in 'Beyond Belief' is refashioned into a fictional milieu" (20) and "articulates … observations through a very partisan perspective … [reinforcing] simplistic binaries … redolent … of much mainstream opinion at the time" (21). Randall suggests that McEwan's writing, in his essays and fiction, "actively contributed to such views" (21).

> It is the essence of compassion, and it is the beginning of morality. ("Only Love" n.p.)

McEwan reiterated these ideas in an interview with Helen Whitney a few months later, in April 2002. "I'm an atheist," he said. "I don't really believe our moral sense comes from a God." He continued:

> It's human, its universal, [it's] being able to think our way into the minds of others. As I said at the time, what those holy fools clearly lacked, or clearly were able to deny themselves, was the ability to enter into the minds of the people they were being so cruel to. Among their crimes, is, was, a failure of the imagination, of the moral imagination.
>
> You cannot be cruel to someone if you fully understand what it is to be them. You have to somehow screen that out. You have to say to yourself, 'They're not really humans.' Or you have to bring into line some sort of powerful ideology or some crazed religious certainty in order to blot out that human instinct. ("Faith and Doubt" n.p.)[26]

But what of the failure to imagine "them," the failure to "imagine [oneself] into the thoughts and feelings" of the *terrorists*? What about the capacity to image "he who inflicts terror himself, having once been its victim," to recall the words of Boehmer and Morton, quoted above? This capacity, I will argue, is largely lacking in the literature and literary responses that were published in the first decade after 9/11.

[26] In the interview McEwan admits to not believing in evil or God, rather in people behaving well and "sometimes behaving monstrously" and because this behaviour is so beyond our capabilities to comprehend and explain that we "have to reach for this numinous notion of evil." When asked about his views on religion, he answered that he does not believe that there is "any inherent darkness at the centre of religion at all" and rather he views religion as a "morally neutral force" which some "people rise up and perform terrible things in its name, just as people perform extraordinarily fine, courageous things in its name" ("Faith and Doubt" n.p.)

Ironically, despite McEwan suggesting that the terrorists behaved as they did because they told themselves their victims were "not really humans," McEwan himself says precisely this about the terrorists. If "[i]magining what it is like to be someone other than yourself is at the core of our humanity" ("Faith and Doubt" n.p.) then the incapacity to do this, the failure of which he accuses the terrorists, means they are not only immoral, but also inhuman.

Martin Amis was another British novelist who wrote about 9/11 in the days after the event. His piece, called "Fear and Loathing," was published in *The Guardian* on 18 September 2001. The by-line states: "the attack on the United States last Tuesday brought home to the West two uncomfortable realities – the ferocious hatred felt for America; and that none of us will ever feel safe again" (n.p.). Further into the article, Amis writes, "The message of September 11 ran as follows: America, it is time you learned how implacably you are hated" ("Fear and Loathing" n.p.). Amis's take on the morality of the terrorists echoes that of McEwan:

> The bringers of Tuesday's terror were morally 'barbaric', inexpiably so, but they brought a demented sophistication to their work. They took these great American artefacts and pestled them together. Nor is it at all helpful to describe the attacks as 'cowardly.' Terror always has its roots in hysteria and psychotic insecurity; still, we should know our enemy. The firefighters were not afraid to die for an idea. But the suicide killers belong in a different psychic category, and their battle effectiveness has, on our side, no equivalent. Clearly, they have contempt for life. Equally clearly, they have contempt for death.[27]
>
> Their aim was to torture tens of thousands, and to terrify hundreds of millions. In this, they have succeeded. ("Fear and Loathing" n.p.)

[27] This idea – terrorists are characterised by a contempt for life, and death – certainly informs his portrait of a 9/11 terrorist in "The Last Days of Muhammad Atta," discussed in my next chapter.

Yet Amis also notes that it "will be horribly difficult and painful for Americans to absorb the fact that they are hated and hated intelligibly." While he suggests this hatred is unintelligible, he provides a sobering figure to account for it: "How many [Americans] know … that their government has destroyed at least 5% of the Iraqi population? How many of them then transfer that figure to America (and come up with 14m)?" In the lines that follow he points the finger at Americans for their lack of precisely that which McEwan suggests is at the core of humanity, the capacity for empathy: "Various national characteristics – self-reliance, a fiercer patriotism than any in western Europe, an assiduous geographical incuriosity – have created a deficit of empathy for the sufferings of people far away." He also draws attention to something "almost tautologous," the idea that "Americans [believe they are] are good and right by virtue of being Americans" (n.p.) Amis notes that a violent counter strike by America is inevitable (and he was correct). He asserts his hope that "the response will be, above all, non-escalatory" (on this his hopes were futile) (n.p.). And he concludes with a moral assertion for all humans, victims and perpetrators alike: "Our best destiny, as planetary cohabitants, is the development of what has been called 'species consciousness' – something over and above nationalisms, blocs, religions, ethnicities" (n.p.). Despite the sentiments expressed here, within a few years Amis appears to have soon reverted to the kind of divisive, binary logic he initially argued against and this is evident in both public commentary he made in 2006 and his short story, published in April that same year: "The Last Days of Muhammad Atta," discussed in my next chapter.

In an interview with Ginny Dougary in *The Times Online* (15 September 2006) he said,

> The Muslim community will have to suffer until it gets its house in order. What sort of suffering? Not let them travel. Deportation – further down the road. Curtailing of freedoms. Strip-searching people who look like they're from the Middle East or from Pakistan... Discriminatory stuff, until it hurts the whole

> community and they start getting tough with their children. They hate us for letting our children have sex and take drugs – well, they've got to stop their children killing people. It's a huge dereliction on their part. I suppose they justify it on the grounds that they have suffered from state terrorism in the past, but I don't think that's wholly irrational. It's their own past they're pissed off about; their great decline. It's also masculinity, isn't it?" ("The Voice of Experince" n.p.)

Much has been written about Amis's discriminatory anti-Muslim sentiments expressed in this interview and the very public spat this initiated with his then-colleague, literary theorist Terry Eagleton, who accused him of racism in 2007, drawing attention to this and other comments by Amis. The left-leaning *Guardian* ran a bold feature titled "Martin Amis and the New Racism," and Amis responded defensively, stressing that this passage was prefaced by the words, "There's a definite urge – don't you have it? – to say, 'The Muslim community … (etc)'" (qtd. Bennett, "Shame on Us" n.p.). He insisted that his words were spoken, not written, and had been taken out of context by Dougary. He rebutted Eagleton's claims that he was a racist in an open letter to journalist Yasmin Alibhai-Brown published in *The Independent* and in a live interview with Jon Snow on Channel 4 News in which he insisted his words were intended as an attack on Islamism, "an extreme ideology within a religion," not Islam in general (see Bennett, "Shame on Us" for a discussion of this and his other public comments).

His letter to Alibhai-Brown was in response to her condemnation of him in an article in *The Independent*, on 17 September 2007, which included the following lines:

> I see [Amis] as another kind of threat to the kind of society I stand up for. He is with the beasts pounding the back door, the Muslim-baiters and haters, these days as likely to come from the Groucho and Garrick clubs as the nasty, secret venues used by neo-fascists. This week, Julie Burchill said she hates Muslims.

> No one slams her. That's just our Julie, such a talent, so clever, so deliciously un-PC, and anyway it is understandable this view, is it not? Last month, Amis bared his expensive teeth and has just been denounced by the Marxist academic Terry Eagleton. Amis wants to strip-search anyone who looks Muslim (me too, then, Martin? Shall I lift my skirt the next time we meet to reassure you?) (qtd. Ross, "The Age of Horrorism" n.p.).

Amis' letter to Alibhai-Brown only stoked the flames further with antagonistic comments like these: "You see, time ha[s] advanced, in the West, since [Rushdie published *The Satanic Verses* in] 1989. Time moves more slowly in Iran and Pakistan. As I don't need to tell you, Yasmin, there is something the matter with the Islamic clock"; and "Adherence, however 'moderate', to a holy book that recommends (for instance) the murder of apostates and the beating of women (on suspicion of disobedience) carries certain consequences. Whereas nothing follows from atheism" (qtd. Jonathan Brown, "Amis Launches Scathing Response" n.p.).

Although Amis is often accused of making the above, and other comments that are derogatory about Muslims and Islam, some critics have praised him for being one of only a few western writers who have, in the words of Birgit Däwes, "attempted imaginative constructions of the terrorists' perspectives" in their post-9/11 fiction ("'Close Neighbors to the Unimaginable'" 496). The Amis text Däwes has in mind and discusses at length in an article published in 2010, is his short story, "The Last Days of Muhammad Atta" (2006).[28] This appeared in *The New Yorker* on 17 April 2006 and was later collected in his book *The Second Plane* (2008), which includes twelve essays and reviews and two short stories. In The "Author's Note" to the collection, Amis writes,

[28] In the same article Dawes also discusses John Updike's *Terrorist* (2006) and Don DeLillo's *Falling Man* (2007) as novels that adopt a "terrorist's point of view."

> Geopolitics may not be my natural subject, but masculinity is. And have we ever seen the male idea in such outrageous garb as the robes, combat fatigues, suits and ties, tracksuits, and medics' smocks of the Islamic radical? I was once asked 'Are you an Islamaphobe?' And the answer is no. What I am is an Islamismophobe, or better say an anti-Islamist, because a phobia is an irrational fear, and it is not irrational to fear something that says it wants to kill you.

It is not possible, in this chapter, to undertake a necessarily extensive discussion about whether Martin Amis is or is not just anti-Islamist but also anti-Islam. Doing so would require careful analysis of his many writings, fictional and nonfictional. Suffice to say that "The Last Days," which is written from the perspective of the ringleader of the 9/11 terrorists, is replete with stereotypical portrayals of Muslim belief (although the titular protagonist is an atheist) and not-too-subtle choices of diction and imagery that seem to have been deliberately chosen to offend Muslim readers as I discuss in my next chapter. What it is possible to assert, however, is that even in their earliest responses to 9/11, prominent western literary authors, with few exceptions, functioned to reiterate and circulate an account of events that was less about politics than about religion, positing an image of Islam as evil against Christianity as the force of good.

Chapter Two: The first wave of fictional writing about 9/11

In the weeks and months after 9/11 many Americans, and the citizens of America's allies, felt emotionally vulnerable and lived in a state of fear. There was an overwhelming sense that something had changed forever and that some kind of "innocence" had been lost, although some critics have suggested that the idealised national past, constructed in the wake of 9/11, never existed.[29] People asked questions about the meaning of life and kept returning to a key question: "why do they [Muslims] hate us?"[30] Many felt they were unable to adequately honour those who had lost their lives and unable to articulate the trauma they had experienced as individuals and a nation.

Trauma quickly became a central paradigm through which to analyse and discuss 9/11 and literature related to the event. However, some scholars have questioned the national sense of trauma felt by Americans who had seen media coverage of 9/11 but did not witness events that day. Literary critic and philosopher Fredric Jameson is a notable early commentator in this vein. In his 2002 essay "Dialectics of Disaster" he draws attention to what he calls "the media hype, and the subsequent media patriotism" and suggests "it is instructive to step away for a moment and to deny that it is natural and self-explanatory for masses of people to be devastated by a catastrophe in which they have lost no-one in a place with which they have no particular connection" (298). He is even blunter a few sentences later, referring to "a collective delirium" (298) before asserting:

> My irreverence for the media goes so far, I have to admit, as even to doubt the fundamental lessons it has sought to draw for us: that America changed forever on September 11, that America lost its innocence, that things will never be the same again, et cetera. The history of the superstate is as bloody as anyone else's

[29] See, for example, Richard Crownshaw, "Deterritorializing the 'Homeland,'" 760.
[30] President Bush, in an "Address to the Nation" on 20 September 2001, suggested "Americans are asking 'Why do they hate us?'"

> national history; and these observations about innocence and experience (they were also affirmed during the Watergate scandal) have more to do with media innocence than with any personal kind; more in common with the widespread diffusion of public violence and pornography than with a private cynicism that has probably existed since the dawn of human history. ("Dialectics of Disaster" 299)

9/11 was not an event that simply appeared out of the blue, like the planes on that day, he insists: "As for the attack itself, it is important to remember that historical events are never really punctual – despite the appearance of this one and the abruptness of its violence – but extend into a before and an after of historical time that only gradually unfold, to disclose the full dimensions of the historicity of the event" (301). Pankaj Mishra similarly comments on the depoliticisation of much 9/11 fiction, stating that "for all that 9/11 stands for in [many] sentimental and nostalgic novels about New Yorkers coping with loss, it could be a natural disaster, like a tsunami" ("The End of Innocence" n.p.)

As discussed in my previous chapter, Jameson was not the first to question the dominant narrative promulgated by mainstream media, although those who did so – like Sontag and Chomsky – were often denigrated and reviled. Increasingly, scholars have sought to understand the role of the media in creating and curating a version of the attacks in which Americans (and citizens of the allied West) are simply victims of unbelievable and unthinkable terror.[31] According to Kathryn Lee, several key themes were evident in the emerging dominant narrative. The first of these was "the idea of America the Brave" ("Fiction as Resistance" 8) which was constructed by the media's focus on the acts of heroism of the day, even though

[31] See, for example, Zelizer and Allen (2011), Bennett et. al (2007), Faludi (2007), Heller (2004), Marik (2020).

America had just suffered loss of life and experienced trauma. The second key theme is linked to President Bush's statement "You are with us, or you are with the terrorists." Lee believes that this statement meant that those who were critical of the government's responses to 9/11 risked being accused of being "unpatriotic and un-American" and this certainly proved to be the case for Sontag and Chomsky, as discussed in my previous chapter (8). The third key theme she identifies is of "America as innocent victim and the terrorists as evil perpetrators" (9). A corollary of this was the refusal to acknowledge that America could be in any way "culpable for the attacks" (9). I contend that these themes are repeated and amplified in fiction written about 9/11, written by western authors, especially in the first decade after the attacks. I will defend this claim later in this chapter.

Shortly after the attacks, between September 15 and December 31, 2001, *The New York Times* published short biographies of the victims of 9/11 under the title "Portraits of Grief." Through these short biographies each victim was given a face and a character/ personality, and the wider American public were encouraged to grieve in solidarity with them and their families regardless of race or ethnicity, as long as those who grieved identified as belonging to "us." (The extent to which race, and ethnicity *did* impact on who could be mourned is challenged by Amy Walden in *The Submission*, discussed in my next chapter). At the same time, however, those of non-European races and ethnicities, especially those who looked (Middle) Eastern or Muslim were viewed with suspicion and, at times, were harassed or interrogated. This racial and ethnic profiling, and the psychological impacts of this for Arab/Muslim protagonists, is a key feature of the novels I discuss in later chapters.

Despite the claim that the trauma of the day was "unspeakable" and "beyond language," volumes of words were written about it. In addition to the kind of articles or reflective pieces by well-known writers and intellectuals discussed in my first chapter, poetry started to emerge on the internet, radio, television, newspapers, and magazines. Often intensely personal and

highly emotive, these poems spoke about death, expressed lament, encouraged grieving and mourning, and offered consolation. Their moral messages were often direct, reactionary and binary. While some significant poems were produced by the likes of Glaway Kinnell and Wislawa Szymboroska, most poetry written in the immediate aftermath was amateurly testimonial.[32]

For obvious reasons, not least because of the time it takes to write and publish a novel, it was some time before developed short stories or full-length fictional responses to 9/11 appeared. According to Joseph M. Conte, "In the six years following 9/11, the publishing industry delivered more than a thousand nonfiction titles dissecting the event as opposed to a mere 30 novels" (*Transnational Politics* 88). There was also a sense that to create a fictional representation of events would somehow demean or belittle the catastrophe by aestheticising it. Gradually, however, novelists "risked treading on that hallowed space and integrating it into their own work" (Charles, "How 9/11 Altered the Fiction Landscape" n.p.). Early responses to these initial books were not always favourable. Michael Rothberg, for example, claimed, "The fiction of 9/11 demonstrates . . . a failure of the imagination" (153) and for others, many books published in the first decade after 9/11 were deemed to be "merely symptoms of an American literature that has retreated from politics into domesticity" or "the American narrative representation and general sociopolitical response to 9/11, and terrorism in general, manifest an extraordinarily myopic, self-righteous, even puerile view of the nature of our world" (Duvall and Marzec, "Narrating 9/11" 383, 394).[33] Catherine Morley makes much the same claim:

> Without doubt, many American writers, possibly overwhelmed by the enormity of the attacks, their spectacular nature and the apparent incompatibility of the terrifying images and mere words, turned inward to depict fractured unions and

[32] For example, see Karen Alkalay-Gut, "The Poetry of September 11."
[33] Duvall and Marzec offer these summaries of other people's opinions on 9/11 fiction and seek to complicate them.

> broken homes. Many novels, among them Updike's *Terrorist*, manifestly failed to understand or to offer a convincing portrait of the figure of the other. And many took refuge in portraying the effects of trauma, both personal and communal. ("How Do We Write about This?" 719)

A significant body of critical material has emerged those comments on "9/11 fiction." The exact characteristics of this genre is a matter of some debate but, for many, the definition is pragmatic: creative writing that is either loosely related to or directly based on the terror attacks of the day.[34] According to Arin Keeble, however, 9/11 novels do not only directly engage with 9/11 and its aftermath, "an assumption," he asserts, "that has underpinned numerous monographs and collections of essays" (*The 9/11 Novel* 274). For Keeble, 9/11 literature also raises questions about locating a "new way of weaving time and history and embodiment together" (*The 9/11 Novel* 273). The implicit assumption here is that the attacks changed something about fictional engagement with history and subjective placement at any given moment. Georgiana Banita, however, in a chapter titled "Literature after 9/11" in *American Literature in Transition*, offers a definition of 9/11 literature as creative writing which is not only about the specifics of "place and time" but is also engaged in "question[ing] its own necessity":

> In this sense, the terrorist attacks intensified ongoing negotiations of what literature is permitted or expected to address, and with what degree of fidelity

[34] See Keeble (2019); Frank and Malreddy (2018); Gray (2011) and (2009).

> or earnestness. Inflated expectations about the great American 9/11 novel enhanced public awareness of how writers reflected on the events, and exactly at what remove from their occurrence. (152)

She suggests, then, that 9/11 changed not only what writers write about, but how they viewed the 'necessity' (or purpose) of their art.

For the purpose of this thesis, I understand 9/11 fiction to be novels written after the events of 9/11 in which the plot focuses on the events of that day and its effect on its characters and *also* literature that in some way deals with the aftermath in its focus on the effects of events for Muslims living in the West, and on Muslim (homegrown) terrorism. In this chapter, after a brief look at how some scholars have categorised 9/11 fiction and how critics have responded to such categorisations, I will discuss a selection of representative fiction from what I describe as the "first wave" of 9/11 fiction, works by western authors that were published, approximately, in the decade after September 11 2001, paying close attention to their representation of Muslim characters and Islam. In the chapter that follows, I will consider how Muslim immigrant authors have responded to the literature penned by western authors in recent years with an emphasis on their portrayal of Muslim immigrant characters and radicalisation.

The "first wave": critical responses

In "Global Responses to the 'War on Terror'" Michael C. Frank and Pavan Kumar Malreddy give the name "Ground Zero literature" to initial 9/11 fiction, produced from 2001 to about 2009. They note that the setting of these novels was usually New York city, where the attacks of the day "invariably constitute a turning point for the protagonists, leading to a new life in an altered world" (93). Literature produced in the "mournful" first decade after the attacks, according to Georgiana Banita, was "melancholy" and tends to reflect intensely on the attacks "and the ways survivors and witnesses were coping with their effects" ("Literature After

9/11" 155). She follows Richard Gray in making this assessment. In a 2009 essay that attempts to survey the growing field, he suggests that the focus of such writing was on the trauma experienced by New Yorkers, and Americans more generally, in the wake of the attacks (Gray "Open Doors, Closed Minds" 130). Keeble similarly notes that these novels almost exclusively focus on the "privileged, white, metropolitan American family" ("The 9/11 Novel" 277) and how their lives changed as a result of the events on that day.

This fiction can be characterised, most agree, as inward-looking and self-focused and was, for the most part, produced by leading figures in "the white male canon of late modern American writing," such as Don DeLillo, Philip Roth, John Updike, Jay McInerney, David Foster Wallace, Jonathan Franzen, Paul Auster and David Eggers (Banita 152-153). In other words, the fiction produced in this era "domesticated" the crisis (Gray "Open Doors, Closed Minds" 134). Gray discusses De Lillo's *Falling Man* as a typical example where "cataclysmic public events are measured purely and simply in terms of their impact on the emotional entanglements of their protagonists" who are white and American (134). Catherine Morley, writing in 2011, agrees with this account and criticises 9/11 fiction writers for their failure to attempt to understand or offer a convincing portrait of the terrorist or Muslim other ("How Do we Write about This?" 719). Michael Rothberg, likewise, believes that 9/11 fiction of this first wave demonstrates a "failure of the imagination" and agrees with Gray, whom he quotes, that most 9/11 novels fail to move beyond "the preliminary stages of trauma" by doing more than simply "registering that *something* traumatic ... has happened" to America/Americans ("Failure of Imagination" 152; emphasis original). He calls for "a fiction of international relations and extraterritorial citizenship" arguing that it is vital that the 9/11 novel addresses "the prosthetic reach of [the US] empire into other worlds" (153).

Gray critiques the texts produced at this time for their limited "encounters with strangers." In his opinion, the "other" that these fictions need to squarely address is "Islam"

and "[f]acing the other, in all its difference and danger, is surely one of the challenges now for writers" ("Open Doors, Closed Minds" 135). In his opinion this is not because these "obscene acts of terrorism" were committed by a "small group of people" but mainly because "the US has become, more than ever, a border territory in which different cultures meet, collide, and in some instances collude with each other" ("Open Doors, Closed Minds"135). American 9/11 fiction, Rothberg concurs, needs to portray these collisions and collusions. Instead, "many of the texts that try to bear witness to contemporary events vacillate ... between large rhetorical gestures acknowledging trauma and retreat into domestic detail. The link between the two is tenuous, reducing a turning point in national and international history to little more than a stage in a sentimental education" ("A Failure of the Imagination" 157).

Writing a few years later than Gray and Rothberg, in *Plotting Justice: Narrative Ethics and Literary Culture after 9/11* (2012), Banita asks a related, provocative question about "diversity and representation in 9/11 authorship": "To what extent does a literary history of the 9/11 decade shed light on US gender and race relations in the twenty-first century?" (153). The objective of my study is aligned with Banita's question, as my analysis aims to focus on how cultural/ethnic "strangers" (including radicalised others) – especially those who have made western nations their home – are portrayed in fiction by white Americans/Anglo-British, *and* to study their fictional representation from a different angle. I propose to bring in the vision of the (Muslim) immigrant author – interestingly, in novels by two female authors – to shed light on how these ethnic/cultural others might imagine themselves, where they stand, and how they feel in the western country that they have either be born into or have voluntarily chosen to call home. An important question will illuminate my analysis in this thesis. If the September 11 terrorist attacks, as Banita asserts, "impacted literary production" and "transformed [literary] criticism" in the decade after they occurred, and did so by "putting pressure on the postmodern trends of the 1990s towards domestic rather than global politics, shifting gears from culture

wars to the clash of civilisations" (153), what came next? If the effects of these events were to produce a decade of literature that was "transitional," as Banita argues, what did it transition *towards*, in the decade after this (2011-2020)?

Banita believes that immediately after the events of that fateful day, "the first need [for writers] was not to create literature, but to theorize it" (*Plotting Justice* 155). She reviews DeLillo's late-2001 article, "In the Ruins of the Future" (which I consider below) along with *The New Yorker* "Tuesday, and After" pieces discussed in my previous chapter and notes that, with the exception of Sontag, the emphasis in most of this writing is on the psychological effect of the attacks on ordinary American people. As noted above, many novels that appeared in the following few years were similarly "invested in the home front [and] tried to domesticate the tragedy" as this was experienced by everyday Americans: "The god in these fictions is a god of small things meant to provide a frail bulwark against the furious passions threatening the larger world" – the protagonists experience the traumatic rupture of 9/11 while babysitting, cooking, struggling with failed relationships, and so on (Banita, *Plotting Justice* 156, 157). They do not look beyond their small lives or homes or cities to consider a larger world. Global politics and global violence are all but absent. 9/11 is considered a life-changing catastrophe that occurred as if at random, without a cause, like an earthquake or tsunami (recalling Jameson and Mishra, quoted above). It is portrayed as deeply affecting the way American people interact in *their* world and with *their* people, especially loved ones. Indeed, the representation of the difficulty of interacting with those who are close after this traumatic and devastating experience became/has become a common theme in many 9/11 novels. In this sense, some of the novels produced can be said to belong to the "family novel" or "domestic novel" genre (Gonçalves, *9/11: Culture, Catastrophe and the Critique of Singularity* 159) – a claim that supports the idea that 9/11 halted the trajectory of the postmodern novel in the US and the UK (and in other English-speaking countries that identified with America). Diana Gonçalves argues that the

(white, non-Muslim) characters in these novels are portrayed as disintegrated, in permanent fall: "They struggle to relate or connect to each other; they struggle to come to terms with their own new selves" (160).

Gray argues that early 9/11 authors failed, or refused, to address "the immigrant encounter" and in order to resolve this issue he suggests "what Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari have called a strategy of deterritorialization" ("Open Doors, Closed Minds" 141). America is a multi-cultural country and although, as Gray recognises, "one culture may well be dominant," it is still important that authors recognise and write about "strangers" living within it (146). He continues:

> What this offers to American writers, and particularly novelists, is the chance, maybe even the obligation, to insert themselves into the space between conflicting interests and practices and then dramatize the contradictions that conflict engenders. Through their work, by means of a mixture of voices and a free play of languages and even genres, they can represent the reality of their culture as multiple, complex, and internally antagonistic. (147)

To Gray this is very important because writers "have the chance, in short, of getting 'into' history, to participate in its processes and, in a perspectival sense at least, of getting 'out' of it too – and enabling us, the readers, to begin to understand just how those processes work" (147). As I discuss later in this thesis, however, it would be almost a decade after the September 11 terrorist attacks that fiction writers began, as Gray puts it, to "ge[t] 'into' history."

Banita suggests that this domestic, inward focus began to change towards the end of the first decade after the terror attacks, introducing a "second wave of post-9/11 literature" apparent in novels like Jonathan Franzen's *Freedom* (2010) and Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Americanah* (2013). She asserts that American (and more broadly western) writers began to "cros[s] national boundaries into less recognizable ground, by confronting the other" (*Plotting*

Justice 157). This is not to suggest that *some* early writers didn't address transatlantic concerns (Banita mentions references to World War II in Foer's *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close*, Vietnam in Paul West's *The Immensity of the Here and Now: A Novel of 9.11*, and "the most prominent transatlantic novel of the decade, Joseph O'Neill's *Netherland*" (157). However, she argues, novelists didn't take the opportunity to engage in debates about "postcolonial power politics" (158) or America's aggressive neocolonialism. Amy Waldman's *The Submission* (2011) is considered by her to be the first of a new kind of 9/11 novel, written by an American. Keeble similarly argues that it was at least a decade after the attacks before novelists started to engage with "otherness and post 9/11 racism and its many layers of reflexivity extended to an awareness of the criticisms that the domestic novels had received" ("The 9/11 Novel" 280). This accords with Banita's suggestion that the familiar insular Anglo-American 9/11 novel was "assimilated into an introspective type of fiction that prods at the singularity and intactness of the American self- and world-image" (155). I will discuss this further in this chapter, paying particular attention to Waldman's novel.

In broad terms, then, the first and second wave of 9/11 literature focused on domestic and broader international / multicultural conflicts respectively. (Which is not to say that there were no exceptions. Mohsin Hamid's *The Reluctant Fundamentalist,* to which I will return, is an obvious example of a first wave novel – in chronological terms – that does not conform with this categorisation. However, importantly, he is an immigrant or transnational writer, and a Muslim. The "third wave" of 9/11 fiction, as I will argue at length in my later chapters, is largely driven by writing by those "strangers" living within the "dominant" cultures of the US and the UK, as part of them, yet still alienated: first and second-generation Muslim immigrants.

Before turning to "Muslim immigrant authors" response to 9/11 fiction written by westerners in later chapters, in the remainder of this chapter I will consider some representative works by prominent western (white, male) authors produced in what I have been referring to

as the "first wave" after 9/11. These are Martin Amis's "The Last Days of Muhammad Atta," John Updike's *Terrorist* and Don DeLillo's *Falling Man*. It is not my intention to provide extensive, original critical commentary on these texts, although I will assert my own assessments as part of my discussion. Instead, I seek to offer a brief synopsis of critical assessments of these novels along with a discussion of characterisation and plot to suggest not only their insularity but repeated, stereotypical portrayals of (Muslim) terrorists and Islam, and to suggest ways in which these portrayals were built on the kinds of attitudes and representations I have earlier discussed as being prevalent in early literary responses and media coverage of 9/11. Further, I suggest that these kinds of fictions acted to solidify and petrify (literally) the image of the Muslim terrorist in the American (and wider Anglo-European) imagination. My discussion of these texts will also highlight the different ways in which Anglo-American and Muslim readers responded to these novels.

The First Wave: a discussion of three representative fictions

Martin Amis: "The Last Days of Muhammad Atta"

In "The Last Days of Muhammad Atta" (2006),[35] Martin Amis, an acclaimed British novelist, essayist, memoirist, screenwriter, critic and (as discussed) self-proclaimed, lifelong non-believer, fictionalises Muhammad Atta's final hours before he piloted the plane which crashed into the North Tower of the World Trade Center. His name suggests he is based on real-life Egyptian Mohamed Mohamed el-Amir Awad el-Sayed Atta, a militant Islamist and Al-Qaeda operative, who was identified as one of the pilots and ringleader in the 9/11 attacks. The short story attempts to recreate the world through the terrorist's eyes, provide a psychological insight into the mind of the hijacker and give voice to the perpetrator as well as

[35] This short story was first published in *The New Yorker* (2006) and later in Amis's collection, *The Second Plane* (2008).

shed light on Atta's motivation to commit such a despicable act. Yet, as I argue, Muhammad Atta is not developed by Amis as a complex character whose actions are the result of any clearly specified psychological drivers or religious convictions, and he does not experience any doubts about whether to commit the terrorist acts or not. In this respect, he differs from the terrorist characters portrayed by John Updike in *Terrorist* and Don DeLillo in *Falling Man* (discussed later in this chapter). Rather, he is portrayed as purely evil, consumed with hatred for all human beings. In the words of John N. Duvall, "For Amis, Atta is a self-hating fundamentalist with no real faith, except a belief in death, which turns out to be his clearest sense of his mission" ("Representing the Enemy Other" 248). Amis's Atta is sadistic, a true barbarian and, importantly, lacks any political or religious beliefs or ideological impetus to explain his behavior. Atta does not regard his actions as part of a holy war against the infidels. Instead, his core motivation is to cause as much pain as possible to other human beings. Duvall argues that this one-dimensional character "becomes a caricature of the Western fantasy of the Islamic terrorist whose religion is reduced to an orgiastic death cult" (248). Notably, Atta's hatred is not only confined to Americans, the target of his suicide mission; he is also disgusted by the Muslims in his terrorist cell and utterly disparaging of the romantic relationship of his fellow suicide-hijacker, Ziad, and his Turkish-German girlfriend: "Adultery punished by whipping, sodomy by burial alive" is an idea "which seemed about right to Muhammad Atta," states the narrator ("The Last Days" 102).

Pleasure and enjoyment in general seem repulsive to him: "He also joined in the hatred of music. And the hatred of laughter" (102). Atta is depicted as a deeply troubled man, a self-loathing loner, and the reader is alerted to this near the beginning of the story where he is shown to obsess about his own appearance as he washes himself on the morning of the plane attacks: "The worst was yet to come: shaving. Shaving was the worst because it necessarily involved him in the contemplation of his own face" (97). He knows in his mind that what he is about to

do would be deemed morally wrong, and cannot understand why people cannot read his plan on what he thinks is his obviously disgusting face: “Why didn’t everybody point, why did not they cringe, why didn’t they run? And yet this face, by now almost comically malevolent, would soon be smiled at, and perfunctorily fussed over (his ticket was business class), by the doomed stewardess” (98). No explanation is given for his self-disgust or his hatred of others. Atta has a stoney face, with no smile: “Muhammad Atta never laughed, not because people were dying in Palestine, but because he found nothing funny” (102). However, this face that Atta cannot bring himself to look at in the mirror, was apparently liked by the Sheikh he visited to receive instructions about the attack (presumably a representation of Osama Bin Laden): “in the last decade, only one human being had taken obvious pleasure from setting eyes on him, and that was the Sheikh” (98). We are informed that the Sheikh did not even have to ask Atta whether he was prepared to die, because he could “see the answer in [his] face” (98). Atta’s loathing of humanity and his desire to cause as much pain as possible is repeatedly stressed; his deepest desire is to hurt, maim and kill. The reader cannot even attribute Atta’s loathing of mankind to being brainwashed by the Sheikh or some other mullah. Instead, Amis presents a character who has gone bad very early in life: “This feeling [of anger and hatred] had been his familiar since the age of twelve or thirteen; it had come upon him, like an illness without a symptom” (117).

Atta’s misanthropic nature is clearly showcased in the disagreement, retrospectively narrated, that Atta and the Sheikh had on possible targets for the attack. Atta has his eyes set on a nuclear power plant near New York, but the narrator tells us that “Puzzlingly, the Sheikh withheld his blessing –despite the presumably attractive possibility of turning large swaths of the Eastern Seaboard into a plutonium cemetery for the next seventy millennia (that is, until the year 72001)” (104). The adverb that begins this sentence, “puzzlingly,” is one of many clues to the key focaliser for the story, which is written in the third person: Atta himself. Given

this, and the fact that the choice of this narrative mode offers Amis the opportunity to divulge Atta's inner motivations, it is even more surprising that by the end of the story we have no idea what might have driven him to do what he goes on to do – ideological or religious belief, a debt to pay, a harm to repay – except for the sickening fact that he appears to hate the world and the people who live in it. In contrast, even the Sheikh, the mastermind behind the 9/11 attacks, is suggested to have some kind of "moral qualm, a silent suggestion that such a move [attacking the nuclear power plant] could be considered exorbitant" (104-105). Irony permeates the comments that follow this statement, "it was the first and only indication that, in their cosmic war against God's enemies, there was any kind of upper limit" (105). Given the story's focalisation, it appears that Atta is mocking the Sheik's belief in the existence of "God's enemies" and a "cosmic war" premised on religious difference; he dismisses the Sheik's religious motivation as having "limits" when his own perverse hatred has none. This is further suggested when, subsequently, Atta questions the Sheikh's motives, beliefs and determination by asking: "Was the *Sheikh* prepared to die?" (105; emphasis original), which, of course, implies that he believes the Sheikh is not willing to do so, thus implying the "limits" to the Sheikh's faith.

Amis's choice of imagery throughout the story is worth close attention. In the passages that relate Atta's visit to a dying imam in a hospice to gain his blessing (or, rather to get some holy water that will supposedly absolve him of the sin of suicide so that he can taunt his fellow terrorists who do not have any), we are told that Atta compares the dying and fragile imam to a dog: "His lips, Muhammad Atta noticed, were dark grey, like the lips of dogs" (110). This is surely not unintentional on the part of the author. Amis appears to be strategically using the simile of the dog here since they are traditionally seen as impure in Islam, and a practicing Muslim cannot pray in a place where there is even a single dog hair. By comparing a holy man to a dog, Amis might be indulging a private joke here, at the expense of Islam, or he is implying

that Atta himself has no respect for or interest in Muslim belief. Other examples of this sly – and offensive – use of imagery in the story include Amis's choice to characterise Atta as having been suffering from constipation for six months and then, further, his description of the pain of Atta's constipation as akin to anal rape (112). Atta, we are told, has been constipated for six months, which according to Chris Morris is Amis's "brilliant way" of insinuating to the reader that Atta is "full of shit" ("The Absurd World" n.p). I think this is too simple an interpretation. Amis appears to have deliberately chosen taboo subjects for Muslims (defecation and a gesture towards homosexuality) in this perverse characterisation.

Amis' story was not favorably received by western critics. Most responded with dismay at Amis's portrayal of Atta, but not because of his unsympathetic portrayal of a sadistic killer, lacking ideological or religious motivation. Some critics feared that Amis was somehow inviting sympathy for the terrorist, which to my mind is a significantly mistaken reading of the story. Brigit Däwes explains:

> Depictions of the perpetrators, [Andreas Veiel] argues, are as dangerous as they are controversial because they create a sense of sympathy with the terrorists and silence the traumatized victims. Along these lines, it is unsurprising that when Martin Amis's short story 'The Last Days of Muhammad Atta' provided a close-up depiction of a perpetrator, it caused a great deal of controversy. Thomas Meaney wrote for the *Yale Review* that the story's premise might seem 'reckless to the point of obscenity' …, and at *The Observer's* online discussion forum comments abound which label the story 'claptrap' or 'pointless, self-important junk,' reproaching Amis for 'letting self-promotion and self-aggrandisement cloud his artistic judgement' (Smillie). As one reads through these reactions, the impression arises that Amis's major flaw was the topic itself: the

> imaginative act of adopting a historical terrorist's point of view is not considered appropriate. (“Close Neighbours” 496)

There is little in the story to suggest that Amis’s “adoption of a historical terrorist’s point of view” is sympathetic. In fact, the opposite seems to be true. Atta is not characterised as a religious fanatic but rather as a sexually repressed and frustrated individual. This is captured in the extended metaphor of Atta as suffering physical discomfort due to prolonged constipation, an offensive depiction, as suggested above. Atta’s character is not described to the reader as charismatic or in any way appealing. His hatred of women, among other things, is made abundantly evident: “I don’t want pregnant women or a person who is not clean to come and say goodbye to me because I don’t approve of it” (“The Last Days” 99). Again, this may be a not-too-subtle dig on the part of the author against the supposed misogyny of Muslim men. But it is not anchored in any realistic or understandable context that might explain why he feels this way. Pregnant women are not considered unclean in Islam (although they are considered to be unclean for a period of time after giving birth.) This man, Atta, just happens to disapprove of pregnant women and also happens to be Muslim.

As mentioned, Atta’s most important character trait is that he takes pleasure in the idea of killing others. As Sylvie Mathé comments, “Dismissing political as well as religious considerations,” Atta’s core motivation is his “hunger to kill” (“Imagining the Perpetrator” 23). In Susana Bocsaru’s opinion, Atta’s character is “completely dehumanized, functioning like a machinery to destroy, most stunningly, for no reason other than a profound hatred for mankind” (345). She argues that although Amis appears to want to portray “the typical Islamist terrorist,” his character is “one-dimensional and simple” (345). Atta is not portrayed as a religious man who intends to commit his crime in the name of Islam, as Däwes observes:

> instead of identifying ideological ardor, the narrator thus offers the psychological portrait of a man who is entirely fed up with life; not a religious

> fundamentalist or even a devout Muslim, but someone full of spite, who executes the order of a suicide attack simply 'for the core reason' of causing war and suffering. ("Close Neighbors" 503)

Atta is described as being different from the other terrorists who plan the attacks, and knows this: "Like the others, he was attending to his prayers, disbursing his alms, washing often, eating little, sleeping little. (But he wasn't like the others)" ("The Last Days" 96). The bracketed assertion of difference is surely attributable to Atta via free indirect discourse, and the repetition of the same words several times in the story suggests that his difference from the others is important to him: "Muhammad Atta wasn't like the others, because he was doing what he was doing for the core reason" (101). His "core reason" differs from that of the other terrorists, whose motivations are overtly linked to religious belief: "they had achieved sublimation, by means of jihadi ardour; and their bodies had been convinced by this arrangement and had gone along with it" (101). In contrast, Atta is simply cruel and evil, a misanthrope and misogynist. He likes the "attitude towards women" he associates with "fundamentalism": "the blend of extreme hostility and extreme wariness he found extremely congenial" (99). But he is no religious fundamentalist. He appears to lack both religious and sexual passion: "Muhammad Atta had decided that romantic and religious ardour came from contiguous parts of the human being: the parts he didn't have" (115). He goes through the motions of Muslim rituals, playing along with his fellow terrorists, but it is clear that religion is nothing more than a handy excuse for horrific behaviour. The narrator comments that the "frugality" of the hijackers in the weeks leading up to the attacks was "part of a peer-group piety contest" (94) but Atta's similar behaviour has no basis in religious conviction:

> He had allied himself with the militants because jihad was, by many magnitudes, the most charismatic idea of his generation …. He played along

> with it and did the things that impressed his peers. If you took away all the rubbish about faith, then fundamentalism suited his character. (99)

The phrasing here – "all the rubbish about faith"– is one of many moments in the story where Amis reveals the "inner" Atta via the use of free indirect discourse. This is not the only moment in the story in which Atta dismisses religion: "Muhammad Atta did not believe in the virgins, did not believe in the Garden. How could he believe in such an implausibly, and dauntingly, priapic paradise? He was an apostate: that is what he was. He did not expect paradise. What he expected was oblivion. And, strange to say, he would find neither" (102). This curious proleptic assertion on the part of the narrator, commenting on events after Atta's death, sits oddly after the revelation of Atta's thoughts.

Amis concentrates the focus of the narrative solely on Atta, but instead of on his religious ideology, the author concentrates on his constipation, which is absurdly detailed and provokes disgust in the reader. This scatological twist can be read as Amis's way of offending his Muslim readers, as I have suggested. That this appears to be deliberate is suggested by the fact that it is the "holy water" received from a dying Imam he visited in Portland which "trigger[s] the explosive release of Atta's bowels, simultaneous with the explosion of the tower" (Mathé, "Imagining the Perpetrator" 24). Holy water, or as Muslims call it "Zamzam water," is considered blessed in Islam and therefore has healing powers, and millions of pilgrims drink it and take it as a gift for their family. Other critics have interpreted things differently. Tim Gauthier, for example, after outlining how Amis has described Atta's physical discomfort in the days prior to the attacks, declares that the story "has a dark comic bite" and although all this could "serve to humanize Atta", the character is "presented unsympathetically, thus diminishing him (and his purported ambitions) in the eyes of the reader" (136). Lionel Barber, in contrast, suggests that, "He [Amis] reaches inside the mind of the killer [Atta] describing the final apocalyptic act in overtly sexual terms" ("A Crisis of Testosterone" n.p.).

For a man who supposedly hates women and declares he has no interest in sex, Atta thinks about it quite a lot – and always in terms that are associated with violence and pain. He recalls the "swinishly luxurious form" of an air hostess on a flight some months earlier, "all that flesh, damp and glowing as if from fever or even lust" (the adjective, "swinishly," appear to be another jibe are Islam given they are considered unclean by believers). The narrator tells us "he would never forget the face of the stewardess … – and how badly he wanted to hurt it" ("The Last Days" 162); he finds himself thrilled by thoughts of "the combination of women and blood" (162). While on his final flight, Atta thinks about slitting the throat of an air hostess in terms that are clearly sexually charged: "He wanted to prepare himself for the opening of female flesh" (120); a few pages before this, he is described as imaging his fellow terrorist, Ziad, having sex with his girlfriend in very similar terms: "he kept wondering how their bodies conjoined, how she must open herself up to him" (115). What Barber appears to mean is that the final "explosions" (of bowels and aeroplane) are orgasmic for the sexually frustrated protagonist, and the phrasing in the final part of the story may support this. The narrator asserts of Atta's final act, "All your frigidities and futilities were rewritten, becoming swollen with meaning" before the "divine delight" (122) of killing and death which, at a stretch, could allude to the poetic trope in which to orgasm is to "die."

Amis's short story was published 5 years after the events of 9/11, at the time when the American public were still trying to comprehend what had happened – and why. Amis's choice of Atta as his protagonist was adroit.[36] The real-life Mohammad Atta was not only one of the terrorist hijackers but the ringleader of the attacks. In the days and weeks that followed, his picture was widely broadcasted, and, in a sense, he became the face of terrorism – and the name most closely associated with it. Amis slightly changed the spelling of the real terrorist's name,

[36] Steven Erlanger discusses the real Mohammad Atta's personality (or persona) as a quiet, polite and unobtrusive student in "After the Attacks: The Investigation."

perhaps suggesting that all "Mohammeds" are the same. Robert Eaglestone asserts that fictional works like Amis's "The Last Days of Muhammad Atta," "mark the limits of the current understanding of terror from the western point of view," and that western authors "seek to recapture or rephrase terror in distinctly western terms blaming it on evil, illness or on universal desires" ("The Age of Reason is Over" 22) rather than religious belief or a deep sense of political injustice. But it may be that Amis does little more than project his own views of Muslims onto Atta who is pointedly characterised *as* a Muslim yet lacks any religious belief. The author is a non-believer, and his character is too. The story ends with the peculiar conceit of telling readers what Atta thinks and feels in the final split second(s) of his life, even though the narrator prefaces this by telling readers "there is no information at all about what it is like to die suddenly and violently" ("The Last Days" 123). In the final paragraph the reader is made aware of Atta's regret in poetic, emotive terms that are very much at odds with the way Atta's thoughts have been portrayed in the rest of the story:

> How very gravely he had underestimated life. His own he had hated, and had wished away; but see how long it was taking to absent itself – and with what helpless grief was he watching it go, imperturbable in its beauty and its power. Even as his flesh fried and his blood boiled, there was life, kissing its finger tips. Then it echoed out, and ended. (124)

In his analysis of "The Last Days," Brandon Kempner states of this conclusion that "human goodness wins out in the end" ("Blow the World Back Together" 70). He argues that in portraying Atta's "final epiphany," in which "he realizes he loves life," Amis humanises Atta. He suggests that Atta is not portrayed as "a crazed Islamist zealot" but "as a human being struggling to find his place in the world" (70). Kempner's larger thesis is that "By attributing a revelation to so unlikely a character, Amis essentially eliminates the idea of Islamist difference: deep down, such characters are humanist subjects" (70). This "subject" he argues,

is premised on a western, liberal model and what Amis is doing is "containing everything within as western framework" (70) and thus is guilty of "coloniz[ing] him" (71). Thus, while Islam "may attempt to control everything, ... a universal, rational, kind subject emerges even in the worst of situations" and this "universal, rational, kind" subject is associated exclusively with the West and its inherent moral superiority" (70). In short, then, Amis credits Atta's "final epiphany, where he realizes he loves life" (70) to the West:

> Even the most dedicated terrorist is unable to resist 'the beauty and power' of life. Amis's essays [in the collection, *The Second Plane*, in which "The Last Days" is also republished] clearly find this embrace of the 'beauty and power' of life to be the 'moral advantage, still vast and obvious' of Western culture. In Amis, terrorism is contained within the framework of the thinking, feeling interiority of the subject. Not even Atta is allowed to escape without his humanist epiphany. […] The concept of interiority used by Amis is essentially the humanist, liberal subject. (70-71)

Even *if* Amis's intention may have been to redeem Atta with a western, humanist-inspired epiphany (which I doubt), I read the final paragraph of the story very differently. In my view, regret comes to Atta when he suddenly realises that he will not be able to enjoy the magnitude and scale of his crime. 2996 people died that day, 2996 families were left without a loved one, and Atta will not be there to see this. All through the story we have been told that Atta is a misanthrope, a hater of love and life and a loner. I cannot read this paragraph as Atta's sudden realisation that he loves life, and that this is somehow redemptive. The prose style is too different from earlier passage in which Atta's interiority is revealed. Rather, it is Amis's way asserting a moralising claim. Atta never attained the pleasure he anticipated; he will not be there to witness the mass suffering he has caused: "The joy of killing was proportional to the value of what was destroyed. But that value was something a killer could never see or gauge"

("The Last Days" 124). In this sense, Amis's recreation of Atta remains consistent in its refusal to grant the terrorist – emphatically characterised as Muslim – any shred of humanity.

John Updike's *Terrorist* (2006)

Two months after the publication of Amis's "The Last Days of Muhammad Atta," in June 2006, John Updike published *Terrorist*, his twenty-second novel. This novel centers around the negative views of the young protagonist, Ahmad Ashmawi Mulloy, about America and the American way of life where his opinions are framed by his religion, Islam. When the novel begins Ahmad is 18 years old, and a self-identified, radical, homegrown (wannabe) suicide-terrorist. Written in the third person but largely focalised through Ahmad's perspective, the novel offers some insights into how Ahmad has reached this point through his recollections of the recent past, and also details his ultimately aborted attempt to blow up the Lincoln Tunnel (New York) by detonating explosives in a truck he is driving. If Amis portrays Atta unsympathetically as a nihilistic misanthrope without religious motivation, as I have suggested, Updike's protagonist is wholly different. He is a fundamentalist Muslim, a point driven home on every page. Updike's motivations also appear quite different to those of Amis in the portrayal of his terrorist. Thomas Meaney offers this comparison of the two texts:

> Updike has sought to enlist our sympathy for radical Islam's grievances – giving us a character in whom fanaticism has not quite crystallized, and who is therefore still open to suggestion. Amis has instead elected to write very raw historical fiction about a terrorist whose monstrosity is so universally acknowledged that any attempt to describe it risks banality. ("Fiction in Review" 171)

Sylvie Mathé also comments on the differences between Updike's and Amis's texts:

> Updike chose to present the standpoint of a would-be Islamist terrorist and to enter the mind of 'the other' in order to set down not a hateful portrait, but on the contrary a 'sympathetic,' even a 'loving' one. Unlike Martin Amis, whose imaginative recreation of the last days of Muhammad Atta exposes a man ravaged by hatred and disgust, intent on destruction and self-destruction, Updike's portrait of Ahmad Ashmawi Mulloy aims, in the author's words, at 'understanding, or at least imagining the other side': 'to write a novel from the side of empathy, if I may say.' (n.p.)

Updike has explained his reasons for writing the book in various interviews, including the one from which Mathé quotes, in the passage above, which was with with Lila Azam Zanganeh for *Le Monde*, on January 5, 2007. Six months before this, in an interview with Alden Mudge, he made similar claims, stating that he attempted to portray his protagonist "as sympathetically" as he could ("Holy Terror" n.p.). Unlike other novelists at this time, Updike apparently wanted to write from the point of view of someone other than the victims of 9/11 and do so with respect and understanding. In a 2006 interview with Lev Grossman, for *Time International*, Updike appears to confirm this. When asked why he would write a book about an Islamic extremist he answered: "I think it was the sense that I could see why Muslims would hate the West, and the U.S. in particular, because so much of what we take pride in and enjoy tends to militate against a simple, ardent faith. I felt I could express this idea, that I had some insight" ("Old Master in a Brave New World" n.p.). Talking with Charles McGrath for the *New York Times,* he acknowledged that just five years after 9/11, this was not likely to be well-received by the public, however he felt compelled to write the book:

> I think I felt I could understand the animosity and hatred which an Islamic believer would have for our system. Nobody is trying to see it from that point of view. I guess I have stuck my neck out here in a number of ways, but that's

> what writers are for, maybe. … I sometimes think, 'Why did I do this?' I'm delving into what can be a very sore subject for some people. ("An Interview with John Updike" n.p).

He further explains that should he ever be challenged about his choice of topic he would say: "They can't ask for a more sympathetic and, in a way, more loving portrait of a terrorist" (n.p.).

That Updike delves into a "sore subject" is something of an understatement given the patriotic sentiments that still surround 9/11 (as discussed) and certainly did just five years after the events. Nonetheless, the novelist seems to have taken it upon himself to try and offer a fictional response to the question that plagued America after the Twin Towers fell – "Why do they hate us?" – and to do so with "sympathy" for the (Muslim) terrorist "other." In discussion with George Stephanopoulos for ABC at the time *Terrorist* was published, he again raised the issue of sympathy and the desire to foster understanding – and the belief that he would be able to achieve this:

> I think I could animate from inside a homegrown terrorist and present at least some of the other sides and what indeed does make young men and now some women commit suicide, blow themselves up, turn themselves into human bombs. It's really a horrific new way of waging a conflict. My hero is called Ahmad Ishmael Malloy, and he is a party to a terrible deed. However, he is a boy trying to make sense of his life and trying to be a good Muslim. And it's not so unlike what we ask of our soldiers, to sacrifice themselves or at least to risk death on the behalf of a cause of the set of ideals. D.H. Lawrence somewhere said that the business of the novelist is to stretch your sympathy, to take it to unexpected places. There have been a few plays and novels and I even wrote a short story in the immediate wake of 9/11, but I think it does take time for art, as it were, to digest the news. I probably will be chastised possibly for

> being a little insensitive to the reality that I'm trying to allude to here. The reality is grim, was grim and the future insofar as it's tainted by another is grim. Nevertheless, it was a human event and I think it doesn't hurt us as humans to try to understand the men who brought it off and the men who are buoying themselves up right now. ("Interview with George Stephanopoulos")

Although in Updike's opinion his portrayal of his Muslim terrorist character is sympathetic, I disagree, as do an increasing number of (especially Muslim) critics of the novel. Ahmad is written as an intelligent young man, but also naïve, childlike, and impressionable. The "hellfire" version of Islam to which he is attracted is also not consistent with the beliefs of many everyday Muslims.

The decision to write about a young would-be Muslim terrorist is rather an unusual one for Updike, whose fictional characters more often are quintessentially American. It could be argued, of course, that Ahmad *is* an American, born in the US and raised by an Irish-Catholic mother, regardless of his Egyptian Muslim-father who deserted his family when the protagonist was only three years old. Nonetheless, he is portrayed as *culturally* Muslim in very stereotypical ways that cast him as an outsider. Ulla Kriebernegg criticises Updike for employing "an entirely essentialist approach to cultural identity, including cliched and stereotypical presentations of Arabs and Muslims" ("Hey, Come On" 156). Updike's narrator stresses that "Ahmed was a native-born," but we are told that he distains "the American reality all around, a sprawling ferment for which he feels the mild pity owed a failed experiment" (*Terrorist* 117). For all that he is "native-born" he is emphatically othered not only by his anti-American thoughts but also by his un-American, formal, stilted diction in the novel, in passages like this one, which offers his views on American presidents: "They all want Americans to be selfish and materialistic, to play their part in consumerism" (72). He is further distinguished from his age-group peers by his adherence to rigid beliefs.

A self-proclaimed Muslim teenager with very simple and unconvincing understanding and view of Islam, Ahmad is isolated in school and his alienation and loneliness extends to mainstream society due to his religious beliefs. Ahmad thinks of the fellow students in his school as *"Devils."* Indeed, this is the single word with which the novel begins, attributed to Ahmad. It is followed by further elaboration of the young man's thoughts: *"These devils seek to take away my God"* (3; italics original). (This parallels the novel's closing lines: "*These devils*, Ahmad thinks, *have taken away my God*" (310)). The reason given for his evident disgust at both the girls and the boys at school is their secular values and, especially, their sexual permissiveness. This extends to his teachers who he describes as:

> scuttling after school into their cars on the crackling, trash-speckled parking lot like pale crabs or dark ones restored to their shells, and they are men and women like any others, full of lust and fear and infatuation with things that can be bought. Infidels, they think safety lies in accumulation of the things of this world, and in the corrupting diversions of the television set. They are slaves to images, false ones of happiness and affluence. (3)

These are not the kinds of words and images one associates with an American teenager, even if one of his parents was an immigrant. The rhetoric is more like what one might find in a fundamentalist pamphlet or hear preached from a minbar. James Wood makes this point in a damning review of *Terrorist*, questioning Updike's "good/sympathetic intentions" of writing from the terrorist's point of view: "But who would desire Updike's kind of sympathy? Wanting to dignify his hero, Updike drastically overcompensates and turns his schoolboy into a stiff stereotype – he's a bigot, Updike seems to be saying, but rather a stately bigot, for all that. How can it be sympathetic to a religion to present, as its exemplar, such a solemn robot?" ("Jihad and the Novel" n.p.). A reviewer from *Newsweek*, David Gates, is equally dismissive, stating that the novel "make[s] you wonder if terrorists, like all monomaniacs who dread complexity

and ambiguity, aren't basically boring people" and concludes that Updike's work is "lame-brained, improbable" ("Terrorist Inflitrations" n.p.). Mathé also comments on "the artificiality of the language [Updike] wrought for his teenage voice," offering telling examples:

> Ahmad thinks and speaks in some kind of archaic version of the English language, formal and foreign-sounding at best, stilted and implausible at worst. Not only is the syntax oddly literary, shunning contractions for instance, but the vocabulary and rhythm seem to mimic the many *suras* that are quoted and commented in the novel: for instance, 'I of course do not hate all Americans. But the American way is the way of infidels. It is headed for a terrible doom' [39]; 'I thirst for paradise' [106]; 'Infidels do not know how to die' [174] etc. Such language, improbable as it sounds coming from a New Jersey teen, is too laden with the message of Islam it is meant to be the vehicle of to become the expressive tool of characterization, illuminating the life of the spirit, that Updike is usually so apt at creating. ("*Terrorist* by John Updike" n.p.)

The Nation's reviewer is blunt: "[*Terrorist*] withholds from the reader the critical contribution fiction might make to our understanding: what it feels like to murder for God" (n.p.) The failure to convincingly portray Ahmad's religious drive is also noted by Jonathan Raban the *New York Review of Books*: "Updike shrinks from giving any real credence to the ideology that drives his plot" ("The Good Soldier" n.p.).

Terrorist purports to narrate Ahmad's journey to Islam and his radicalisation in search of his absent father: "He thought he might find in this religion a trace of the handsome father who had receded at the moment his memories were beginning" (*Terrorist* 99). His search takes him to "number 2781½, between the nail salon and the establishment" (99) – a storefront mosque – and he becomes a student of a Yemeni Wahhabi Sheikh named Rashid. His mother explains the underlying reason why he has joined the mosque:

> He's always seemed so alone. He did this Allah thing all by himself, with no help from me. Less than help, really – I resented that he cared so much about a father who did not do squat for him. For us. But I guess a boy needs a father and if he doesn't have one he'll invent one. (117)

As Alaa Alghamdi points out: "Understanding the effects of an absent father, as readers, we are quickly convinced of the powerful influence that Shaikh Rashid must have over Ahmad – moreover, as readers well versed in the rudiments of popular psychology, we can wholly rationalize the reason behind it" ("Terrorism as a Gendered Familial Psychodrama" 5). Not only Ahmad but other fictional, teenage, male, second-generation immigrant Muslim characters who feature in novels discussed in later in this thesis, like Laleh Khadivi's Rez in *A Good Country* and Kamila Shamsie's Parviz in *Home Fire*, all undergo an identity crisis in their multi-cultural societies and turn to Islam. All become victims of radical Islamists and thus are (unintentionally) radicalised. Common in all three texts is that the protagonists lack a father (or in the case of Rez the inability to form a loving relationship with his father). These young men, instead of searching for Islam within the safe environment of their families, turn to other, nefarious substitute "fathers" to find answers to their religious questions and their sense of not belonging in the country adopted by their parents and into which they have been born. In these later novels, however, the psychological impact of an absent (or emotionally absent) father are carefully portrayed with insight and compassion. In *Terrorist*, there is no such care or nuance. Readers are left to extrapolate the effects of paternal loss, rather than feel and understand it.

A smart and promising high-school student, Ahmad is manipulated by his imam, Rashid, to become a truck driver instead of going to college: "He [Rashid] said the college track exposed me to corrupting influences – bad philosophy and bad literature. Western culture is Godless" (*Terrorist* 38); Rashid says, "And because it has no God, it is obsessed with sex and luxury goods" (38). The imam helps him find a job with a furniture delivery company,

owned by Lebanese immigrants. Ahmad surrenders himself to Rashid and is quickly brainwashed to the extent that he is completely incapable of making rational decisions. Updike's stereotypical depiction of his protagonist extends to the character's binary/Manichean narrative of us and them, where 'us' are the pious Muslims and 'them' all corrupt non-Muslims. Ahmad's West is hyper-sexualised, and he is overtly aware of the sensuality of his surroundings. In this respect he is like many young people, perhaps, and is shown to think a great deal about sex. But *how* he thinks about it is atypical for a teenager: sexuality and bare bodies are impure to him. He is torn between desire and revulsion in his relationship with sexually-experienced classmate, Joryleen.

Updike's Islam and his Muslim characters are disrespectful of non-Muslims and perceive themselves to be above everyone else. Ahmad not only shows no tolerance for other religions, but he also does not have any respect for other worldviews. Updike cleverly reinforces the American slogan that 'they hate us' because of 'our freedom' through Ahmad's reason for why he dislikes his mother: "His mother is, he sees now, looking back, a typical American, lacking strong convictions and the courage and comfort they bring. She is the victim of the American religion of freedom, freedom above all, though freedom to do what and to what purpose is left up in the air" (*Terrorist* 167). Updike's young terrorist is at war with the West because he believes that the West wants "to take our God" (188). Ahmad believes he is surrounded by impure Westerners whose only goal is to destroy his spirit and his religion and believes he must defend himself against them.

The absence of a (Muslim) father figure in Ahmad's life is presented as a cause for the choices made by the young man, and it is not coincidental that he is saved – talked out of his deadly suicide mission at the last moment – by another ("good" and, interestingly, Jewish) father figure, his high school guidance counselor, Jack Levy. His mother, Teresa Mulloy, was raised as a Catholic, but she later abandoned her religious beliefs. Teresa is described as a rather

inattentive mother; she is a free spirit and open about her sexuality and relationships. This lack of prejudices allows her to later form a sexual relationship with Jack Levy who, it transpires, is the one who talks Ahmad out of the suicide mission on which he is sent. Driving a bomb-laden truck into the Lincoln Tunnel at rush hour, he encounters Jack who convinces him to not go through with the bombing, which would result in not only Ahmad's death but those of multiple innocent civilians, the plan instilled in him by the "bad" (Muslim) father figure, Shaikh Rashid. The novel ends with Ahmad and Jack riding through Manhattan together towards the George Washington Bridge to return to New Jersey. Jack seems to care deeply about Ahmad, he recognises Ahmad's intelligence and full potential and when Ahmad reveals to him that he wants to become a truck driver it is Jack who tries to persuade him to choose a different path for himself. Jack's caring nature is revealed to the reader when he intervenes in the bombing mission, does not leave Ahmad alone, and is even prepared to die with him: "I don't think I'll get out. We're in this together son" (296). Eventually he convinces Ahmad to abort the suicide bombing, saying, "You're a victim, Ahmad – a fall guy" (309). In contrast, the imam had casually said goodbye to him the night before, knowing he was planning to commit suicide (and mass murder) the next day.

According to Alghamdi, in telling Ahmad's story, Updike offers "an almost forensic account of what has gone wrong and a chilling admonishment that this wrong can have devastating effects" ("Terrorism as a Gendered Familial Psychodrama" 4). Furthermore, Alghamdi argues, Updike's examination "focuses on psychological truths and the interaction that takes place between family and community" (4). I disagree with this assessment in many ways because we are actually privy to very little of the reasoning that drives Ahmad to become not just a Muslim, but a fundamentalist one. However, one of the "psychological truths" that Updike drives home involves the absence of Ahmad's father and, by extension, the effects this has, or more often tends to have, on boys and young men – a notion captured well in Guy

Corneau's best-selling (in the West) book *Absent Fathers, Lost Sons: The Search for Masculine Identity* (1991) and multiple similar accounts since then that stress the importance of a fathers as boys develop to manhood. Alghamdi claims that "Updike plays upon such a well-known psychological dynamic in the book – indeed one may even say he exploits it, because this dynamic, the narrative of which is so familiar to a *western* readership, lends an air of tragic inevitability to the events in the novel" (5; my emphasis). This said, although Updike has chosen to focalise the story through a Muslim character and claims to have done so sympathetically, Ahmad's character is not very believable – and certainly not from a western perspective. The reader is not given any accounts of the events that led the 11-year-old to turn to Islam in search of a father.

Also unconvincing, as several commentators on the novel have noted, is the portrayal of Ahmad's radicalisation. Ahmad is an alienated teenager with no friends nor hobbies or interests. Although the depiction of religion as a way of preying on a lonely and isolated young man could be considered rather accurate, because as Recep Dogan states, "radical groups exploit such religious concepts as jihad and caliphate to attract ignorant minds to their ranks and manipulate their religious sensitivity towards their evil agenda" (3), Updike only offers a one dimensional, naïve and narrow-minded character. The reader is not given any in-depth information about Ahmad's earlier life or explanation for why he hates America so much. Since his character's reasons/actions/behavior cannot be rationally interpreted, his religion alone is blamed for his behavior. James Wood makes precisely this point: "As we encounter him at the start of the book, Ahmad is already boiling over with anti-American thoughts; we are thus offered no idea of what he was like before meeting the imam, what he was like as, say, a moderately Islamic fifteen-year-old" ("Jihad and the Novelist" n.p.). Examples are manifold. At the seaside, for example, Ahmad thinks, "*Devils*. The guts of the men sag hugely, and the monstrous buttocks of the women seesaw painfully as they tread the boardwalk in swollen

sneakers. A few steps from death, these American elders defy decorum and dress as toddlers" (*Terrorist* 200). Midway through the novel, he is reported as thinking of Americans:

> These doomed animals gathered in the odor of mating and mischief yet have the comfort of their herded kindred, and each harbors some hope or plan of a future, a job, a destination, an aspiration if only to rise in the ranks of dope dealers or pimps. Whereas he, Ahmad, with abilities that Mr. Levy had told him were ample, has no plan: the God attached to him like an invisible twin, his other self, is a God not of enterprise but of submission. (184)

In the final paragraph of the book he is shown to think of people in Manhattan, "scuttling, hurrying, intent in the milky morning sun upon some plan or scheme or hope they are hugging to themselves, their reason for living another day, each impaled live upon the pin of consciousness, fixed upon self-advancement and self-preservation. That and only that."

Commenting on such passages in the novel, C.R. Pennell avers,

> All the Muslims [in the novel] are outsiders, foreigners even when they were born in America. None is white and Updike is also obsessed with colour and pigments his characters with the obsessive precision of an apartheid bureaucrat.
>
> There is no literary device, no authenticating fiction to bridge the gap, no diaries or death-cell interview to explain how Updike hears Ahmad's innermost thoughts. So he doesn't: the whole book comes across as if Updike had just finished reading the works of Sayyid Qutb, an Egyptian who studied in the US in the 1940s. Qutb found even the sexually repressed America of that time too much for him, full of immorality, seductiveness and vulgarity, and his books rail against it. Updike's book reads flatly as a quotation, not an exercise in imagination. ("Self-righteousness" n.p.)

James Wood rather wittily complains that "when Ahmad speaks, he sounds like V.S. Naipaul" and when he thinks "he sounds like John Updike" ("Jihad and the Novelist" n.p.). Jack and Ahmad's final conversation in the truck is a good example. The account of Jack and Ahmad bonding together in a father-son moment, is utterly unconvincing. Indeed, as a reviewer for *The San Francisco Chronicle* states, "Ahmad sounds [like] a wooden actor with a bad accent," concluding that "Updike has lost, or perhaps abandoned his gift for characterization" (qtd. Batchelor, *John Updike: A Critical Biography* 168). Examples of such criticism can be multiplied many times over. Here is one more, from Michiko Kakutani in *The New York Times*:

> Unfortunately, the would-be terrorist in this novel turns out to be a completely unbelievable individual: more robot than human being and such a cliché that the reader cannot help suspecting that Mr. Updike found the idea of such a person so incomprehensible that he at some point abandoned any earnest attempt to depict his inner life and settled instead for giving us a static, one-dimensional stereotype.
>
> Ahmad talks not like a teenager who was born and grew up in New Jersey but like an Islamic terrorist in a bad action-adventure movie, or someone who has been brainwashed and programmed to spout jihadist clichés. Much of the time he sounds like someone who has learned English as a second language. ("John Updike's *Terrorist*" n.p.)

The effect of the awkward dialogue, one-dimensional characterisation and tenuous plot is that Ahmad is an outsider both in the novel and to the reader. The reader is not given enough information about what life was like for Ahmad before he started his religious studies or whether religion had any role in his upbringing. The story does not offer a believable/substantial rationale for Ahmad's behaviour or decision for undertaking the bombing. Richard Gray is not persuaded by Updike's portrayal of the radicalised teenager

either, and to him, "Quite simply, this brave attempt to imagine the other never really fits together as a meaningful story" (*After the Fall* 34). He continues to say that "In *Terrorist*, by contrast [with other novels that have portrayed terrorists, such as Joseph Conrad's *The Secret Agent*], there is neither the same degree of imaginative involvement, getting inside the skin of the victim, nor anything like a similar measure of argumentative mediation, the witnessing or explanatory piecing together of personal or cultural motive" (*After the Fall* 34).

Apart from Ahmad, Updike's novel hosts several other hybrid identities; Ahmad's mother is Irish-American, Jack Levy is Jewish-American, his boss is a Lebanese immigrant, and his high school crush, Jorylee, is African-American. Despite this variety of ethnic and national ancestry in the novel, it is the Arab-American who turns into a terrorist. The other hyphenated identities do not suffer from identity crises, rather it is the (culturally) Muslim characters who do and in search of answers subsequently turn to (radical) Islam. Only the Muslim characters are portrayed as having difficulties with the American way of life and the solution to this, it is implied, is to become a terrorist (Ahmad) or to mastermind a terrorist attack (the imam, Shaikh Rashid).

There are stark differences between the opinions of Muslim and non-Muslim readers of the novel.[37] Western reviews of the novel fell into three main camps: some patriotic hardliners that chastised Updike for his attempt to portray a terrorist sympathetically; a few that praised Updike's bravery in attempting to write from a Muslim's perspective and championed his achievement in doing so; and many that dismissed the novel on aesthetic grounds as bad writing. Typifying the second camp are reviews like that of Jem Poster, in *The Guardian*. He lauds Updike for "choosing to tackle a subject as risky as it is topical," describes the novel as a "human study of a young man's journey towards jihad" and insists that the novel is "a work of considerable distinction" ("Paradise Lost" n.p.). He continues: "[Updike's] thoughtful,

[37] See Kristiaan Versluys's summary of (western) reviews in *Out of the Blue: September 11 and the Novel*.

disturbing narrative insists repeatedly on the moral and spiritual dimensions of jihad, tacitly urging us towards a deeper understanding of Islamic fundamentalism and revealing, in the process, patterns of connection vastly more subtle and complex than anything recognised by America's political masters" (n.p.). Likewise, Peter C. Herman expresses admiration for the novel and approvingly quotes Anna Hartwell: "Updike's 'achievements [in *Terrorist*] have been significantly underrated,'" and praises Hartwell for "explor[ing] the novel's refusal to participate in 'the national triumphalism that underpins much post–9/11 reflection in the US'" (692). He admires Updike for taking "a genuine risk, [doing] so fully aware that many would not be pleased by his approach" (699). He even goes so far as to state that "[Updike] seems to fully endorse the Islamic critique of America's exhausted consumer culture" (705). In a similar vein, Mohan G. Ramanan suggests that "Both Teresa [Ahmad's mother] and her sister Beth get space and the result is a multi-voiced and gripping exploration of the American way of life and its Islamic other. It is also an adventure story and Updike's considerable story-telling skills are very much visible. It is a bracing exposé of America and one is clear that Updike has struck a fine and difficult balance in his treatment of the theme" ("The West and its Other" 129). Hartnell (praised by Herman) argues that "Updike's decision to tackle the perspective of the 'perpetrator' is a courageous attempt to pull away from the prevalent cultural tendency to privilege the category of 'trauma' in treatments of 9/11 that emerged in its wake and with notable rapidity in the years 2005–2007" ("Violence and the Faithful" 478).

Such positive responses to the novel are decidedly in the minority, however. A bald statement by a reviewer for *The Wall Street Journal* exemplifies the response of the more populous third camp which views *Terrorist* as poorly written, resulting in unconvincing characterisation of the protagonist and a creaking plot full of unlikely coincidences. Updike is slated as "A high-brow novelist trying to write below his pay grade" and for penning a novel that is "uncongenial to his talent": "It all falls flat … squandered by the hopeless plot" (qtd.

Batchelor, 168). Salman Rushdie described *Terrorist* as "beyond awful" and advised Updike to "stay in his parochial neighborhood and write about wife-swapping because it's what he can do" (qtd. in Campbell, "A Translated Man" n.p.). Christopher Hitchens' review in *The Atlantic* is harshly critical, stating that he was bored and annoyed at the novel and not convinced by either the plot or the characters.[38] In his opinion, Updike's novel is "one of the worst pieces of writing from any grown-up source" ("No Way" n.p.). James Wood's objections are also aesthetic:

> What is most striking about this novel is that, despite Updike's massive familiarity with the technical challenges of fiction-writing – this is his twenty-second novel, for goodness sake – he proves himself relatively inept at the essential task of free indirect style, of trying to find an authorial voice for his Muslim schoolboy. He will begin a paragraph in his character's voice, and then, apparently losing any capacity for the necessary ventriloquism, decide utterly to write over his character. […]
>
> One can understand … why Updike, in third-person narration, writes over his character so absolutely: he is icing a hollow cake. Ahmad has no personality, no quiddity as an eighteen-year-old American, so he is Updike's serf, ready for whatever the writer chooses to do with him. In Updikeland, this means lyrical authorial commentary. ("Jihad and the Novelist" n.p.)

Mathé argues much the same:

> Yet empathy, somehow, is not enough. The quality of ventriloquism does not convey the feel of religious *experience*, if experience be, as William James

[38] One of many unconvincing plot developments is when, through the focalisation of Jack, we learn that there has been a "sting operation" organised by the Department of Homeland Security to sacrifice Ahmad as a scapegoat. His ostensible co-conspirator, Charlie Chehb is revealed to be an undercover CIA agent. Charlie is beheaded by others involved in the plot when they discover his true identity. Jack's sister-in-law just happens to be an assistant in the Department of Homeland Security, who just happens to mention her suspicions about a New Jersey terrorist cell not long before Ahmad gets into his bomb-filled truck.

> argues, the core and backbone of religious life, so that the spectre of didacticism shows through: mouthing the words will not morph into breathing the faith. Granted the unfamiliar angle was a challenge, a way perhaps for the novelist to reinvent himself as he has been prone to do throughout his career with variable success, but Updike seems to have overreached this time: for what *Terrorist* lacks most is authenticity.
>
> […]
>
> The sad truth is that, in *Terrorist*, Updike's empathy does not carry him quite far enough to become the voice and suffering, etymologically speaking, of his teenage protagonist. The result weighs not only on the artistic but also on the ideological bearing of the novel: the argument for terrorism moves from stereotype to sheer confusion. ("*Terrorist* by John Updike" n.p.; italics original)

Endorsing such responses, Däwes is also not convinced by the Jewish guidance counsellor trying to talk his secret lapsed-Catholic lover's Muslim son out of the suicide mission, and in her opinion, this is "less, it seems, for the sake of the political and metaphorical implications than to serve the effect of suspense" ("Close Neighbors" 507).

In a discussion of American reviewer responses to *Terrorist*, Laurence Mazzeno and Sue Norton make the salient observation that,

> Many American reviewers' assessments of *Terrorist* had as much to do with their political bias as with their literary judgment – perhaps even more so. In an early review in the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, Harry Levins offers a prescient assessment of the novel's impact in America: '*Terrorist* is likely to upset lots of people. American Muslims surely will complain that Updike has depicted them as mindless zealots, while some on the civil-rights side will accuse Updike of stereotyping his poor urban black characters. Red-state Americans will grouse

> that Updike portrays US society largely in Ahmad's terms: hedonistic, carnal and godless.' More than a hundred reviews prove him largely correct, with a few notable exceptions. One never can be certain if American reviewers are unhappy with Updike's politics or his aesthetic sensibilities, but they seem, as a rule, either to blame him harshly for transgressing into territory they believe should have been off limits to him, or praise him for exposing the dangers of home-grown terrorism. (2)

Mazzeno and Norton make this claim in service of an argument that non-American European reviewers have tended to be less critical of the novel's politics although many agree "that Updike fails in creating a believable protagonist" (5). Despite a broadly unfavourable critical response, however, the novel was a best seller in the West, no doubt due to both the author's literary celebrity and the contentious topic he had chosen to broach.

Strikingly, almost all of Updike's Muslim critics – many of whom have commented on the novel in recent years – are hostile towards the novel. They not only dismiss Updike's portrayal of a stereotypical Muslim terrorist but also his misinterpretation/misrepresentation of the Quran. Despite Updike's claims about wanting to write a sympathetic portrait of his young Muslim terrorist, many Muslim reviewers argue that Updike's seemingly good intentions may have in fact turned out to be hubristic and damaging. What does he really know about Islam? What are his sources? What right does he have to try and 'enter the mind' of a would-be terrorist, and a Muslim, when his leanings – as evident in all his other publications – are decidedly Christian and (middle) American? He is, after all, a committed Christian and according to Benedicta Cipolla, "much of his earlier work contains traces of Updike's furious immersion in Christian theology" ("John Updike" n.p.). Danny E. Olinger claims that "[Christian] faith permeated Updike's writings" that he "deliberately placed Christian themes at the centre of his stories" ("John Updike and Christianity" n.p.). Hartnell agrees, saying of

Terrorist that "Christianity polices Updike's religious vision" ("Writing Islam" 143). It is perhaps unsurprising, then, that Updike's interpretations of the Quran appear to misrepresent and misinterpret Islam as a violent, demonic, and aggressive religion and, consequently, Muslims as irrational and turbulent. While Updike quotes from the Quran in the novel, his opinion of the holy book is evident in the passages which he has chosen. According to Updike, as stated in an interview with Charles McGrath published in *The New York Times*, the Quran "does not speak very eloquently to a Westerner" because "Much of it is either legalistic or opaquely poetic. There's a lot of hellfire – descriptions of making unbelievers drink molten metal occur more than once. It's not a fuzzy, lovable book, although in the very next verse there can be something quite generous." ("Updike Explores the Mind of a Terrorist" n.p.). He gives no such evidence of "generous" Quranic verses however. Indeed, as Muhammad Awan argues, "[m]ost of the verses that Updike has gathered are about the Divine fury and anger at the infidels and the sinful" (528). Nayef Ali Al-Joulan et al. make the same point: "In *Terroris*t, Updike quotes Qur'anic verses to show that Islam's God is merciless and violent, Islam's messenger, prophet Muhammad (PUH), adopted and promoted God's cruelty and the followers of Islam believed in, preached and performed that brutality. … Updike selectively quotes verses that validate his malicious misrepresentation" ("Satanized Verses" 17).[39] They further assert, "Working hard to select verses that promote an image of a violent Islam, Updike not only ignores the contexts of those verses but also unfairly overlooks abundant Qur'anic verses and Prophet's sayings that endorse forgiveness and peace" (18). The first quotation from the Quran appears early in the novel and is typical in tone and content of the many others quoted:

> *And who shall teach thee what the Crushing Fire is?*

[39] See also: Doha Al-Sayed (2021).

It is God's kindled fire,

Which shall mount above the hearts of the damned;

It shall verily rise over them like a vault,

On outstretched columns. (*Terrorist* 6; italics original)

Sheikh Rashid teaches many such verses to Ahmad, for example, "*Let not the infidels deem that the length of days we give them is good for them! We only give them length of days that they may increase their sins! And a shameful chastisement shall be their lot*" (76; italics original). He tells the young man, "the enchanting youths [American teenagers], likened to scattered pearls, cited in the sura called 'Man' should be rendered 'chilled raisins' – referring to a cooling raisin drink served with elaborate courtesy in Paradise while the damned drink molten metal in Hell" (106); and "Say not those who are slain on God's path they are Dead; nay, they are living!" (112). Rashid tells Ahmad Islam needs a warrior "whose love of God is unqualified, and who impatiently thirsts for the glory of Paradise," before asking him, "are you such a one, Ahmad?" (234). And Ahmad speaks (and thinks) in just the same way as the imam. He tells Charlie, "Mohammad is Allah's apostle. Those who follow him are ruthless to the unbelievers but merciful to one another" (183). The dialogue between Ahmed and Jack, in the bomb-laden truck at the end of the novel, is another case in point. Ahmad says, "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. They think to be themselves is sufficient. They love this present life more than the next" (294). Jack replies by saying, "So kill them now. That seems pretty severe" (294). Ahmed responds to this with, "In the third sura of the Qur'an it says that not all the gold in the world can ransom those who once believed and now disbelieve, and that God will never accept their repentance" (294). Such proclamations may have been intended to portray the extent to which Ahmad has been brainwashed by Rashid, however their stereotypical fervour is not only tedious but unconvincing.

Another main thread in Arab/Muslim criticism of the novel is of Updike's racial and cultural profiling and stereotyping. M. Alosman et. al., for example, observe that Ahmad disrespects and disregards non-Muslims beliefs and as a result, Muslims are presented as the "intolerant other who is not able to co-exist with non-Muslims" ("Differentiation and Imperfectionality" 62). They also comment that Updike's narrative portrays Christianity and Judaism "as peace-loving religions that can co-exist within the American climate of religious diversity," while Islam is presented as an anti-western, intolerant religion (63). A related argument draws attention to Updike's use of orientalist binaries to delineate Islam and the West in opposition. The result is the portrayal of Islam as a backward and anti-modern religion, which hates the developed, civilised West. Indeed, there is no portrayal of tolerant, loving or generous Muslims in the novel. This is the line taken buy Fikret Güven and Bülent Güven in their article, "Orientalism in John Updike's novel *Terrorist*": "[Updike's] fictional terrorists' individual actions are presented as manifestation of their backward and violent religion. These characteristics are then used to contrast with a progressive and enlightened West" (215). They continue: "Individual Muslims and collective Islam are represented as a monolithic identity of defeat, revenge, and displacement" (217-218).

Rehana Ahmed et al. argue that "While attempting to situate Ahmad's political acts within religious ideology, Updike fails to consider the communal aspects of religion – especially Islam – that actually make it resistant to the kind of critique he is undertaking" (*Culture, Diaspora, and Modernity in Muslim Writing* 8). They note that,

> Ahmad's radicalization takes place in isolation, with little refence to the politics of the Islamic world, cited as a decisive factor by many commentators and by jihadist militants themselves. Perhaps this is another instance of Updike's preference for the isolatable individualism of the Protestant mind [as evident in much of his other fiction]. Ultimately, Updike's *Terrorist* works within

> Orientalist representational conventions even while sympathising with parts of Ahmad's critique of a soulless, materialistic and sex-obsessed contemporary America. …Updike's vision is one that separates the private sphere of religious faith from the public realm of collective activity in ways that mimic the wider prejudices of the society of which he is part. (8)[40]

There is a fundamental disconnect, in other words, between the protestant individualism of the protagonist and the community-oriented religion he ostensibly espouses.

Developing such ideas, Saleen Dhobi claims that the novel is not simply a reflection of John Updike's personal lack of understanding of Islam, or his stereotypical understanding of Muslims, but evidences larger social facts about the US, in particular the nation's inability to accommodate cultural difference. He argues that not only Muslim Ahmad, but also characters of other ethnic and racial minorities (like African-American Joryleen and Tylenol, and Jewish Jack Levy), are also portrayed in ways that evidence "the cultural bigotry amplified in the aftermath of 9/11" (65). Dhobi proposes that "exclusionary practices" as shown in the novel are widespread in the US and that Updike's novel is realistic in revealing how these have caused "isolation and marginalisation of Muslim and Jewish minorities" (72). What is to be criticised, then, is not the novel or the author's conception of Islam, but the nation he faithfully portrays. It might be that the one-sided Quranic quotations in the novel – full of hell-fire and the call to violence against 'infidels' – and the stereotypical anti-American hatred Ahmad espouses, is an attempt to show how thoroughly the young protagonist has been brainwashed by the imam who has fed him these lines and this vision. This could be justified, perhaps, by the fact that much of the novel is focalised through Ahmad, so the single-minded religious fervour is intended to show *his* mind-set, not the author's opinion of Islam. If this was Updike's intention, however, it fails because there is no voice in the novel that offers an alternative version of Islam or the

[40] See also: Altwaiji, Mubarak (2015).

Quaran and could serve to show the limitations of Ahmad's knowledge and understanding of Islam and the Holy Book. However well-intentioned Updike's vision for the novel might have been, his portrayal of an Islamic terrorist fails in manifold ways, just as Amis's did, albeit for different reasons.

Don DeLillo's *Falling Man* (2007)

Don DeLillo's *Falling Man*, published the year after Updike's *Terrorist* and Amis's "The Last Days of Muhammad Atta," is remarkably different from these texts in style, theme and approach. Instead of focusing on the figure of the terrorist fanatic leading up to his violent act, much of *Falling Man* is set in the aftermath of 9/11 and is the story of Keith Neudecker, a 39-year-old lawyer who works in the World Trade Center and managed to escape one of the Twin Towers before it fell. Three (non-sequential) chapters *are* devoted to a terrorist – Hammad – as he prepares for and finally undertakes the fatal flight into one of the Twin Towers, but this character is minor in comparison to Keith. Indeed, the representation of Hammad is so limited and narrow that Catherine Morley argues, "[t]he narrative's relegation of Hammad to [the novel's] periphery" is "a formal embodiment of the ostracism of minority groups in current day America" ("Writing in the Wake of 9/11" 252). This may be something of an over-statement, but it gestures to the fact that the novel appears resolutely focused on the psychological effects of the attacks on the lives of middle-class Americans.

Many reviewers expressed disappointment at the novel for "turning its focus sharply and relentlessly inward instead of trying to consider the scale of the incident" (Ally, "Mourning in the Age of Terror" 354). Sonia Baelo-Allué is representative, asserting, "*Falling Man* deals with the domestic and intimate rather than the panoramic and public. It is not the cultural trauma novel that some critics expected" ("9/11 and the Psychic Trauma Novel" 64). There is no mention of President Bush or Vice-president Cheney, no real discussion about Islam except

in set piece arguments between two terrorists, no international history or politics (apart from allusion to political activism in Germany in the 1960s (see below). At the end of the book, when Lianne and Justin (Keith's estranged wife and son) attend an anti-war protest, they get bored and go to a bookshop instead. Ally notes that,

> The novel was widely criticized on this very basis – that it ignored the cultural zeitgeist, showed little of the event's impact on either culture or geopolitics, evaded the trauma inflicted on the nation's shared consciousness, and even left largely untouched the most familiar of DeLillo's usual obsessions: the experience of modernity through the background hiss of involuntary media consumption. By avoiding these topics, *Falling Man* was read by most reviewers either as an insignificant novel or as a vexingly depoliticized one (the former accusation perhaps being based on the latter). Though later critics have tried to redeem the novel to an extent, it remains a difficult and, as far as its contribution to the novel form goes, even a damaged text, one that feels oddly incomplete. ("Mourning in the Age of Terror" 354)

It *is* a difficult text, perhaps because, as many have observed, *Falling Man* is not a thrilling, plot-driven novel. It is disjointed, fragmented and there is no satisfactory resolution or realisation achieved by the central characters. Toby Litt observes this in his review of the novel for *The Guardian*:

> There is no attempt to write another panoramic Big Book, like *Underworld*. … *Falling Man* is ambitious in scope but not in scale. It is scrupulously domestic, relentlessly downbeat. If a scene can be shown in retrospect, it is; if it can have the dramatic stuffing knocked out of it in advance, all the better. ("The Trembling Air" n.p.)

While it is fair to say the novel "feels oddly incomplete," this appears to have been DeLillo's point. Kathryn Lee observes of the fragmented narrative that it requires "slow and careful" reading and "[t]his has the opposite effect to watching the mass media coverage of 9/11 where the images were supplied in a quick-fire, easily-consumed manner with commentary to direct those watching it on what to think and what was considered an appropriate reaction" ("Fiction as Resistance" 43-44).

Lee's observation seems apt when if we consider the novel in relation to DeLillo's essay, "In the Ruins of the Future," first published in *Harper's Magazine* and republished in *The Guardian* three months after 9/11. I refer to it as an essay, but it is a strangely hybrid work combining elements of essay, narrative and prose-poem – a form that anticipates the prosodic and structural dislocations of *Falling Man*. Near that start of the essay, De Lillo writes,

> Today … the world narrative belongs to terrorists. But the primary target of the men who attacked the Pentagon and the World Trade Centre was not the global economy. It was America that drew their fury. It was the high gloss of our modernity. It was the thrust of our technology. It was our perceived godlessness. It was the blunt force of our foreign policy. It was the power of American culture to penetrate every wall, home, life and mind.
>
> Terror's response is a narrative that has been developing over years, only now becoming inescapable. ("In the Ruins" n.p.)

This narrative, he next suggests, is one that "may begin to feel less motivated by politics and personal hatred than by brotherhood itself"; the terrorist "knows who we are and what we mean in the world – an idea, a righteous fever in the brain." DeLillo is not on neutral territory here as the adjective "righteous" suggests. The terrorists he describes are in thrall to a specifically religious narrative, an Islamic one that is ancient and brutally atavistic: "the future has yielded, for now, to medieval expedience, to the old slow furies of cut-throat religion"; "He [the

terrorist] pledges his submission to God and meditates on the blood to come"; "They [terrorists] surely see themselves as the elect of God whether or not they follow the central precepts of Islam. It is the presumptive right of those who choose violence and death to speak directly to God. They will kill and then die" ("In the Ruins" n.p). The description of the terrorists' "religion" – Islam – as cruel, backward and barbaric is repeated throughout.

According to DeLillo, against this atavistic narrative, directed to the past – the narrative of the terrorist "Them" – is another, the one perpetrated by "Us" (US). It points to the future, but not necessarily a positive one (DeLillo's critique of American "progress" is evident in all his novels): "The World Trade towers were not only an emblem of advanced technology but a justification, in a sense, for technology's irresistible will to realise in solid form whatever becomes theoretically allowable"; "We like to think that America invented the future," he states, however, "[w]e may find that the ruin of the towers is implicit in other things. The new Palm Pilot at a fingertip's reach, the stretch limousine parked outside the hotel, the midtown skyscraper under construction, carrying the name of a major investment bank" ("In the Ruins" n.p.) The US narrative, he notes, is also one about global military power and its alliance with the media and technology: "during the engagement in the Persian Gulf, people had trouble separating the war from coverage of the war" ("In the Ruins" n.p.). DeLillo's critique of the media spectacle continues:

> The events of September 11 were covered unstintingly. There was no confusion of roles [between us and them] on TV. The raw event was one thing, the coverage another. The event dominated the medium. It was bright and totalising and some of us said it was unreal. When we say a thing is unreal, we mean it is too real, a phenomenon so unaccountable and yet so bound to the power of objective fact that we can't tilt it to the slant of our perceptions. First the planes struck the towers. After a time it became possible for us to absorb this, barely.

> But when the towers fell. When the rolling smoke began moving downward, floor to floor. This was so vast and terrible that it was outside imagining even as it happened. We could not catch up with it. But it was real, punishingly so, an expression of the physics of structural limits and a void in one's soul… . ("In the Ruins" n.p.)

The incomplete sentences and fractured syntax in the essay testify to the impossibility of "absorbing" the events. Nonetheless, writes DeLillo in the essay, there are "[t]wo forces in the world, past and future." There are also two "totalising" narratives: ours and theirs ("In the Ruins" n.p.). He is critical of both global capitalism and terrorist fundamentalism.

It is against such totalisation that he attempts to write in the essay, doing so in fragments, interspersing episodic scenes from the lives of an imagined "Karen" and "Marc" who are perhaps prototypes for the characters Keith and Lianne in *Falling Man*. The unattributed comments of a series of 'someone's' are interspersed between single line descriptions: "Smoke began to enter the corridor"; "The detective told Karen to stay where they were" ("In the Ruins" n.p.). Multiple *things* are juxtaposed in lists, and "represent the confluence of a number of cultural tides, patriotic and multidevotional and retro hippy": "The flags, flowerbeds and votive candles, the lamppost hung with paper airplanes, the passages from the Koran and the Bible, the letters and poems, the cardboard John Wayne, the children's drawings of the twin towers, the hand-painted signs for Free Hugs, Free Back Rubs, the graffiti of love and peace on the tall equestrian statue" ("In the Ruins" n.p.). Or: "The cellphones, the lost shoes, the handkerchiefs mashed in the faces of running men and women. The box cutters and credit cards. The paper that came streaming out of the towers and drifted across the river to Brooklyn backyards, status reports, résumés, insurance forms" ("In the Ruins" n.p.). These jumbled, disassociated things, sentences and descriptions in the essay stand in contrast to the "bright and totalising" television narrative and the moral judgements it stabilised. In reality,

however, there are multiple singular narratives, "100,000 stories crisscrossing New York, Washington, and the world. Where we were, who we know, what we've seen or heard" ("In the Ruins" n.p.). At the heart of the essay stands this self-reflective question: "The writer wants to understand what this day has done to us. Is it too soon?" ("In the Ruins" n.p.) This is followed soon after by a statement about what the writer hopes and wants to do: "There is something empty in the sky. The writer tries to give memory, tenderness and meaning to all that howling space" ("In the Ruins" n.p.).

Falling Man is that attempt "to give memory, tenderness and meaning" in the aftermath of the horror, and its difficulty is perhaps explained by the writer's, DeLillo's, desire "to understand what this day has done to *us*" ("In the Ruins" n.p. my emphasis). It is an urgent and resolute attempt to not only understand, but also represent the traumatic impact of that day on "us," however the result is a problematic evasion of politics and context as if the planes that flew into the Twin Towers were simply a fateful act of indifferent nature, not purposely piloted by men with reasons, however mistaken or appalling these reasons might be. As Michael Jamieson suggests, in the novel,

> DeLillo actively works to keep the greater historical context out of play. The only characters that reference this larger political context are the children, Keith and Lianne's son Justin and his playmates "the Siblings." The three take to staring out of windows with binoculars, waiting for Bill Lawton [they have misheard new reports about Bin Laden] to fly another plane into a tower. ("Don DeLillo and 9/11" 18)

The novel begins in *media res*, without any context or explanation (which is precisely how those in or near the towers would have experienced the attacks): "It was not a street anymore but a world, a time and space of falling ash and near night" (*Falling Man* 3). The entire world has shrunk into this one moment and place. A man identified only as "he," is

described “walking north through rubble and mud,” surrounded by people running and falling and seeking shelter. Things – shoes, handbags, paper cups, laptops, cell phones, a shirt, office paper, contracts, resumés – litter DeLillo’s sentences, like the streets through which the man walks.

> The roar was still in the air, the buckling rumble of the fall. This was the world now. Smoke and ash came rolling down streets and turning corners, busting around corners, seismic tides of smoke, with office paper flashing past, standard sheets with cutting edge, skimming, whipping past, otherworldly things in the morning pall. (3)

We only learn the man’s identity many pages later – he is the protagonist, Keith, who has escaped the burning North Tower where he worked as a lawyer: “there was glass in his hair and face, marbled bolls of blood and light” (3). Eventually he is picked up by a passing truck and asks to be taken to Lianne’s flat. Although Keith and Lianne are separated, they are not yet divorced and share the care of their young son, Justin. The narrator tells us, “When he appeared at the door it was not possible, a man come out of an ash storm, all blood and slag, reeking of burnt matter, with pinpoint glints of silvered glass in his face” (87). The descriptions area heavily adjectival, evoking all the senses.

Lianne, shocked by the attacks, lets Keith inside her apartment and tries to treat his injuries: “He walked past her toward the kitchen and she tried calling her doctor, then 911, then the nearest hospital, but all she heard was the drone of overloaded lines” (87). Keith, we learn, had been handed a stranger’s briefcase while escaping the North Tower. A few weeks later he decides to look for the owner of the briefcase which leads him to meet Florence Givens, “a “light-skinned black woman” (92), a fellow survivor of the attacks with whom he starts a sexual relationship although he appears less interested in sex than in trying to recall “the dazed reality

they'd shared in the stairwells" (166). In a review for *The New York Times*, Frank Rich comments,

> Whether Keith and Lianne will reconstitute their marriage is almost irrelevant to what DeLillo is up to here. In the ruins of 9/11, relationships are a non sequitur. Disconnectedness is the new currency. Language is fragmented. Vision is distorted. Even when the characters look at the bottles and jars in the composition of a beloved Giorgio Morandi still life, they still can't help seeing the towers. While there are just enough signposts to keep *Falling Man* tethered to a recognizable reality, it's an askew, alternative-reality variation on the literal, as if we, too, were taking it in through Keith's unfocused gaze. The entire city, not just downtown, is in the physical and emotional limbo of a frozen zone. ("The Clear Blue Sky" n.p.)

As this suggests, DeLillo is clearly attempting to portray the "disconnectedness" and "emotional limbo" experienced by survivors of 9/11 and their friends, families and fellow citizens. DeLillo gives the reader a chance to witness the psychological effects of surviving the events of this trauma through the "unfocused gaze" of ordinary (mostly white) Americans. Lianne tries to make sense of things but fails to do so; she focuses on the texts she is editing (she works as a freelance editor), gets angry with a neighbor who plays Middle Eastern music, "music located in Islamic tradition" (*Falling Man* 67), facilitates a writing workshop with of people in the early stages of Alzheimer's disease (a gesture to the thematic concern with the failures of memory); and recalls her father's death by suicide. She returns to Catholicism. She talks with her mother, Nina, and her mother's long-time lover, Martin, an art-dealer, who may or may not have belonged to a terrorist group in Germany three decades earlier but how this

relates to the current events remains opaque.[41] Nothing adds up for the reader in these disparate scenes featuring Lianne because nothing adds up for her.

Pre 9/11, Keith hosted poker games with men whose names are less important than their occupations, all of which suggest corporate capitalism: "the business writer, the adman, the mortgage broker" (*Falling Man* 96) and "the bond trader, the lawyer, the other lawyer" (97); "[T]hese games were the funneled essence, the clear and intimate extract of their daytime initiatives" (97). The men would gather weekly, "sit and play, game-faced, testing the forces that govern events" (97). They introduce a series of arbitrary rules to govern their play, first limiting the dealer's choices then banning food, then limiting the kinds of alcohol they can drink to hard liquor, then banning sports talk, then cigarettes: "They enjoyed doing this, most of them. They liked creating a structure out of willful trivia" (98); "They played it safe and regretted it, took risks and lost, fell into states of lunar gloom. But there were always things to ban and rules to make" (98). Poker is a game of chance and, according to Charles Sumner this could be DeLillo's metaphor for life's unpredictability and the desire of the almost interchangeable corporate men to exert some control over it, as a kind of managed risk:

> In short, the poker games occasion the imposition of rules on a situation governed by chance, thereby delivering some sense of mastery to the players whose lives are seemingly governed by chance. This desire to control and order a situation over which they have little or no control stems from impersonal forces that govern their lives outside the poker game, and specifically from a corporate culture that renders each man exchangeable with another, so that personal identity is all but erased. ("Don DeLillo's Falling Man" 16)

In the aftermath of 9/11 Keith quits his job to become a professional poker player and spends more and more of his time in Las Vegas, slowly sinking into oblivion. These actions

[41] On this, see, Linda S. Kaufman (2010)

can be interpreted as his futile attempt to gain control over a life driven by chance. However, this change of occupation does not bring him peace or normality, rather the memories of poker nights with his friends, one severely injured now and several dead, causes more personal trauma for Keith. Benice Spark argues that:

> If the poker games were once the highlight of his quotidian existence, his movement into professional poker playing on the American circuit is a perversion of the original desire. … What was once a collective pleasure has become a distortion: in its new form, the game acts as an escape to an outside at the edge of reality for the traumatized victim. (*The Ethical Work of Literature* 146)

In the portrayal of the poker players and the poker games, DeLillo gestures towards global capitalism but it remains nothing but a gesture. The emphasis is on the intimate, domestic suffering of ordinary middle-class New Yorkers. Randall notes that DeLillo's initial response of "anger" to 9/11, so evident in his essay "In the Ruins," has been replaced with "an overwhelming mood of mourning and melancholy" in the novel (*9/11 and the Literature of Terror* 121). Rich mentions that, except for a brief reference to Mohammad Atta, "DeLillo mentions none of the other boldface names of 9/11, not even the mayor" ("The Clear Blue Sky" n.p.) and instead keeps the focus on Keith, his immediate family and so, by extension, other middle-class (white) families.

Michiko Kakutani begins her *The New York Times* review of the novel by voicing a common assumption at the time: "not enough time has passed for any novelist to put the events of that day and its shuddering consequences into historical perspective," and then offers a scathing criticism: "And yet even within these parameters of reduced expectations, *Falling Man* feels small and unsatisfying and inadequate" ("A Man, A Woman and a Day of Terror" n.p.). Kakutani is equally dismissive of the recurrent figure of a performance artist, David

Janiak, in the novel. He starts appearing in the days after the attack (in the fictional world) and is popularly referred to as Falling Man by people in the novel's New York. Lianne (unwillingly) watches several of his performances at various points in the novel. Focalised through Lianne, we learn of Janiak:

> He'd appeared several times in the last week, unannounced, in various parts of the city, suspended from one or another structure, always upside down, wearing a suit, a tie and dress shoes. He brought it back, of course, those stark moments in the burning towers when people fell or were forced to jump. He'd been seen dangling from a balcony in a hotel atrium, and police had escorted him out of a concert hall and two or three apartment buildings with terraces or accessible rooftops. (*Falling Man* 33)

Her response to the performer is very different to what she experiences when she first sees Richard Drew's famous photograph, "The Falling Man": "Headlong, free fall, she thought, and this picture burned hole in her mind and heart, dear God, he was a falling angel and his beauty was horrific" (222). Kakutani says of this that it is "a not so subtle symbol of the hubris of trying to make art out of horror" ("A Man, A Woman and a Day of Terror" n.p.). DeLillo's novel may self reflexively be working through precisely this problem, one that Drew certainly experienced when his photograph was made public.

"The Falling Man," Drew's famous and iconic photograph, captured a moment in an unidentified man's fall from the World Trade Centre during the attacks. He had jumped to his death rather than burn or choke to death on fumes, as did hundreds of others trapped in the blazing buildings.

Image 2: Richard Drew, AP. "The Falling Man." Reproduced in Junod's *Esquire* article.

When it was first published, many people were appalled by the image and claimed its publication was callous and unfeeling. Tom Junod, writing in defense of the photograph for *Esquire*, twenty years later, says:

> In most American newspapers**,** the photograph that Richard Drew took of the Falling Man ran once and never again. Papers all over the country, from the *Fort Worth Star-Telegram* to the Memphis *Commercial Appeal* to *The Denver Post*, were forced to defend themselves against charges that they exploited a man's death, stripped him of his dignity, invaded his privacy, turned tragedy into leering pornography. ("The Falling Man" n.p.)

Over time, the response to this image changed, and Junod claims that the photograph is now thought to be one of the five most historically significant in the world and is accepted as a masterpiece. But at the time DeLillo wrote the novel, the photograph was still contentious and divisive. Many felt it was exploitative to make 'art' from this horrific act, or to give particular attention to just one of the many people who jumped from the building (hundreds did), and it disappeared from public view for many years. Junod continues:

> P**hotographs lie.** Even great photographs. Especially great photographs. The Falling Man in Richard Drew's picture fell in the manner suggested by the photograph for only a fraction of a second, and then kept falling. The photograph functioned as a study of doomed verticality, a fantasia of straight lines, with a human being slivered at the center, like a spike. In truth, however, the Falling Man fell with neither the precision of an arrow nor the grace of an Olympic diver. He fell like everyone else, like all the other jumpers – trying to hold on to the life he was leaving, which is to say that he fell desperately, inelegantly. ("The Falling Man"; bold original)

Given the controversy about the photograph, it is easy to see why the repeated vignettes in which David Janiak (aka Falling Man) appears in *Falling Man* raised the ire of some at the time of publication.

In portraying Janiak's perilous re-enactions, in public, of the death plunge of so many who leapt from the burning Towers, was DeLillo criticising the fictional artist's attempt to make art out of horror? (Janiak eventually dies when one of his stunts go wrong, perhaps suggesting judgement.) Or was he signalling the importance of doing just this, in a defence of his own and other novels about 9/11? Critics have precisely debated this in their attempts to assess the novel, with the general consensus being that it is a flawed but courageous attempt to focus on an individual's (and his immediate family's) traumatised dissociation from contextualising events, in slow narrative 'frames': much like the Drew's famous photograph and the series of which it was part.

Images 3, 4 & 5: further pictures from Drew's series of the man falling from the Twin Towers, taken from Juno's article.

What, then, are we to make of the novel's representation of the terrorist, Hammad, and his "brother" in terror, Amir, who masterminds the attacks (and is clearly based on Mohammad Atta)? DeLillo's emphasis on the terrorist *plot* is significant in a novel as ostensibly unplotted as this one. The novel is divided into three parts and at the end of each of these there is a short section, with a separate title, that portrays Hammad and his co-conspirators preparing for the attacks. In the first, Hammad and his fellow terrorists are students in Hamburg, Germany where they learn English (*Falling Man* 79, 82). They watch "videos of jihad in other countries" (80) and spend time reading the Quran (83). In the second, the young men are in Nokomis, Florida, training as pilots (171). The "plot" in all senses, is closing in on them as stressed in this passage, rendered in free-indirect discourse, in which Hammad describes his role and the claims of brotherhood:

> Here they were in the midst of unbelief, in the bloodstream of the *kufr*. They felt things together, he and his brothers. They felt the claim of danger and isolation. They felt the magnetic effect of plot. Plot drew them together more tightly than ever. Plot closed the world to the slenderest line of sight, where everything converges to a point. … There was the statement that death made, the strongest claim of all, the highest jihad. (*Falling Man* 174)

The final section portrays the men inside the hijacked plane as it is about to fly into one of the Twin Towers. Hammad sprays the cabin with tear gas, buckles himself into his seat and begins

to “recite the sacred words” (*Falling Man* 238). At precisely this moment, within a single sentence, the focus shifts from Hammad to Keith, and the novel returns to where it began as the plane strikes the Tower:

> A bottle fell of the counter in the galley, on the other side of the aisle, and he [Hammad] watched it roll this way and that, a water bottle, empty, making an arc one way and rolling back the other, and he watched it spin more quickly and then skitter across the floor an instant before the aircraft struck the tower, heat, then fuel, then fire, and a blast wave passed through the structure that sent Keith Neudecker out of his chair and into a wall. He [Keith] found himself walking into a wall. He didn’t drop the telephone until he hit the wall. The floor began to slide beneath him and he lost his balance and eased along the wall to the floor. (239)

What is given, then, is a curious elision of the moment of impact as it is experienced by *both* men: “he” (Keith and Hammad) collide linguistically and in act. It is the only moment in the novel when the (fictional) world of the terrorist and the survivor connect. In the rest of the novel the plotting terrorists and the New York survivors are dealt with in wholly separate chapters. It is the portrayal of Hammad (and Amir, with whom he converses) that most interests me here. Why has DeLillo given three chapters to Hammad given his resolute focus is on the domestic, American experience of 9/11 in the remainder of the novel? Why does he fail to portray the American socio-political context and yet attempt to provide one for the terrorists, specifically Hammad (and to an extent his ‘leader,’ Amir – clearly modelled on the real-life Muhammad Atta)? This is a question that was not asked when DeLillo first published the novel, although it has found some traction in the decade after the attacks.

Sascha Pöhlmann, for example, argues that while *Falling Man* “succeeds in complexifying the victim-perpetrator relationship” in a variety of ways, it “ultimately fails to

leave dominant ideological frameworks precisely in its attempts at representation, and … it does not succeed in imagining the terrorist as anything other than an Orientalist construction of an Islamist terrorist" ("Collapsing Identities" 58, 51). She continues, "*Falling Man* can be criticised for ultimately offering only a singular image of the terrorist that remains within the dominant framework of representations and fails to equal the complexity with which other characters are imagined in the novel" (54); "it presents a singular image of the terrorist that offers none of the self-reflexive ambivalences that characterize other passages" (54). Hammad, she argues, is "less a character than a narrative device" (59). She offers examples like the following, in which Hammad's thoughts are given: "Everything here was twisted, hypocrite, the West corrupt of mind and body, determined to shiver Islam down to bread crumbs for birds" (*Falling Man* 79); "Islam is the struggle against the enemy, near enemy and far, Jews first, for all things unjust and hateful, and then the Americans" (*Falling Man* 80); "They read the sword verses of the Koran. They were strong-willed, determined to become one mind. Shed everything but the men you are with. Become each other's running blood" (*Falling Man* 83); "They sat around a table on day one and pledged to accept their duty, which was for each of them, in blood trust, to kill Americans. [. . .] In the camp on the windy plain they were shaped into men" (*Falling Man* 171, 173). Or this, as the final moments approach:

> Forget the world. Be unmindful of the thing called the world [. . .]. Recite the sacred words. Pull your clothes tightly about you. Fix your gaze. Carry your soul in your hand [. . .] Every sin of your life is forgiven in the seconds to come. There is nothing between you and eternal life in the seconds to come. You are wishing for death and now it is here in the seconds to come. (*Falling Man* 238–9)

In short, Pöhlmann argues that while DeLillo works hard to offer a complex and ambivalent portrait of his American characters, he reduces his terrorist to religious cliché.

Many other passages from the 'terrorist' sections of the novel appear to support this claim, for example this in which the young fundamentalists in Hamburg discuss their grievances against the West: "There was the feeling of lost history. They were too long in isolation. This is what they talked about, being crowded out by other cultures, other futures, the all-enfolding will of capital markets and foreign policies" (*Falling Man* 80). Nina, Lianne's mother, offers a counter to this elsewhere in the book: "It's not the history of Western interference that pulls down these [Muslim] societies. It's their own history, their mentality. They live in a closed world, of choice, of necessity. They haven't advanced because they haven't wanted to or tried to" (47). Perhaps DeLillo is attempting here to show her Nina's narrow-mindedness and prejudice, however the structure of the novel means that the terrorists and the victims never connect, let alone communicate – except for the final explosive moment of shared impact between Hammad's plane and Keith's Tower.

Others argue that DeLillo falls into the trap of *westernising* his terrorist rather than orientalising him and does so to garner (western) reader sympathy for him. John Carlos Rowe, for example, suggests that "DeLillo gives some human definition to Hammad only to Westernize him" ("Global Horizons" 129). In his opinion, "Hammad's Westernized desires and confused soul do not adequately represent the rage or the violence directed against the United States by groups and individuals who are willing to die for the barest chance to 'speak out' against first-world arrogance" (132). This is most evident in the representation of Hammad as a man who at times dreams of a "normal" (in western terms) life: one with marriage and children; one without jihad. He is also portrayed as far from an abstinent, ascetic religious fanatic, at least initially: he enjoys sex in his relationship with his lover, Leyla; he flirts with and has regular sexual fantasies about other women. Jessica McDonald argues that "DeLillo constructs a love story for Hammad and Leyla which fosters fellow-feeling and demonstrates

Hammad's capacity for intimacy, care, and affection ("DeLillo's *Falling Man*" 5). She states, further,

> When 'late one night' Hammad [has] to 'step over the prone form of a brother in prayer as he [makes] his way to the toilet to jerk off' (80), we are reminded of the nearly universal reality that is shirking your religious, social, or professional responsibilities in favor of immediate physical gratification. This reminder appeals to the reader's sense of a common humanity and connects her world and Hammad's. (5)

Perhaps, but the representation of Hammad's sexual desires and fantasies have the effect of reducing him somehow to the level of an immature young man (as does his love of takeaway food and television).

Moreover, Hammad's overwhelming response to America and Americans is portrayed as one of distaste and hatred. He perceives their lifestyle reflects just one thing: "world domination" (*Falling Man* 173). In the final of the three chapters in which he appears, set in Florida, Hammad appears to have conflicted thoughts about his "mission", and this suggests some complexity and ambivalence in his character. At first, he thinks about it in sacred terms: "There was no feeling like this ever in his life. He wore a bomb vest and knew he was a man now, finally, ready to close the distance to God" (172). But he has doubts, too, and fears death: "There was the claim of fate, that they were born to this. There was the claim of being chosen, out there, in the wind and sky of Islam. There was the statement that death made, the strongest claim of all, the highest jihad. But does a man have to kill himself in order to accomplish something in the world?" (174). Similar doubts are voiced in the pages that follow: "But does a man have to kill himself in order to count for something, be someone, find the way?" (175). Such questions, when voiced, are immediately foreclosed by Amir who, thinks Hammad, thought "clearly, in straight lines, direct and systematic" (175). Amir responds:

> The end of our life is predetermined. We are carried toward that day from the minute we are born. There is no sacred law against what we are going to do. This is not suicide in any meaning or interpretation of the word. It is only something long written. We are finding the way already chosen for us. (175)

And when Hammad asks, "Never mind the man who takes his own life in this situation. What about the lives of the others he takes with him?" (176). Amir's reply is equally ruthless:

> [T]here are no others. The others exist only to the degree that they fill the role we have designed for them. This is their function as others. Those who will die have no claim to their lives outside the useful fact of their dying. Hammad was impressed by this. It sounded like philosophy (176).

The last two sentences in the above quote underscore the characterisation of Hammad that is maintained throughout the novel. He is childlike, naïve, manipulable and in awe of his puppet-master, Amir. As MacDonald suggests, "underneath this demeaning narrative lies the presumption of Hammad's intellectual or moral inferiority – either he is not smart enough or not morally strong enough to resist succumbing to Amir and to the 'propaganda' espoused by radical Islam" ("DeLillo's *Falling Man*" 6). Amir, for his part, is a caricature of the Islamic jihadist in every way, right down to his distorted misquotations from the Quran. At other times, Hammad is reduced to a figure that is barbaric and backward. Take, for example, the scene in which Hammad kills a camel in a sacrificial ritual:

> In the camp they gave him a long knife that had once belonged to a Saudi prince. An old man whipped the camel to its knees and then took the bridle and jerked the head skyward and Hammad slit the animal's throat. They made a noise when he did it, he and the camel both, braying, and he felt a deep warrior joy, standing back to watch the beast topple. He stood there, Hammad, arms spread wide, then

> kissed the bloody knife and raised it to the ones who were watching, the robed and turbaned men, showing his respect and gratitude. (*Falling Man* 174)

He is described here as atavistic, regressive and cruel, recalling DeLillo's characterisation of Islam in these terms in "In the Ruins." It is hard to square such representations as these with others in which Hammad questions the suicide plot and the necessity of the deaths of innocents that will result. Michael Wood says of the novel that it "has a string of remarkable hits here, and a small run of misses" and chief among the latter "are the attempted evocations of the hijacker's mind. 'Forget the world. Be unmindful of the thing called the world. All of life's lost time is over now. This is your long wish, to die with your brothers.' This is literature's terrorist, talking like a novel. ("Picture of A Gone World" n.p.) Wood's assessment is shared by many others. In his analysis of *Falling Man,* for example, Pöhlmann argues that "*Falling Man* cannot be criticized for not presenting a "real terrorist" to its readers, however, he continues, "it can be criticized for ultimately offering only a singular image of the terrorist that remains within the dominant framework of representations and fails to equal the complexity with which other characters are imagined in the novel" ("Collapsing Identities"54). In many respects this is true. It must be noted, however, that DeLillo's portrayal of 'the terrorist' is certainly more nuanced than those of both Amis and Updike. As Paul Petrovic observes, "Pöhlmann's reading foregoes Hammad's first two sections of the novel, which combat a nationalist steadfastness by utilizing a nuanced and careful inquiry into other ideological realities" ("Children, Terrorists, and Cultural Resistance" 599). Petrovic is referring here to the scene in which an old Iraqi baker Hammad meets in Hamburg passionately denounces the use of child-soldiers in the Iran-Iraq War, or the doubts Hammad has about the validity of promises made to jihadists about the afterlife, and his obvious pleasure in carnality that figure in the first two chapters focused on him. Similarly, Leif Grössinger suggests DeLillo complicates his portrait of the terrorists by showing how their "claim to stand outside society

is jeopardized by the problems they have in renouncing Western culture not so much in their minds as in their daily lives" ("Public Image and Self-Representation" 85). Indeed, at the end of the first Hammad chapter, this is stressed by DeLillo. The narrator tells us that Hammad "had to fight against the need to be normal. He had to struggle against himself, first, and then against the injustice that haunted their lives" (*Falling Man* 3). This is not a man who is wholly ideologically blinkered or committed to the jihadi cause, although in the later Hammad chapters he slowly succumbs to the indoctrination of his fellow agents, despite some moments of doubt and indecision.

DeLillo also poses some disturbing questions for his readers. Would we feel more sympathetic towards Hammad if his cause was one more familiar to us in the West? This appears to be a question raised by Amis in his portrayal of Martin Ridnour (alias of Ernst Hechinger), Lianne's mother's lover. It is hinted that he was once a radical activist, perhaps even a terrorist against the West German state. Lianne suspects this much, but Amis's narrator reports, "Maybe he was a terrorist but he was one of ours, she thought, and the thought chilled her, shamed her – one of ours, which meant godless, Western, white". On this, Conte comments, "whether we find Martin clustered with valor or cloaked with shame for his association with a radical movement, we do not find his brand of ant establishmentarian or state-sponsored terrorism to be alien in the history of Western political imbroglios of the twentieth century. He was one of ours" (*Transnational Politics* 94). This ironic return to the polarising language of us and them, ours and theirs, is a challenging moment for the reader of the novel.

Despite what appears to be a concerted effort to show Hammad's individualistic struggle against the indoctrination that consumes him, in the final analysis I believe DeLillo does lapse into stereotypes. Perhaps he has no other option: the Islamic other is too foreign to adequately portray; he is not (as DeLillo suggests in the thought given to Lianne) one of *ours*.

More problematic is the lack of political context provided. In interview, DeLillo has insisted that he "did not want to write a novel that had a great deal of political sweep." In portraying the terrorist, he stated, "I wanted to trace the evolution of one individual's passage from an uninvolved life to one that becomes deeply committed to a grave act of terror" (Intensity of a Plot" n.p.). He continues:

> With Hammad, I wanted to try to imagine how a man might begin as a secular individual and then discover religion, always through the power of *deep companionship with other men*. This is the force that drives him. Ultimately it's not religion, it's not politics and it's not history. It's a kind of *blood bond with other men*. And the intensity of *a plot*, which narrows the worlds enormously and makes it possible for men to operate without a sense of the innocent victims they plan to destroy. (n.p.; my emphasis)

This comment underscores the reservations at the heart of many critics' unease about DeLillo's portrayal of Hammad – and so of the "Islamic terrorist": he is depoliticised. Although he mouths radical Islamic truisms, he has no religious motives, no historical or ideological reasons for doing what he does. He is driven only by a masculinist urge to "bond" with "other men," to be part of a *brotherhood*, to have the security and reassurance of a *plot*. It is this ahistorical conception of the terrorist, combined with the central focus on the novel on domestic, middleclass American trauma, that renders the novel inadequate, in my opinion. After all, "The writer wants to understand what this day has done to us," as DeLillo writes in "In the Ruins of the Future" (n.p.). In response to his own question, "Is it too soon?" [to understand or write about it], the answer is surely that in the case of *Falling Man*, yes, it was.

Chapter Three: The second wave of fictional writing about 9/11

How soon was too soon to write effectively about 9/11 and its aftermath? It is impossible to give a precise answer to such a question, but it seems that it would be well into the first decade of the twenty-first century before writers began to write 9/11 fictional texts that did more than focus on rupture, lament American victimhood (from the perspective of survivors or witnesses), or portray Muslims (and Muslim terrorists) in ways that went beyond the caricatures and stereotypes that I have argued limit the effectiveness of the fictions discussed in my previous chapter. Understandably, it took time before writers and readers felt anything near comfortable about the literary representation of such shocking events. Jay McInerney, author of *The Good Life* (2006; one of the early 9/11 novels not discussed in this thesis) said this about the writing of his novel:

> Most novelists I know went through a period of intense self-examination and self-loathing after the terrorist attacks on the World Trade Centre. I certainly did. For a while the idea of 'invented characters' and alternate realities seemed trivial and frivolous and suddenly, horribly outdated. For a while. I abandoned the novel I was working on and didn't even think about writing fiction for the next six months. In fact, I was so traumatised and my attention span was shot to such an extent that for months I was incapable of reading a novel, or anything much longer than a standard article in the New York Times, even though I was fortunate enough not to have lost any close friends in the attack. ("The Uses of Invention" n.p.)

Ian McEwan made similar claims stating he found it "wearisome to confront invented characters" after 9/11:

> I wanted to be told about the world. I wanted to be informed. I felt that we had gone through great changes and now was the time to just go back to school, as

> it were, and start to learn. … The so-called work in progress had been reduced, overnight, to a blue streak of pitiable babble. But then, too, a feeling of gangrenous futility had infected the whole corpus. ("Truth is Stronger than Fiction" n.p.)

As these comments suggest, many writers felt there was something unethical about making art out of the cataclysmic events. Indeed, there was an overwhelming sense expressed by many writers that 9/11resulted in a what Daniel Lea refers to as a "crisis of narrative" ("Aesthetics and Anaesthetics" 17). Moreover, as Arin Keeble notes, many felt that 9/11 fiction ran the risk of depoliticising the attacks, especially if the interpretive framework applied was (individual and collective) trauma (*The 9/11 Novel* 11). The danger was, he explains following Michael Rothberg, that the trauma lens adopted "might lend itself to the conservative political and media strategies looking for manageable ways of explaining and the attacks" (11). He quotes Rothberg who expresses concern that "a focus on trauma solely as a structure of reception" might have the effect of "unwittingly reinforcing the repressive liberal-conservative consensus in the United States that attempting to explain the events amounts to explaining them away or excusing them" (qtd, Keeble, *The 9/11 Novel* 11).

Nonetheless, as discussed in my previous chapter, Anglo-American novelists started to publish books about 9/11 about five or six years after the event. A number of critics have followed Jeffrey Melnick's suggestion, in *9/11 Culture: America Under Construction* (2009), that Hurricane Katrina's devastation of New Orleans in August 2005 marked a pivotal moment for 9/11 art and literature. Keeble is one of these and reads Mohsin Hamid's *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* (2007), Joseph O'Neill's *Netherland* (2008) and Amy Walman's *The Submission* (2011) as novels that "cultivate and capture the politicized mood of dissent that began with Hurricane Katrina" (*The 9/11 Novel* 15), resulting in a new way of looking at – and

representing – 9/11. The "mood of dissent" to which Keeble refers is distinctly racialised in Melnick's account:

> [The] heartbreaking vision of equality promoted by the World Trade Center jumpers [of diverse race and economic status] was washed away by the more compelling vision of the inequalities of race and class featured in media coverage of the flood. The democratic appeal of the rising and falling narrative, mostly about the intactness of white families, could not be sustained once Hurricane Katrina revealed the realities of Black suffering in America. (Melnick, *9/11 Culture* 93)

To my mind, that the national recognition of inequities and suffering experienced by Black Americans in the wake of Hurricane Katrina marks a turning point for the 9/11 novel is an interesting but deeply problematic claim. For a start, it remains wholly internally focused, despite some rather obscure attempts by Melnick to draw connections between Black Americans and North African Muslims. Admittedly, one of *Netherland*'s central characters is a Trinidadian migrant, the other a Dutch one, and questions about attitudes towards Black people in America, not least New York, are posed throughout the novel. ("You want a taste of how it feels to be a black man in this country?" one character asks. "Put on the white clothes of the cricketer. Put on white to feel black.") Nonetheless, as Sean O'Hagan wryly writes of the novel, although it features immigrant characters, it has "an ordinary European Everyman at its centre" (Review of *Netherland* n.p.). As I will discuss below, Hamid's *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* is something of an anomaly in attempts to make it fit into any specific waves of 9/11 fictional writing but, while it also features an immigrant protagonist, it has nothing to say about the inequities faced by Black Americans. It would be hard to make the claim that this is the central focus of Waldman's *The Submission*, either. As I will argue later in this chapter, Waldman's fiction – published six years after Hurricane Katrina – can and should be classified

as belonging to a second wave of Anglo-American 9/11 fiction in which questions about Muslim immigrant characters come to the fore, not ones about Black/white relationships in the United States.

In short, Melnick's and Keeble's claims about the impact of Hurricane Katrina completely ignores the situation of Muslim Americans or Muslim immigrants in America (of any race). A more pertinent and viable – and political – reason for the change that we can see in 9/11 fiction written about a decade after the events, I argue, was the inauguration of Barack Obama as the 44th President of the United States in January 2009.

One of the key features of Obama's popularity was his promise to change the administration and policies of President Bush, who had been in office for the previous eight years. A *New York Times* editorial on his inaugural address made clear the mood of the nation: "In about 20 minutes, he swept away eight years of President George Bush's false choices and failed policies and promised to recommit to America's cherished ideals." Andrew Bacevich, Professor Emeritus of International Relations and History at Boston University, suggested that Obama's election would "signal a clear repudiation of his predecessor's reckless and ill-advised approach to national security policy." According to Daniel Klaidman, "Obama was elected, in part, to wind down the wars of 9/11, to reduce America's global footprint, and to refocus national energies on challenges at home and core interests abroad" (48-49). It has been argued that while Obama's rhetoric was all about change, he was "nonetheless trapped in the core assumptions established by his predecessor's administration about the meaning of 9/11, the existential nature of the terrorist threat and the imperative of meeting that threat globally"; he "continued Bush's 'war on terror' in all but name" (McCrisken, 786, 787). Gabriel Rubin similarly claims that "He made far fewer speeches about terrorism than George W. Bush did. Yet, despite some efforts to the contrary, he continued many of Bush's policies – and in the case of targeted assassinations using drones (unmanned aerial vehicles), went further than

Bush" (Rubin 81). While he oversaw the end of the highly unpopular Iraq war (only to get dragged back into it soon after), it was during his time in the office that US Navy SEALs conducted a successful operation in Pakistan that resulted in the killing of Al-Qaeda leader Osama Bin Laden.

Be this as it may, what matters most is the public *perception* that Obama brought change, and the fact that Obama played to the American population's desire for change, eight years after 9/11. Rubin suggests that "Obama tamped down Bush's rhetoric but kept alive many of the same themes" (Rubin 87). One aspect of this "tamping down" was to use "concrete terms" (Rubin 84) when referring to terrorists. He no longer used the words "Muslim" or "Islamic" as a generic term for terrorists. Instead, he used specific names for specific terrorist organisations: Al Qaeda, Al Nusra Front, the Taliban. When asked, in 2016 about his refusal to use the word "Islamic terrorism," reports Daniella Diaz, he said:

> There is no doubt, and I've said repeatedly, where we see terrorist organizations like al Qaeda or ISIL – They have perverted and distorted and tried to claim the mantle of Islam for an excuse for basically barbarism and death.
>
> These are people who've killed children, killed Muslims, take sex slaves, there's no religious rationale that would justify in any way any of the things that they do," he said. "But what I have been careful about when I describe these issues is to make sure that we do not lump these murderers into the billion Muslims that exist around the world, including in this country, who are peaceful, who are responsible, who, in this country, are fellow troops and police officers and fire fighters and teachers and neighbors and friends. (qtd Diaz, n.p.)

Two months after his inauguration, in Ankara, Turkey, Obama declared, "the United States is not, and will never be, at war with Islam. […] We seek broader engagement based on mutual interest and mutual respect. We will listen carefully, we will bridge misunderstandings, and we

will seek common ground. We will be respectful, even when we do not agree" ("Remarks by President Obama to the Turkish Parliament").

Such sentiments were a consistent feature of his presidency, and public statements. In an interview with Hisham Melhem of the Al-Arabiya television network in 2009, for example, Obama talked about the Muslim world and how his job was to communicate to the American people that "the Muslim world is filled with extraordinary people who simply want to live their lives and see their children live better lives. My job to the Muslim world is to communicate that the Americans are not your enemy" ("Full Transcript" n.p). But it was his "A New Beginning" speech, delivered a few months later, which attracted the greatest attention.

"A New Beginning" was President Obama's historic speech delivered just five months into his presidency, on 4 June 2009 from Cairo University in Egypt, to fulfil a promise he had made during his 2008 presidential campaign to give a major address to Muslims from a Muslim capital during his first few months in office. The speech proposed a new beginning in the relations between the United States and the Muslim world, and it was perceived by many as an attempt to reach out to Muslims around the globe. It emphasised mutual respect and understanding between the US and Muslim countries. In George Packer's words, this was a message advocating peace and cooperation between America, the West, and the Muslim world, and "It sketched an optimistic vision of the future based on principles of mutual respect, tolerance, human development, and democracy" ("Two Speeches" n.p). President Obama began with an Islamic greeting (*assalamu alaikum*) referred to the Quran as the "Holy Quran" and quoted some of the best-know verses from it. He stated that "I consider it part of my responsibility as president of the United States to fight against negative stereotypes of Islam whenever they appear," and said,

> I've come here in Cairo to seek a new beginning between the United States and Muslims around the world, one based on mutual interest and mutual respect,

> and one based upon the truth that America and Islam are not exclusive and need not be in competition. Instead, they overlap, and share common principles – principles of justice and progress; tolerance and the dignity of all human beings. (Remarks by the President at Cairo University" n.p.)

After 8 years of war under George Bush, this speech and the prospect of a new beginning, seemed promising and attractive, at least for the time being. Colonel Norvell B. DeAtkine, a former US Army Middle East specialist, credits President Obama's speech writers for their "masterful job of pushing all the right buttons" ("President Obama's Pitch" n.p.). Shadi Hamid refers to it as "an impressive piece of oratory" (n.p.). Tarek Heggy, an Egyptian writer, claimed that the President had a rock star appeal to the Arab world and, almost like a magician, conquered their hearts and minds. According to Iraqi sociologist Ali Al Wardi, "Arabs love words over deeds, and the president's use of symbology and analogies (a style used in the Qur'an) was enthusiastically received by the people in attendance ("Obama's Good Intentions" n.p.)". However, as DeAtkine illustrates, reactions were in fact mixed, and the speech received unfavourable opinions too. Mohammad Hussain Haykal considered the speech a "change in terminology and nuance but not policy" (qtd. DeAtkine, "President Obama's Pitch" n.p.). Five years after the speech was delivered, Packer commented:

> Not only was he not George W. Bush, he was a black President with the middle name Hussein, who had opposed the Iraq War and spent time in places like Indonesia and Pakistan. It was like a campaign speech directed at Muslims. There was very little follow-up in the way of policies and programs. Today, from Tripoli to Raqqa, from Mosul to Ghazni, from Karachi back to Cairo, that speech is in tatters. ("Two Speeches")

Regardless of such retrospective evaluations of Obama's failure to make good on his promise of a new beginning in global US-Muslim relations (and other matters), at the time of his

electoral campaign in 2007-2008 and his inaugurations in 2009, he offered Americans hope and the possibility of change. Eugenio Lilli writes, "Besides characterizing Barak Obama's statements, ideas of hope and change also dominated campaign ads, bumper stickers, T-shirts, and pins" (*New Beginnings* 3). He continues, "The *leitmotif* of the Obama team's public rhetoric was one emphasizing its willingness to represent a turning point from the previous George W. Bush administrations" (3).

Obama's successful election showed he had interpreted and responded to a majority (even if slim at 52.9%) desire, among Americans, for a change. Most major US newspapers reported his election in positive terms. Here is what *The New York Times* had to say:

> Mr. Obama's election amounted to a national catharsis, a repudiation of a historically unpopular Republican president and his economic and foreign policies, and an embrace of Mr. Obama's call for a change in the direction and the tone of the country. But it was just as much a strikingly symbolic moment in the evolution of the nation's fraught racial history, a breakthrough that would have seemed unthinkable just two years ago. (Nagourney n.p.)

Obama's victory "is in so many ways a complete repudiation of everything about the presidency of George W. Bush," wrote CBSNews.com senior political advisor, Vaughn Ververs, about the election, adding "The once-improbable Democratic candidate has ridden the twin themes of 'hope' and 'change' into the White House" ("A Mandate for Change" n.p.)

This desire for change, and the willingness to embrace it by electing the first-ever Black (and falsely rumoured Muslim) president who platformed on racial, cultural and religious tolerance, was also evident in the kinds of fiction that writers increasingly *allowed* themselves to write, and which publishers realised that readers were willing to read. This, I argue, becomes apparent when we consider the kind of 9/11 and/or "fundamentalist terrorist" fiction that gradually started appearing after Obama's election. One such early example was (Pakistani-

native) Mohsin Hamid's award-winning and best-selling novel *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* (2007), to which I will shortly return. For now, however, I want to remain focused on fiction written by white British/Americans. I posit that in fiction written by such authors, it is possible to trace a change in the representation of Muslims that starts to take place towards the end of the first decade of the twenty-first century and into the second one – a period that accords with Obama's election and two-term presidency. To this end, I turn to Amy Waldman's *The Submission* (2011) which, in the words of Arin Keeble, "was immediately identified as a new kind of 9/11 novel" (*The 9/11 Novel* 165).

Amy Waldman's *The Submission*: "a new kind of 9/11 novel"

Ten years after 9/11, Amy Waldman published her first novel, *The Submission* (2011), for which she was shortlisted for the Guardian First Book Award. The 'newness' of the novel was noted by many reviewers. Kamila Shamsie is representative; she opened her review of *The Submission,* for *The Guardian,* by stating:

> Perhaps the representatives of fiction writing and non-fiction writing in America didn't gather in a smoke-filled room at the end of 2001 and divide territory. Perhaps the fiction writers didn't claim for themselves the individual tales of trauma around the day itself (signatories include Jonathan Safron Foer, Don DeLillo, Claire Messud) while the non-fiction writers held on to History and Politics leading up to and on from 9/11 (Lawrence Wright, Jane Meyer, Rajiv Chandrasekaran). If it did happen, then Amy Waldman – former bureau chief for the *New York Times* – simply decided to tear up the contract. (Shamsie, "The Submission" n.p.)

The "contract" she refers to is one that I have discussed at length in this thesis: the portrayal of "individual tales of trauma around the day itself" by writers who "bemoan all that has been

done to their nation." Instead, writes Shamsie, Waldman "take[s] the trauma and grief of 9/11 as the starting point of [her] novel and move[s] on to a tale of suspended civil liberties and prejudice." She explores the "grief surrounding 9/11 – the forms it takes, the claims it makes, the claims made in its name by third parties, the hierarchy which surrounds it (not all griefs are equal), the guilt and anger which are born from it, the gulf between the silence of private grief and the clamour of public grief." (n.p.) She moves, then, according to Shamsie, beyond the insular terrain of the 'contractual' 9/11 novels that were published in the first decade after the events.

Waldman is a former *New York Times* reporter and was amongst other journalists who had contributed to the newspaper's Pulitzer Prize-winning "Portraits of Grief," a long-running series that features short obituaries of people who died in the attacks that took place on 9/11. As a journalist she had covered New York in the aftermath of 9/11 and was well versed in the political importance of a monument to memorialise Ground Zero, the commission of which is fictionalised at the centre of *The Submission*. The novel is set two years after 9/11 and imagines a scenario in which a Muslim architect is selected by an all-American jury, from a poll of anonymous submissions, to design a Ground-Zero memorial to commemorate the victims of a major bombing that occurred in Manhattan. While 9/11 is never specifically mentioned in the novel, we are encouraged to make this connection and I will follow other critics of the novel by referring to the unnamed bombing as "9/11." When Waldman was questioned by Heather Grossman for *Metrofocus* about how she came up with this idea, she responded by recalling how she had questioned a friend, in late 2003, on her decision not to enter the 9/11 memorial design competition and her friend had brought up the controversy surrounding the choice of Asian-American artist and architect Maya Lin to build the Vietnam Veteran Monument in Washington. This, she said, "got me thinking about what the rough equivalent would be for 9/11. I thought that if an American Muslim won, that would be much more controversial even

than Lin's selection was. I thought, 'That's a novel, someone should write that'" ("Q & A with Amy Waldman n.p.).

Interestingly, two years prior to publication of Waldman's novel, but after she had begun writing it, in December of 2009, there was a proposal to build a Muslim community centre in Lower Manhattan (dubbed the Ground Zero Mosque). Of this, Claire Messud writes:

> One imagines that the former *New York Times* journalist Amy Waldman heard these arguments with a combination of recognition and, perhaps, faint dismay: the general topic of her as yet unpublished first novel, "The Submission," was proving disturbingly prescient. Her carefully imagined fiction was in the process of becoming fact. ("A Novel of Grief" n.p.)

Heather Grossmann brought up the "Ground Zero Mosque" in her interview and asked Walman's thoughts and opinions on that controversy, to which Waldman responded that she was intrigued by it because she had started to think that "things had settled down a little bit" and maybe her story would not be "as a big deal" as she had thought. However, after seeing the reactions to the idea of the Ground Zero Mosque, "I thought, 'oh, actually I'm right, this would really hit a nerve.' I did rewriting to move away from it. Certain things that I had written suddenly were in the newspapers and I didn't want the book to read like a transcription of reality" ("Q & A with Amy Waldman 'n.p.).

Waldman's *The Submission* dared to ask the 'what if' question that struck at the heart of racial and cultural divisiveness and discrimination against Muslims (and other brown-skinned people) in the US: What if a Muslim-American was (accidentally) chosen to design a memorial to honour the victims of the 9/11 attack? This is exactly what happens in *The Submission* and Waldman explores the emotions that arise when a Muslim architect's anonymously submitted design is chosen. The story begins with a highly charged jury meeting in New York in 2003. The jury members are trying to agree on which of the submitted designs

should be built on the site of the World Trade Centre. They eventually choose a design known as 'the Garden,' favoured by a jury member who is a representative of the families of 9/11 victims, Claire Burwell. She manages to convince her fellow jurors to choose 'the Garden' despite an influential sculptor, Ariana Montagu, arguing for one called 'the Void.'

Only when agreement has been reached on the winning submission does the jury chair, Paul Rubin, open the envelop that contains the designer's name: Mohammad Khan. For Rubin, "reading the name brought no pleasure, only a painful tightening in his jaw" (18). A furore arises among the jury. What are they to do? They argue, with one juror blurting out, "Jesus fucking Christ! It's a goddamn Muslim" (20); another says, "this is not time for multicultural pandering" (21). Claire continues to back 'the Garden,' insisting that her late husband, killed when the Twin Towers fell, would have been dismayed at the religious discrimination of some of the others in the room. While this is going on, someone (we are not told who) leaks the news to the media.

Once the press catches on to the story it sparks a wave of emotions and heated discussions that go on to divide the nation. It seems not to matter that Mohammad Khan, or Mo as he is known to family and friends, is an American citizen. The child of Indian immigrants, he was born and raised in the US. Quite simply, it is his Muslim *name* that arouses concern and fear. That he is secular and a deeply ambitious member of a highly renowned architectural firm, is irrelevant to public perception. Of him, Waldman's narrator says:

> His parents, immigrants to America in the 1960s, made modernity their religion, became almost puritanical in their secularism. As a boy he had no religious education. He ate pork, although he hadn't grown up doing so. He dated Jews, not to mention Catholics and atheists. He was, if not an atheist himself, certainly agnostic, which perhaps made him not a Muslim at all. (30)

Nonetheless, once the race and, more importantly, the (ostensible) religion of the architect is revealed, Mo receives condemnation instead of praise and glory. The selection does not just split and shock the jury but also the American nation.

As noted, *The Submission* is set in 2003, when emotions were still raw, and media and the public, primed by the Bush narrative, were not open to the idea of a Muslim designing a memorial for the victims of 9/11, who had died in a terrorist attack committed in the name of Islam. Throughout the novel, the reader sees Khan struggling with his attempts to reconcile his personal beliefs with the backlashes he receives from both the Muslim and non-Muslim communities. Demands are made on Khan to explain his design and what it represents but he obstinately refuses. Rubin, the jury's pragmatic chairman, encourages Khan to withdraw his design, saying, "I don't know why anyone who loves America, wants it to heal, would subject it to the kind of battle the selection of a Muslim would cause" (82). But Mo continues to offer no comment or explanation. More than this, he makes no attempt to appease the fear and anger of those who lost loved ones in the 9/11 attacks, and he declines to discuss his influences or his conception of the design. He also doggedly refuses to defend Islam against the claim that 'all' believers are potential terrorists; and he ignores imams who call him blasphemous.

Khan's winning design is of a rectangular garden, divided by two perpendicular canals, planted with real trees and ones made from steel salvaged from the World Trade Centre wreckage. It is surrounded by a "white perimeter wall, 27 feet high," on which the names of the dead are to be inscribed. On learning the architect is (ostensibly) Muslim, many members of the public take umbrage at what they believe is an allusion to an Islamic walled garden. (Ironically, well into the novel we learn that Mo's design *was* influenced by Eastern Islamic gardens, notably the Babur Gardens, built for the first Mughal emperor. However, we are encouraged to see his intentions as benevolent and ambitious, not religious.) One group, naming themselves Save America From Islam, refers to Mo's design as "an Islamic garden, [a]

martyr's paradise … a code to jihadis". A Fox news anchor reports, "In a potentially explosive development, the memorial design may actually be a martyrs' paradise" (130). He invites feedback from "a panel of experts on radical Islam." One panel member says, "[The terrorists'] remains are in that ground, too. [Khan has] made a tomb, a graveyard for them, not the victims. He would know that the Arabic word for tomb and garden are the same" (130) (And the alert reader, reflecting on the novel's title, might know that "one who submits" is the meaning of the word Muslim). Another retorts, "He's trying to encourage new martyrs – see, here's a taste of where you'll get if you blow yourself up" (130).

> 'VICTORY GARDEN!' screamed the *Post*. A *Wall Street Journal* op-ed called Khan's design 'an assault on America's Judeo-Christian heritage, an attempt to change its cultural landscape. It would appear to be a covert attempt at Islamization,' the paper intoned. 'Two decades of multicultural appeasement have led to this: we've invited the enemy into our home to decorate.' (130)

Khan's design sparks a great number of debates, and his motives are questioned by Americans, immigrants, Jews, Christians *and* Muslims. However, as Waldman demonstrates, the subject of the debates is not his design, but rather the designer's racial and religious identity, as Sonia Baelo-Allué notes: "In *The Submission* the discovery of the identity of the designer of the Garden shatters the nation's sense of identity once more and triggers a public firestorm that grows as antagonistic positions are established" ("From the Traumatic to the Political" 171). Two years after the attacks, the idea of a Muslim designing a memorial on ground zero is unsettling and surreal. As Tim Gauthier says in his analysis of the novel, for many characters in *The Submission*, to allow a Muslim to construct a memorial on ground zero "is equivalent to Creating a 'victory garden' for the jihadists" because after all Ground Zero is also the final resting of the terrorists too (*9/11 Fiction, Empathy, and Otherness* 199). This opinion is strongly voiced by Sean Gallager, another character who represents the families of 9/11

victims. On the choice of Mo's design, he comments: "Is it not enough," he says, "that they kill us, they have to humiliate us, too" (150). To Americans Ground Zero is a sacred place, a place where innocent lives were taken, a place of loss and grief.

All the outrage and the discussions only affirm the nation's mourning and exacerbate the suspicion of Muslims. Muslims are assaulted nationwide, the women's headscarves pulled off, and mosques are desecrated. People from all walks of life – journalists, activists, mourners, and bureaucrats – struggle to understand the concept and fight for their (very diverse) ideals. Claire actively solicits others to support her decision in favour of 'the Garden.' Beautiful and eloquent, the grieving widow and sole parent to two young children is more than a little self-righteously liberal. She regards the design as "a place where we – where the widows, their children, anyone – can stumble on joy. My husband…" (6). However, Ariana Montagu disagrees with her, bluntly stating, "I'm sorry, but a memorial isn't a graveyard. It's a national symbol, an historic signifier, a way to make sure anyone who visits – no matter how attenuated their link in time or geography to the attack – understands how it felt, what it meant" (6). Her preference is for 'the Void' since it is "visceral, angry, dark, raw, because there was no joy on that day" (6). Claire wants a space for healing, whereas Ariana seeks something that will forever testify to the wounds of 9/11 which must not heal. As the novel progresses, however, Claire begins to change her mind as she starts to imagine more about Mo's intentions. He refuses to divulge these, and she is increasingly influenced by what she reads in newspapers and sees on television. Amir Khadem perceptively notes, "In this post-9/11 chaos, the discrepancy between what Claire as a civil defender of social values and what the grieving widow of a 9/11 victim is obliged to want marks the inadequacy of the ideological discourse in the midst of grief, panic, and hatred" ("Paucity of Imagination" 75).

Her vacillation and shifting assumptions and principles are not unique to her. Most of the novel's major characters change their minds or reevaluate their beliefs as the narrative progresses. According to Michiko Kakutani, writing for *The New York Times*,

> The pretentious intellectual squabbles over the choice of the memorial; the cynical attempts by politicians to position themselves on the debate; the tactical manoeuvrings of special-interest groups; the cascade of inflammatory commentary from pundits on the right and left; and the speculation, lies and rumours fuelled by the Internet – all are deftly conjured by Ms. Waldman, who explicates how such elements inflame class, religious and ethnic tensions already simmering in the city. … [*The Submission* is] a novel that gives the reader a visceral understanding of how New York City and the country at large reacted to 9/11, and how that terrible day affected some Americans' attitudes toward Muslims and immigrants. ("The Right Architect" n.p.)

Kakutani's comment is important. Not only does *The Submission* deal with how Americans reacted to "that terrible day," it also "affected some Americans' attitudes toward Muslims and immigrants." This, I argue, represents something new in 9/11 fiction penned by American authors up to this time.

In this way, *The Submission* challenges the notion of the American Dream where individuals regardless of background, social class, race and religion can succeed, as well as narratives about American exceptionalism. The novel encourages the reader to examine the values and beliefs that the American nation holds dear. It also highlights the powerful influence of the media on people's perceptions and America's lack of knowledge of Islam and its refusal to even try to understand it in the face of the media's construction of 'truth.' Near the end of the novel, the narrator states, "the camera strips the eye of its freedom, holds viewers hostage to its choices" (297), thus emphasising a key concern in the novel, the power of the media –

especially visual media – to manipulate and control perception and belief. This is rather heavy-handedly – or perhaps parodically – suggested in the portrayal of Alyssa Spier, a journalist who, suggests Heather Pope, "is held up as a tabloid charlatan who represents the kind of media-inspired evil of 9/11 that propagates and disseminates ideology under the guide of news" (28). In one of her online blogs, for example, Spiers writes, "[t]he problem with Islam is Islam" (139); she insists on "the religion's violent propensities, its oppression of women, its incompatibility with democracy and the American way of life" (139). Gauthier credits Waldman's journalistic background for her stress on how (mis)information spread by the media can influence a nation's public opinion (*9/11 Fiction, Empathy, and Otherness* 200). He argues that the representation of Alyssa Spier provokes "the reader to consider the processes through which the media either help or hinder us in navigating or negotiating the surfeit of otherness with which we are bombarded every day" (Gauthier 200).

The novel clearly demonstrates how the media-fuelled narrative of "us" versus "them" overrides both any aesthetic concerns and, finally, any liberal good will. Khan is asked to prove that he is one of "us", and to confirm his Americanness. "'Mohammad Khan has absolutely, unequivocally every right to proceed with his memorial', read [the fictional] *The New Yorker's* weekly Comment, penned by its editor. 'The question is whether he *should* proceed'" (139). Although the editor begins with a statement that recognises Khan's right to win the design competition, in the next sentence they identify Khan as the other and imply that his withdrawal from the architectural competition is the right course of action. One of the many instances when his American identity is questioned is an interview with Lou Sarge, an extreme-right New York media personality. Sarge asks, "So what did you feel, really feel, the day of the attack?" (212), Sarge's line of questioning implies that the young architect is disguising his true emotions (and it is also, perhaps an intertextual nod, by Waldman, to Mohsin Hamid's *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* in which the Muslim protagonist smiles as he watches the Twin Towers fall).

Sarge does not stop here and pushes Khan to explain how he came up with the idea of the Garden, to which Khan replies: "I thought a garden would be symbolically resonate as a memorial, given its interplay of life and death" and (212) He is cut short by Sarge who says, "Got it. So it is, actually, an Islamic Garden?", "A martyrs' paradise", "A jihadi playground?", "A joke on the American people" (213). Sarge's interpretation implies that this design's purpose is religious, and that *it is* in fact an Islamic Garden. No matter how hard Khan tries to explain his intentions and his design (too late, after his earlier refusals to do so), the public is not ready to accept this. His racial identity overshadows his design. In this respect, then,

> Khan's identity is quickly unravelled by his post-9/11 experience. His American citizenship is insufficient indemnity against the onslaught of negativity that he suffers. Waldman's construction of this process highlights some important aspects concerning the relationship between a personal Islamic identity and US citizenship, and, in particular, exposes why they may be perceived as incompatible states. (Gissane, *Literary Recognition* 144)

The unravelling of Khan's identity ironically involves his internalisation of the negative public perceptions and misrepresentations of him and his work. He becomes increasingly servile at work, noting, "the difference wasn't in how he was being treated but in how he was behaving" (25).

It is a vicious cycle, with external confirmation of his otherness (for example when interrogated at Los Angeles airport, based on his name and appearance) making him *feel* increasingly other than those around him. Perusing newspapers,

> Mo read that he was Pakistani, Saudi and Qatari; that he was not an American citizen; that he had donated to organizations backing terrorism; that he had dated half the female architects in New York; that as a Muslim he didn't date at all; that his father ran a shady Islamic charity; that his brother—how badly Mo,

> as an only child, had wanted a brother!—had started a radical Muslim students' association at his university. He was called, besides decadent, abstinent, deviant, violent, insolent, abhorrent, aberrant, and typical. (161)

Ironically, this breathes air on the latent coals of his parents' religion. During the airport interrogation, the Muslim profession of faith (shahada) "floated unbidden into his mind . . . at the moment he planned to disavow his Muslim identity, his subconscious had unearthed its kernel" (Waldman 28). How people perceive and invent him changes Mo. He tells his girlfriend, "Everyday I'm different. … I'm not the person you met three weeks ago. If this keeps up, in two weeks I won't be the person you know now" (155).

Khan is a non-practicing Muslim born in America, but because of his racial and religious background he is associated with terrorism and repeatedly asked to prove his Americanness. In Tim Gauthier's words: "In their [Americans'] minds, all Arabs are Muslims, all Muslims are Islamists, and all Islamists seek the destruction of the Western world. Any commonalities Khan may share with his 'fellow' American citizens are overshadowed by his Muslim background" (*9/11 Fiction, Empathy, and Otherness* 199). But Waldman does not only focus on white Americans and their responses. Indeed, one thing that differentiates Waldman's 9/11 novel from those fictions discussed in my previous chapter (by Amis, Updike and DeLillo) is the inclusive nature of her cast. As the focalisation shifts between the main protagonists there is, in the words of Baelo-Allué, a "constant crisscrossing of perspectives" ("From the Traumatic to the Political" 174). While there is a third-person narrator, the narrative is focalised at times through a wide array of characters, each with an individual voice and context. Moreover, the grieving families she represents are not just white American; she also portrays how Muslim victims' families, including undocumented ones, have suffered and how Muslims are targeted due to their race and faith in the wake of the terrorist attacks. As Oana-Celia Gheorghiu notes,

> *The Submission* carries its readers along a spectrum of social strata: from the upper class representatives ... to openly Islamophobic Irish workers and single mums turned activists on the one hand, and minorities bent on defending their rights to be equally treated as Americans, on the other. Down below, unacknowledged even in death, are the illegal Bangladeshi migrants, living undocumented in their enclosed 'little Dhaka', speaking little to no English, yet trying to live the American Dream. (*British and American Representations* 112)

When interviewed by Jonathan Derbyshire, Waldman spoke of her decision to write a novel about the aftermath of 9/11 because, "fiction just has a lot more room for ambivalence and internal conflict, contradiction, and for me that sums up so much of what people felt after 9/11 – confusion even. And I think that's hard to capture in journalism" ("A Conversation with Amy Waldman" 3). This complexity didn't find its way into public discourse, she said, "because people want to present coherent selves and want to draw coherent answers" ("A Conversation with Amy Waldman" 3). She explained this was the reason why she decided to write the novel from multiple perspectives, canvassing characters from a range of ethnic, racial and economic strata:

> I had a sense very early on of the victims' families containing so many perspectives, even though they were often talked about as a monolith. And so, it felt like it was something that fiction could do. And it is a moral choice in the sense that I know many readers, just like writers, have many positions or preconceptions, but I wanted to try to force people outside of that pre-existing position and to inhabit, however briefly, these different perspectives. ("A Conversation with Amy Waldman" 3)

Unlike the Muslim characters in the fictions discussed earlier, Waldman's Muslim characters, minor and major, are multidimensional and in this way, avers Pope, she "challenges perceptions of Muslim homogeneity often depicted in early 9/11 literature" (Pope 19). Further, she "helps to expand the genre of 9/11 literature by including and valuing the experiences of the marginalised" (Pope 19). Her Muslim cast includes Indian restaurant workers, Pakistani news vendors, storekeepers from Bangladesh and Muslim managers at the subway station and all express different attitudes and opinions. The author also juxtaposes two "types" of Muslim women in the novel, for example, in the figures of Asma Anwar and Laila Fathi.

Asma, an illegal Bangladeshi immigrant, is a 'traditional' Muslim woman in dress and mannerisms. Before her husband's death in the World Trade Centre (where he worked as a cleaner) she remained at home in a closed Muslim community and loyally performed the expected duties of wife and mother. But Waldman disturbs the stereotypical expectations readers may have of this 'oppressed' Muslim woman needing rescue from her husband and culture, by portraying her interiority. She is fearful that her husband may not reach paradise because he was not properly buried and worries that she will have to go and live with her husband's relatives now that she is widowed, as is traditional in some Muslim cultures. But we are also shown a woman fiercely determined to ensure her husband is remembered as one of 9/11's victims, despite his illegal status. The first time we meet her in the novel, she asks, "[h]ow could you be dead if you did not exist?" (88). The subcontractor who employed her husband denies his existence: "there was no Inman Haque, since he had taken the job using a fake name and security number" (70). She learns he has not been recognised as one of the victims and will not be named on the official memorial:

> Asma Anwar's husband was not among them. The undocumented also had to be uncounted, officials insisted. The consulate could not abet illegals, even posthumously. They were very sorry about Inam, 'if indeed he had existed'

> rolling off their tongues as often as *Insh'Allah*, but they could do nothing about repatriating the body, if it were found, or helping with funds for the widow. (88)

Asma is also revealed to be a woman of passionate and liberal sexuality; we come to realise her perceptiveness and admire the frank, sometimes critical, assessments she offers of her insular community. She is also willing to stand up for her husband and her faith at a public hearing about the design, saying (via a friend's translation) to those gathered:

> You have mixed up these bad Muslims, these bad people, and Islam. Millions of people all over the world have done good things because Islam tells them to. There are so many more Muslims who would never think of taking a life. You talk about paradise as a place for bad people. But that is not what we believe. That is not who the garden is for. The gardens of paradise are for men like my husband, who never hurt anyone. (296)

Her outspokenness, in the full glare of the national media, leads to calls for her to be removed from the US and she is finally murdered by an unknown assailant who may be a right-wing extremist or an offended Bangladeshi community member. Peter Morey argues that Waldman thus suggests that "there is no question but that those most directly at risk from hatred and Islamophobia will always pay the highest price" (*Islamophobia and the Novel* 142). It must be noted, however, that some critics of the novel, especially those from Muslim-majority countries, see her murder as reflective of Waldman's defeated realisation that there is no place, yet, in American literature, for the voices of Muslim women who defy the stereotypes placed upon them.

Laila Fathi, an unconventional and fiery young Iranian-Muslim civil liberties lawyer, tries to help Asma to gain acceptance of her husband's status as a victim. She eventually becomes Mo's personal spokesperson. In contrast to Asma, she is clearly assimilated and has abandoned pious Muslim female attire as the following description, focalised by Asma

suggests: “Her dark hair, unlike Asma’s was uncovered. The skirt of her snug-fitting turquoise suit struck just above the knee. Her pale legs were bare; her heels, which matched her suit, high. Her lips were painted the colour of a plum” (157-8). She also has a brief sexual relationship with Mo however this ends because she believes he is unwilling to fight for his Muslim identity and that he only names his religion when it is safe to do so.

By emphasising the way that the dominant narrative – and dominant memory – subdues and silences the memories and narratives of (racial, class, religious) ‘others,’ Waldman can be seen to draw attention to what Arin Keeble, evoking Michael Rothberg, refers to as “multidirectional memory.” Are all victims of 9/11 equally important? Are they remembered, and valued, equally? “Does my husband matter less than all of your relatives?” (296), Asma asks at the public gathering. What about the histories and tragedies that have been obscured by or forgotten in the *American* memory of 9/11? A member of one pro-Muslim group in the novel says:

> Since we are talking about memorials, where is the memorial to the half-million Iraqi children killed by U.S. sanctions? To the thousands of innocent Afghans killed in response to this attack, or the Iraqis killed on the pretext of responding to this attack? Or to all the Muslims slaughtered in Chechnya, or Kashmir, or Palestine, while the U.S. stood by … . The attack here becomes no less tragic if we acknowledge these other tragedies and demand equal time, equal care for them. (101)

The speaker is a minor character in the novel, but gestures here to all that the official US narrative about 9/11, at least in the immediate years after the attacks, ignored.

Khan is a complex character. In response to the racism and religious labelling to which he is subjected, he ironically begins to adopt behaviours that are stereotypically Muslim: he observes Ramadan for the first time and grows a beard, “merely to assert his right to wear a

beard, to play with assumptions about his religiosity it might create" (146). He is deliberately enigmatic and obfuscatory in response to media questions: "It was exactly because they had nothing to worry about from him that he wanted to let them worry" (99-100). Ironically, he starts becoming the stereotype that is imposed when "[s]trangers analyzed, judged and invented him" (161). Of this, Amir Khadem argues that Mo "has to struggle not only with the outside forces of dogmatism and hatred but also with the self-representation that he uncomfortably creates" ("Paucity of the Imagination" 69). Claire is initially Khan's advocate. She argues that the selection of a Muslim "will send a message, a good message, that in America, it doesn't matter what your name is – and we don't have much more here than a name – that your name is no bar to entering a competition like this, or to winning it" (20). However, the reader very well knows that this is not the case; Khan's Muslim name and identity is a great barrier. As the media frenzy grows, Claire starts second-guessing her choice of Mo's design. She tells him, "Your design becomes more threatening if you won't change it: it tells me there's something there, something hidden, you want to preserve. Followers of your religion have caused enormous pain. And for all of us, it's very difficult to sort out what Islam actually means or encourages" (304). She continues, "So it's not unreasonable for me to ask where on that continuum [of good Muslim to terrorist Muslim] do you sit?" (304). Both parties in this exchange are ultimately disappointed. Claire feels betrayed that the young architect does not acknowledge her loss and Khan is hurt because his motives are questioned.

He also refuses to reassure his critics that he is a good Muslim and when a journalist tells him that by insisting on his right to win, he "offended so many Americans, hurt so many of the families' feelings" (334), he responds, "I am an American too" (335). Nonetheless, a turning point in the novel comes when he decides to shave off his beard, an action that makes him feel like he is "putting himself away in a case." He realises he must agree to assimilation in America or leave the country. He chooses the latter. He withdraws his design submission,

and we learn in the final chapter of the book, which is set twenty years later, that he has left America and now lives and works as "a global citizen, American only in name" (369). At the end, the reader learns that Khan is living in the Middle East where: "his name was not a liability".

In Sonia Baelo Allue's words, "[*The Submission*] is a cultural trauma novel that moves beyond the shortcomings of psychic trauma fiction to show the cultural and political consequences of trauma, opening up a new path for future 9/11 fiction" ("From the Traumatic to the Political" 167). Indeed, Waldman's novel poses "a new path." She was arguably the first highly successful (white) American novelist who attempted to break the cycle of inwardness and religious blame that characterised so much previous 9/11 fiction. As discussed above, novels written in the first wave (the first decade or so after the terrorist attacks) were preoccupied with domestic trauma and often perpetuated negative stereotypes about Muslims and Islam, even when attempting, as Updike did, to be "sympathetic" towards them. As Arin Keeble argues, "Waldman's novel works against the unilateralism of the Bush Doctrine, and attempts to reanimate some of the nuance, complexity and conflictedness that was overshadowed by Manichaeism and clash-of-civilization discourse" (*The 9/11 Novel* 16).[42] Waldman's novel is remarkable for its refusal to engage in or endorse the binary rhetoric that characterised 'White House speak,' and mass media parroting of this, during the time when the novel is set. The author attempts to balance private emotions, public fear and socio-politics in the portrayal of intersecting intercultural relationships and dynamics in the fallout from Khan's selection. She also offers readers insight into the inner – often conflicted – thoughts of her characters as they struggle with the issue that animates the novel as a whole: how do we

[42] The "Bush Doctrine", according to Noam Chomksy, has its origins in the American National Security Strategy of September 2002 (Chomsky 2004: n.p.) which paved the way for the war on terror, the Patriot Act, wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, and other post-9/11 governmental policies and actions.

remember and portray 9/11? The answer, it seems, is not one that falls neatly into an either/or solution.

The Muslim Author Response

In this thesis I have adopted the terms 'first' and 'second wave' to characterise the post-9/11 fiction written, approximately, from 2001 to about 2008, claiming that since about 2009, 9/11 novels written by white Anglo-Americans started to change becoming more inclusive in their casts of characters and increasingly willing to challenge the rhetoric about Muslims, Islam and terrorism that dominated fictional representations in the Bush era. It is my claim that in the context of the more liberal era in American politics ushered in with the election of Barack Obama as president (at least on the surface and in terms of public perception), it became possible for writers to write novels that challenged media-fuelled stereotypes. The temporal distance from the shocking events of 9/11 was important too as, almost ten years after the fatal day, readers seemed more willing to buy, consume and discuss novels with a broader scope. I have discussed Amy Waldman's *The Submission*, which broadly received positive acclaim, as a representative example of this change. Others include Joseph O'Neill's *Netherland* (2008), Teju Cole's *Open City* (2011), Jacob M. Appel's *The Man Who Wouldn't Stand Up* (2012), Thomas Pynchon's *Bleeding Edge* (2013). Like Waldman's The *Submission*, these fictions feature a multicultural cast of characters, including immigrant ones, move away from the representation of (white) New York domestic trauma and, in various ways, challenge and critique American politics and the American dream. They do not, however, feature a Muslim protagonist, as Waldman's novel does.

Of course, the line delineating these two 'waves' is not a hard/rigid one, and there are publications that do not fit easily into each one. An example is Mohsin Hamid's *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* which I will discuss shortly. Not only is it written by a (cultural if not religious) Muslim, it features an immigrant (cultural) Muslim protagonist who is not vilified for his ethnic and religious status. Nonetheless, with exceptions, I identify broad trends in the novels written by white Anglo-Americans during these approximate periods.

At this juncture, I would like to turn to what I suggest is an emergent 'third wave' of post 9/11 fiction: that is, fiction written by people I earlier referred to as "'strangers' living within the 'dominant' cultures of the US and the UK, as part of them, yet still alienated: first and second-generation Muslim immigrants." Although passport-carrying citizens of these western nations, the novelists who interest me here are nonetheless marginalised by virtue of their minority religion (even if non-practicing) and culture, and by appearance: brown skins, beards (men), hijabs (women), etc. It is my claim that these novelists seek to challenge the dominant narrative about Muslims (and terrorism) as it has been curated and replicated in media and mainstream fiction, building on the changes already evident in writing such as Waldman's (and Hamid's). I suggest this body of work offers a framework for interpreting and making sense of the complex world of Muslims living (often as citizens or with a resident permit) in the West. It also invites a deeper understanding of Islam as a religion of peace which, sadly, like all religions, may be – and has been – twisted and abused to violent ideological ends. Most interestingly, for my purposes, many of these novelists explore, with a complexity and care (largely) missing in earlier post-9/11 fiction penned by western authors, the reasons *why* some disaffected Muslim immigrants might turn to terrorism against their host nation (or the nation that accepted their parents as citizens). As this suggests, I will restrict my focus to texts that portray "homegrown" or "domestic" Muslim terrorism, to explore how these differ from portraits of Muslim terrorists by western authors, such as those discussed in my previous chapter. "Homegrown" Muslim terrorism[43] is terrorism committed by a Muslim perpetrator who is a resident or citizen of the same (non-Muslim-majority) nation as his/her victims or, in the words of Risa A. Brooks, "violent attacks from extremist elements *within* the country's

[43] Of course, not all domestic terrorism is committed by Muslims – indeed far from it. A review conducted by President Biden's national security team in 2021 found that "the two most lethal elements of today's domestic terrorism threat are (1) racially or ethnically motivated violent extremists who advocate for the superiority of the white race and (2) anti-government or anti-authority violent extremists, such as militia violent extremists" ("Fact Sheet: National Strategy for Countering Domestic Terrorism" n.p.)

Muslim population" (9; my emphasis).[44] Before the London bombings in July 2005, Islamic terrorism in the West was largely understood as a threat from foreign sources, particularly the Middle East and South Asia (as it occurred in September 2001). Increasingly, however, the threat of terrorism originating from within the country that is attacked (by "the enemy within") has been acknowledged and widely discussed with the drivers for and determinants of extremist violence extensively debated.[45]

The turn of Muslim protagonists to terrorism is never valorised or sanctioned in the texts that I characterise as belonging to the "third wave" of post-9/11 fiction. The pain and loss it causes – for individuals, their families, their communities and the nation – is clearly portrayed. Nonetheless, they begin to address the question posited by President George W. Bush after 9/11 – "why do they hate us?" – offering answers that reverse the self-victimisation of his words by drawing attention to the marginalisation, discrimination and racial profiling endured by many Muslims is the West, and the festering resentment in many Muslim-majority countries towards the US and UK's militarised global policies and interventions. They also, crucially, suggest that home-grown terrorism may be (in part) caused by domestic and familial reasons, rather than simply involving religion or politics, per se. In the portrayal of their terrorist protagonists, these novels accord with recent findings that "terrorists are often drawn from well-educated, middle-class or high-income families" and that poverty and lack of education are not the key drivers of terrorism as originally thought (Altunbus and Thornton 262). Influences like parental loss and intergenerational conflict within immigrant families are suggested to have an important role to play in the radicalisation of fictional characters. The Muslim authors on whom I will focus in the following two chapters, Laleh Khadivi and Kamila Shamsie, approach the topic of Muslim homegrown terrorism with nuance and accuracy

[44] See: Bergen and Hoffman (2010), Marc Sageman (2008), Manni Crone and Martin Harrow (2011).
[45] See, for example, Altunbas and Thornton (2011), Berman (2009), Kreuger (2007).

through portraying the complex life of radical Muslim characters who are not simply in thrall of the putative latent violence of Islam.

Before turning to these I will offer a brief discussion of Mohsin Hamid's *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* (2007) which portrays a (*possibly* radicalised) protagonist, Changez, who is both "foreign" (Pakistani) and "homegrown" by virtue of his recent immigrant status in the US. The reluctance of the protagonist to embrace fundamentalism is emphasised in the title. Moreover, the *kind* of fundamentalism he reluctantly embraces, or eschews, is never made clear to the reader who is invited to recognise that there are forms of fundamentalism that are not Muslim (like the fundamentalism of global corporate capitalism). As Peter Morey notes, then, Hamid "undertakes a playful transvaluing of the notion of 'fundamentals' and 'fundamentalism'" ("Mohsin Hamid's *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*" 143).

It has been widely suggested that *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* was the first mainstream novel in English to counter the America-centric nature of 9/11 fiction.[46] In this respect it is somewhat anomalous in the terms of the post-9/11 fictional waves I have outlined, because its publication occurs within, albeit latterly – the dates of the first period. Arguably, however, this is because it is written by a cultural Muslim and an immigrant to the US. It stands as an exception to novels written by white Anglo-American writers and as a precursor to the third wave novels, representative examples of which are explored in Chapters Five and Six. This may explain the ambiguity of the novel (largely a result of the narrative mode used, as I explain below) and the widely differing responses to it of readers. Some readers decried it as anti-American;[47] others as pro-Muslim; yet others praised it as for its accessible and sympathetic representation of religious tension and terrorism and for offering "a counter-statement to one of the established ways of understanding the post-9/11 era" (Darda 116; see

[46] Hamid is referred to as Pakistani since he was born and raised in Pakistan. However, he lived in the US and the UK for at least two decades and undertook his tertiary education in the US.
[47] Ann Marlowe describes *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* as "anti-American agitprop clumsily masquerading as a work of art". See also Karen Olsson (2007); Paula Bock (2007) and Marina Budhos (2007).

also Singh, Haider, Keeble). Much, of course, depends on the preconceptions and predispositions of readers on precisely such matters.

Peter Morey's comments move along the lines that I have traced in previous chapters to claim that (earlier) post-9/11 fictions were either:

> 'trauma narratives,', attempting to trace the psychological scarring and mental realignments of characters caught up in the Twin Towers attacks, or semi-fictionalized 'Muslim misery memoirs' which often served to underscore the injustices of Islamic rule and justify neoconservative interventionism. ("The Rules of the Game Have Changed" 136)

Following this claim, Morey then focuses on Hamid's novel and discusses the ways in which it differs. According to Morey, *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*

> represents a sly intervention that destabilizes the dominant categories of the post-9/11 novel, undercutting the impulse to national normalization through the experience of its protagonist, Changez, and his journey from fully interpellated capitalist "fundamentalist" and "post-political" transnational subject to racially profiled object of suspicion and finally anti-American firebrand. (136)

The assertion that Changez becomes an "anti-American firebrand" is rather too hasty. The nature of his motivations, and his political leanings, are not explained and remain unclear at the novel's end. To a great extent, this is due to the narrative style adopted by Hamid. The novel takes the form of a dramatic monologue in which Pakistani immigrant Changez talks about his experiences when living and working in America to a voiceless American whom he has met in a café in Lahore, Pakistan. In this one-sided conversation, Changez, a highly educated financial analyst, narrates his journey from Pakistan to employment and life in the US and his eventual choice to return to Pakistan; his failed romance with an a American woman named Erica; his job at a corporate evaluation firm; and his experiences before and after the

9/11 attacks, which radically changed the way he, a Pakistani, non-practicing Muslim, was perceived and treated in the US(America). By virtue of the dramatic monologue narration, Changez alone speaks and his American auditor (who *may* be a CIA or a US Army agent out to get him) remains silent. As a result, readers are forced to guess not only the reasons why the American man is in Lahore, but also what his motives, actions and words to Changez are.

Changez tells the American that after graduating from Princeton University he joined Underwood Samson (the initials of which are *US*), a prominent New York firm, as an analyst. He recounts his experiences of living in New York and his failed relationship with Erica ((*Am)erica*) who is in love with the memory of her dead boyfriend Chris (c.f. *Christopher Columbus*; founding father, nativism). He focuses in particular on the months prior to and just after the 9/11 attacks. Although highly successful and respected by his employer before the attacks, everything changes after the Twin Towers fall. As Stephen Hong Sohn puts it, "Regardless of Changez's myriad talents, he discovers that he is essentially forever foreign, the enemy alien" (235). Then, he - and so many other Muslims – or people of Muslim appearance – were incriminated and discriminated against based on their racial and ethnic appearance. He explains how he was called a "Fucking Arab" (*The Reluctant Fundamentalist* 134) because of his dark complexion or what Vani Kannan calls "potentially-Muslim brown skin" (36), and is subjected to unnecessary control measures at the border when he returns to the US after a trip abroad. This resulted, he says, in him feeling constantly surveilled by the official authorities. Much of the novel turns on how these altered American attitudes towards him change Changez (not unlike the way Mo, in *The Submission*, changes due to other's changed perceptions of him).

Commenting on Changez's account of his experiences, Tufail Muhammad Chandio et al. assert that Hamid's novel portrays "the Muslim immigrant protagonist's national and cultural identity crisis in the face of religious profiling and discrimination, suspicion,

marginalization, physical or verbal assault and stereotyping of Muslims in the wake of the attacks" ("The Reluctant Fundamentalist" 64). In this way, it has been widely argued, Changez's monologue evaluates post-9/11 America and finds that it has been negatively influenced and divided by the dominant political narrative. However, some suggest that a problematic aspect of Hamid's novel is the fact that it remains limited to one voice, an uninterrupted and unchallenged monologue, so the reader is only offered Changez's point of view and forced to agree or disagree with this.[48] Others suggest "Changez functions as the perfect kind of critical middleman: his political views are not so radical as to alienate liberal readers, so he can articulate the dangers of paranoia that cast any suspect body as one imbued with terrorist potentialities" (Sohn 254).

According to Geoffrey Nash, Hamid's novel provides some crucial elements that are missing in post-9/11 fiction by writers such as Amis, McEwan, DeLillo and Updike: "a non-western migrant's view of what it is like to live in the West; a 'Third World' perspective on America's global activities; and an insider's view of how it feels to belong to a Muslim nation" (*Writing Muslim Identity* 108). Hamid's narrative is unique (or was at the time of writing) in the sense that he attempts to shed light on the challenges and experiences of a non-white Muslim migrant, in post-9/11 America. His "Third World" perspective offers a different viewpoint into how geopolitical dynamics have affected the way a Muslim is viewed and received in post-9/11 US. The reader is invited to explore 9/11 and its aftermath from the perspective of one who professes to be "a lover of America" (1) but nonetheless "*smiled*" (72; emphasis original) when he watched the second Twin Tower collapse: "Yes, despicable as it may sound, my initial reaction was to be pleased" (72), he tells his American auditor.

[48] For a counter to this and a discussion of the narrative as "a dialogue (strategically) disguised as a monologue" (310) see Madiou (2021).

Changez's smile at this horrific vision has been the subject of much discussion.[49] Perhaps this is the moment in the text where he lays bare his hatred for America? Or perhaps it is a confession of what he knows was an appalling response, but one that happened instinctively? Pei-chen Liao argues along these latter lines:

> Just because he belongs to the privileged social class and derives much benefit from the US, his smile at the collapse of the Twin Towers appears despicable to himself, his American addressee, and quite a few reviewers of the novel. … Yet Changez's almost unconscious smile is uncanny in a Freudian sense, for it actually reveals a familiar yet strange side of himself which he has attempted to repress under his pursuit of the American dream and which allows him to see another side of 9/11 that Americans do not see or acknowledge. … [T]he fact that even a privileged, Westernized, and highly educated member of the elite class like Changez could turn against the US and become a reluctant fundamentalist exemplifies that there is 'no simple answer to the causes of terrorism' [quoting Raymond Bonner]. Indeed, whereas conventional thinking about terrorism, as politicians and journalists would have us believe, is 'set on its axis – that it was the product of religious zealotry, fueled by radical imams in the madrassas of Pakistan, the pesantras of Indonesia' [quoting Bonner], Hamid's novel sheds light on the complexity of the issues of terrorism and paying attention to privileged social status. (124)

Liao's analysis is perhaps a bit too blunt here as suggested by his claims that Changez (simply) becomes not only a 'reluctant fundamentalist' but also a terrorist. As I have noted, such certainty is disallowed to Hamid's reader. That said, Liao's overriding point – that Hamid encourages his readers to understand that (Muslim) terrorism is not only "the product of

[49] On this, see Naydan (2016).

religious zealotry" – is a very important one. If anything, Changez is characterised by his *lack* of religious zeal (and he is neither poor, uneducated nor lacking privilege.) It is this that distinguishes Hamid's protagonist from those portrayed in post-9/11 fiction by (white, western) authors such as Amis and Updike. And it is this that makes *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* such an important exemplar text for later Muslim (first or second generation) immigrant writers.

Since the publication of *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*, other Muslim/immigrant authors have similarly taken to literature (written in English) to not only portray the demonisation of Muslims in the West but also to defend Islam and portray a positive image of the religion. In his article "Defending the Faith," Shakir Mustafa looks at how, post 9/11, Muslim authors in the West, have "present[ed] characters who find in the Quran a source of positive power and find in their faith a refuge from an environment that has suddenly become less hospitable" (282). These authors, he claims, portray Islam as a peaceful religion and Muslims as "humane individuals at peace at home and in equally humane spaces like the mosque or some similar Islamic center of activity" (282). This may be so of the wider canon of Muslim-authored fiction, post-9/11, but is not a statement relevant to Hamid's novel in which the religious beliefs of the protagonist are (perhaps quite deliberately) barely mentioned, apart from the information that he does not practice Islam. Fadda-Conrey believes that:

> The period following September 2001 did not only generate a need on the part of Arab Americans and Muslim-Americans to deflect the terrorism and fanaticism charges targeting them, but has made it important for Arab-American poets, fiction writers, journalists, and essayists to point out the historical injustices that fellow Arabs in the Middle East had been subjected to by US foreign policy. (59)

In recent years, many Arab-American authors have tried to challenge the dominant narrative and give voice to their community in their work and announce that they, too, have been affected

by the fanatical acts of the 9/11 terrorists. Arab and Muslim American writers have tried to respond to stereotypes like "the Faceless Veiled Arab Woman" or "the Islamic Terrorist" by writing their own versions of what it means to be Arab, Arab-American, or Muslim living in a US that, after 9/11, has become increasingly hostile toward them. Through their works, these authors have presented the challenges their immigrant Muslim characters are constantly dealing with and explore the complexities of their Arab-American (or Arab-British) identity. They break the stereotypes associated with the Muslim identity and enlighten the reader on Muslim characters' diverse experiences, and diverse religious/political perspectives. Such an approach ultimately seeks to enable Arab-Americans (or Arab-British) immigrants to achieve the autonomy needed to define and explore their plural identities in their pursuit of agency (Fadda-Conrey 62).

As noted, these writers in no way condone Muslim religious extremism or the decision to adopt terror as a weapon. Naomi Shihab Nye, an Arab-American poet wrote a letter called "To Any Would-Be Terrorists" shortly after September 11, 2001. In this, she directly speaks to those responsible for the 9/11 attacks and says:

> Not only did your colleagues kill thousands of innocent, international people in those buildings and scar their families forever, they wounded a huge community of people in the Middle East, in the United States and all over the world. If that's what they wanted to do, please know the mission was a terrible success, and you can stop now. (n.p.)

This exhortation strongly condemns the 9/11 attacks over the loss of innocent lives but also reflects on the long-lasting negative affects it has on Muslims everywhere. Shihab Nye's letter expresses her empathy towards the lost lives and her anger towards the attackers for the grief caused not only to the victims' families but also Muslims all over the world. She then goes on to say how difficult it is to be a Muslim living in America, how this terrorist attack has affected

every Muslim-American and concludes by stating that "it will be peace, not violence, that fixes things" (n.p.). The idea that only peace will bring stability and prosperity sounds contrary to prevailing attitudes at the time, and forcibly voiced by President Bush, which demanded revenge and violence in response to the attacks.

I have used the phrase "Muslim writer" throughout this thesis and in doing so write of a group of authors that must be acknowledged as very diverse. Anisa Ather defines "Muslim writers" as "a vast category of Muslims inclusive of secular authors on the one hand, and religiously motivated authors on the other" (6), and my usage accords with this definition. Ather quotes Claire Chambers as saying that this group is producing "some of the most interesting fiction [and nonfiction] in the UK today" (6). Robin Yassin-Kassab stresses the importance of their work, arguing that:

> Heard voices empower. Voices heard through novels also work against ignorance, because novels, unlike the BBC, humanise. They deal in characters instead of abstractions, and raise questions, and so provide the human texture which the most well-intentioned news media cannot. ("Muslim Writer" n.p.)

Yassin-Kassab's assertion about the power of fiction celebrates the importance of words and their lasting impact. By "rais[ing] questions" novels have the power to provoke critical thinking and contribute to a deeper understanding of events and actions. Ather similarly asserts that since 9/11 and 7/7 writing by Muslims has gained significance, commenting on the way Muslim authors have striven to rewrite the 'terrorist' identity with which Muslims are so often associated (9), and this includes more carefully contextualised narratives of (immigrant) radicalisation.

Les Pickers reports that as of December 2015, approximately 30,000 fighters from at least 85 countries had joined ISIS. Greg Myre's detailed 2018 report asserts that an estimated 300 Americans have attempted to join ISIS, which accounts for about one percent of foreign

fighters (n.p.). Although only a very small number of westerners have actually been radicalised, a disproportionate number of characters in immigrant fiction, in the fiction written both by western and immigrant authors, become radicalised and either commit terror attacks within their adopted country or leave to join jihadist groups in places like Syria, Afghanistan or Iraq. Examples of these so-called "radicalisation narratives," a body of contemporary fiction dominated by the figure of the (often second-generation) disaffected Muslim-immigrant-turned-jihadist include Ed Hussain's *The Islamist: Why I Became an Islamic Fundamentalist: What I Saw Inside, and Why I Left* (2007; a memoir), Sunjeev Sahota's *Ours are the Streets* (2011), Laleh Khadivi's *A Good Country* (2017), Kamila Shamsi's *Home Fire* (2017), Fatima Bhutto's *The Runaways* (2019), Mahir Guven's *Older Brother* (2019) and Hassan Ghedi Santur's *The Youth of God* (2019). All these works were written by immigrants now living in the west (or who have returned to their homeland after a significant period of time living in the west). Excited as I was to read these texts as I conducted research for this thesis, I found myself disappointed by quite a few of them.

Jago Morrison, in "Jihadi Fiction: Radicalisation Narratives in the Contemporary Novel," cites the FBI Counterterrorism Division's handbook "The Radicalization Process: From Conversion to Jihad" which outlines the four stages ("preradicalisation, identification, indoctrination, and action") that young men and women go through to become radicalised, and he goes on to say that the representation of these stages of the psychological modelling of potential terrorists is evident in a surprising amount of post-9/11 writing about radicalisation and seem to have been written by following the same formulaic journey for their protagonists. Morrison expresses dismay at this "flagrant reductionalism" and discuses Ed Husain's *The Islamist* as an example. In this novel, Morrison argues, the protagonist goes from impressionable young Muslim to Hizb ut-Tahrir activist – only a step away from becoming a violent jihadi. He says that as in the FBI's account:

> The young person's journey into Islamism is framed in this text, almost entirely in terms of a teenager's naiveté and desire for special status, while the worsening political climate, including rising Islamophobia and Western tolerance and sponsorship of mass violence against Muslims, are for the most part peripheral. (570)

Despite some positive reviews, Hussain's book received a fair share of negative criticism. Take this, for example, from Ziauddin Sardar (writing for *The Independent*): "*The Islamist* seems to have been drafted by a Whitehall mandarin as a PR job for the Blair government" ("*The Islamist*" n.p.). Madeleine Bunting, writing for *The Guardian*, notes that "he [Hussain] has been condemned as a government stooge." She continues:

> It is as if, just as Husain once swallowed large chunks of Hizb ut-Tahrir propaganda, he now seems to have swallowed undigested the prevailing critique of British Muslims. … One suspects the naivety which took him into Hizb-ut Tahrir has blinded him as to how his story will be used to buttress positions hostile to many things he holds dear – his own faith and racial tolerance, for example. A glance at the blog response to a Husain piece in the *Telegraph* reveals how rightwing racism and anti-Islamic sentiment are feasting on his testimony. ("We were the Brothers" n.p.)

Although not a novel, the impulses that critics such as Sardar and Bunting argue are at the heart of the memoir are also evident in some novels written about homegrown radicalisation by Muslim (first or second generation) immigrant authors.

One of these is Fatima Bhutto's *The Runaways* (2019). Bhutto, a Pakistani writer, is not an immigrant in the west but has lived for extended periods outside of Pakistan and completed her bachelors and master's education in England. I eagerly anticipated reading this novel, published near the start of my doctoral research journey. I was very disappointed, however,

when I did so. One of the three youth protagonists in the novel, Anita Rose (aka Layla), lives in poverty in Karachi, where her family's dire straits are exacerbated by their Christianity. Another, Monty (aka Mustafa), also lives in Karachi, but on the 'other' side – the side of wealth and privilege. The third, Sunny (aka Salman), is the child of immigrants to Britain where he does not quite fit in or belong. They all meet – following different paths – at a jihadi training camp on the outskirts of Mosul. What brings them together, in the words of reviewer Shahidha Bari, is "the disquietude of youth, the vulnerability and the foolishness" ("The Runaways" n.p.). And for Anita Rose, Bari claims, it is "the indignity of servitude and the constraints of poverty that compel her to seek an alternative life" (n.p.). To blame radicalisation on the vulnerability and foolishness of youth, or on poverty, or on what a reviewer suggests is social media exposure "a little too conveniently timed" ("*The Runaway*s" n.p.) is inadequate. Yet this is what the novel asks us to accept. Although Bhutto says she wrote the novel to explore why young people might be radicalised, I put down the novel unable to understand what had driven any of the characters to turn to Islamic extremism.[50] They all suffer identity crises of some kind, but so do many people, especially teenagers, and only a very, very small percentage of them choose to follow the jihadi path. I concur with the opinion of Chris Oleson, who writes of the novel that its promise to reveal why the three youths make "the most momentous decision of their lives" (as stated on the jacket cover) is unfulfilled:

> Unfortunately, *The Runaways* denigrated into a mundane thriller that camouflaged its 'reveal' of its characters 'most momentous decision.' It draped itself in garments of significance that it never earned the right to wear. Although all three teenagers explore and express attraction to radical Islam or political action, I never really understood why. Critical plot points and development

[50] See interviews with Bhutto by Mark Reynolds and Sofia Rehman in which she makes this claim.

> happened off page and suddenly burst into the story in interminable backstory segments. (“A Dizzying Sense of Discontinuity” n.p.)

In an interview released by her publisher, Penguin, she was asked: “Your characters are all young and feel alienation in different ways, so they dice with extremism. Was it important to you to humanise them?” She answers that her job as a novelist is to observe and portray people and not to indict them (“Fatima Bhutto on Radicalisation” n.p.). She goes on to say that people, wherever they are and whoever they are, want to belong, to be respected, to be loved and cared for. She says that “when you don’t offer a sizeable portion of your population a vision for their future and when they feel excluded from a collective narrative, they will look elsewhere for a vision and a place to belong” (n.p.). This may be so, but a “sizable portion” of people do not become Islamic terrorists. Why *these* particular characters do so remains obscure.

Hassan Ghedi Santur, author of *The Youth of God* (2019), immigrated to Canada at the age of thirteen. He makes a similar point about disaffection and alienation as drivers for radicalisation in an interview with Ashly July. He claims that he was curious to know why the son of a Somali Muslim immigrant (his protagonist, Nuur), who has never been to Somalia, would become radicalised. He explains:

> I was working backwards and trying to find potential answers for why something like that would happen. A lot of the stories had one particular theme that was running through them: a sense of alienation, a sense of feeling like they don’t fit in, they don’t belong. That sense of alienation makes the idea of finding a home—sometimes a literal home and sometimes an emotional home—quite attractive to these young men. It can give them a sense of identity and a sense of belonging in the world. (n.p.)

He concludes the interview by saying, “The only thing that I would say is I hope that a reader of the novel would come away thinking, ‘I could see how this could happen. I could

understand — even though I may not condone it or may be disturbed by it — I can understand what would make somebody do something like this'" (n.p.). Unfortunately, when I came away from the novel I didn't have this kind of understanding. Certainly, Nuur is portrayed as vulnerable and insecure – in part due to his unusual intelligence, in part due to his second-generation immigrant status. However, much of the novel focuses on what one reviewer acutely calls "the lack of embodied love" and how this can "starve a young person's ability to make choices in their best interests" (Sheniz Janmohamed, n.p.). Is this lack a sufficient driver on which to hang so much weight in a novel about radicalisation? Another reviewer, Abukar Sanei, identifies three key themes in the novel: "loss of identity, belonging and nostalgia" ("Book Review: *The Youth of God*" n.p.). Nuur is not only Black, but a pious Muslim, and both impact his sense of alienation in Canada. His disaffection is further complicated by his parent's divorce and uneasy reunion, and the pull of two different kinds of Muslims, a strict imam from a nearby mosque and a supportive teacher at school. While the novel portrays intergenerational conflict between (rather progressive) first-generation immigrant parents and their increasingly devout second-generation immigrant Muslim son, it fails to do so in a convincing way. The novel, which is narrated in the third person in a voice that tells rather than shows us what Nuur is thinking or feeling, includes extensive dialogue that is stilted and unrealistic. *The Youth of God* was not reviewed in any major newspapers or journals and to date there is no literary critical commentary on it. I believe this is due to the rather weak and trite storyline which rehashes cliches of about immigrant alienation without offering us a believable or engaging protagonist.

The young Muslim protagonists in fictions like those of Bhutto and Santur struggle to find a "home" and to feel "at home". Doubly "unhomed," they struggle to belong within their immediate family and in wider (western) society. We are *told* about the difficulties they face, intergenerational and intra-societal, however there is little sense of the protagonists'

interiority. They are one-dimensional and often stereotypical, albeit in very different ways from the disenfranchised Muslim terrorists crafted by Amis, Updike and DeLillo. While the stated goal of both authors is to help readers understand why (immigrant) Muslim youths may be radicalised and turn to terror – a very different goal to that of the Anglo-America authors discussed earlier in this thesis – they do little more that fictionalise the journey to extremism that is laid out in the FBI Counterterrorism Division's handbook and similar "risk factor indicator" publications and sources.

It must be noted, nonetheless, that Bhutto's and Santur's novels are indicative of a significant shift in post-9/11 fiction: the recent proliferation of what I have called 'third-wave' post-9/11 fiction: fiction written by Muslim immigrant or transnational authors, that portray radicalised second-generation Muslim protagonists with a focus on the reasons that lead to their choices to embrace the jihadi cause. This attempt to fictionalise reasons and causes, to explore to elicit understanding if not condonation, is almost totally lacking in first-wave post 9-11 literature. Second-wave writing, such as Amy Waldman's *The Submission*, steps towards this by exploring the effects of negative racial and religious profiling without confronting the difficult issues of radicalisation.

In my next two chapters I will discuss two third-wave novels that I believe are more successful in the attempt to explain what might drive young (second-generation) Muslim immigrants to join extremist terrorist groups: Laleh Khadivi's *A Good Country* and Kamila Shamsie's *Home Fire* (this latter being the most sophisticated and engaging, I argue). In these works, the novelists pay extended attention to the cumulative, if often mundane effects of discrimination, misunderstanding, and the long-lasting effects of an almost impossible attempt to fit in. Such works portray complicated, individual human beings and families torn between cultural and religious loyalties in ways that complicate and undermine fear-confirming narratives of Muslim fanatical terrorism. They counter the all-too-simple trope of

the ‘angry young Muslim becomes terrorist’ that appears in many fictions written by western authors. Importantly, these novels portray more complex and multi-faceted individual ‘radicalised youths’ in their familial environments, paying special attention to the representation of the *psychology* of their protagonists, something that is achieved via complex narrational methods that invite readers to ‘see inside’ their minds and *feel* their experiences and pain.

Chapter Four: Laleh Khadivi *A Good Country* (2017)

At the end of my previous chapter, I briefly considered several novels by Muslim immigrant authors, suggesting they evidence an emerging "third wave" of post-9/11 literature about Muslim terrorists and radicalisation that differs from fiction penned by native-born (and 'white') American and British writers. As I have argued, some of these later works are not altogether successful, relying on weak plot lines, unconvincing characters, and obscure motivations for their radicalisation. Nonetheless, they all appear to challenge stereotypical or one-dimensional portrayals of Muslims, Islam and, very importantly, the reasons why some 'home grown' Muslim youths turn down the path of fundamentalism. In this chapter I will discuss another – and I believe more successful – novel that can be seen as belonging to this emergent new category: Laleh Khadivi's *A Good Country* (2017).

The novel is set in Orange County, California, in the years immediately before and after the 2013 Boston Marathon bombing. Although the novel's teenage protagonist is not directly involved in this, the event is presented as crucial to his maturing identity. Shocking and devastating as it was, the Boston Marathon bombing, a terrorist attack involving the planting of two bombs near the finish line of the sporting event, was 'minor' in comparison to the 9/11 atrocities: three people died, 260 were injured. The bombers were two young-adult brothers, ethnic Chechens (Sunni Muslims) who had spent much of their lives in the US and had recently applied for citizenship. Investigators later concluded that the young men were "'self-radicalized,' having developed a personal militant ideology that drew from disparate sources without being directly connected to any of them" (Ray, "Boston Marathon" n.p.). Khadivi uses this historic event to focus on the continuing fears, in the US (and elsewhere in the West), of Islamic terrorism and, especially, of 'home grown' terrorism. The question posed by Barack Obama in an address to the nation about the bombing, was one asked by many: "Why did young men who grew up and studied here, as part of our communities and our country, resort to such

violence?" ("Statement by the President" n.p.). The novel can be seen as an attempt to answer just this question, a variation on the familiar one asked after 9/11: "Why do they hate us?" While Obama did not directly name the religion of the brothers, it was well known. They were Muslim.

In earlier chapters I discussed Martin Amis's "Last Days of Muhammad Atta" (2006), John Updike's *Terrorist* (2006), and Don DeLillo's *Falling Man* (2007), suggesting that these texts, by white western men, ultimately fail in their attempts to imagine their Muslim terrorist protagonists (in the former two especially), or relegate their terrorist character to a peripheral role in their focus on the pain of shocked and bereaved Americans in the aftermath of 9/11 (in the case of the latter). In this chapter I will argue that Khadivi, with partial success, attempts to do what these novelists did not, something that was also achieved, in some measure, in Mohsin Hamid's *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*: portray the psychological drivers for her protagonist's (reluctant) radicalisation, doing so with a careful focus on his interiority. This, in turn, requires consideration of how she narrates the novel, using limited third-person focalisation to bring her reader closely into the mind of her young protagonist, Alireza (Rez) Courdee.

Significantly, like Mohsin Hamid and Kamila Shamsie, to whom I will turn in my next chapter, Khadivi is herself an immigrant in the West. She writes with an intimate insider's knowledge of what it means to be educated or 'bred' in the United States, but not born there, and regarded as an ethnic outsider. Much of her writing and other creative work, to date, concentrates on the themes of borders, identity, belonging and migration. She was born in 1977, in Esfahan, Iran, to a Kurdish family. Shortly after the Iranian Revolution (1979), her family fled, first to Canada and then to the US, where she grew up enjoying a typical American childhood. Of this, Bill Donahue writes that "[s]he retained no memory of the exodus, and grew up a nomadic American, the daughter of an itinerant businessman, stationed first in Dallas, then Los Angeles, then Atlanta. She watched MTV, listened to Bob Marley and ate Pizza Hut. It

wasn't as though the cry of the muezzin dominated her childhood" ("A Kurdish Odyssey" n.p.). Khadivi worked as director, producer and cinematographer of documentary films from 1999, and her documentary film *900 Women*, about life at the Louisiana Correctional Institute for Women, was premiered at the Human Rights Watch Film Festival and on A&E (American pay television network) in 2001. Several years later, she completed an MFA at Mills College and was a Creative Writing Fellow in Fiction at Emory University. In 2008 she received the Whiting Writers' Award, followed soon after by a Carl Djerassi fellowship, the Barnes and Noble Discover New Writers Award, and a Soros Foundation Award. Khadivi's short fiction and non-fiction work have been published in *The Los Angeles Times*, *The San Francisco Chronicle*, *VQR*, *The Sun* and other newspapers and magazines. In 2016, she was awarded a National Endowment for the Arts Grant and the Pushcart Prize for her story "Wanderlust." She was for a time the Associate Dean of Graduate Programmes and Strategic Initiatives, and an Assistant Professor, at the University of San Francisco. She is currently (2023) the Stein Visiting Writer at Stanford University.[51]

In 2009 she published her first novel, *The Age of Orphans*; this was followed by *The Walking* (2012). These are the first two books in a trilogy, a saga spanning three generations in the (fictional) Khourdi/Courdee male line. *A Good Country* is the third book in the trilogy. When Khadivi started writing the first book, *The Age of Orphans*, she began research on the life and fate of the Kurds living in Iran. The novel fictionalises the knowledge she gained. It spans the years 1921 to 1978 and traces the life of Rez's Kurdish grandfather (called Reza Khourdi – the family anglicises their name when they immigrate to the US) whose entire family is massacred by the Iranian Shah's army when he is eight. He is then forced to become a child soldier in the Iranian army. In time he becomes a cruel murderer of his own people and a servant

[51] I provide this information because, unlike many of the other novelists I discuss in this thesis, Khadivi is relatively unknown.

to the new nation, hiding his ethnic identity throughout his life, something that comes at great personal cost.

The second book in the trilogy, *The Walking* (2013), is about Rez's father, Saladin Khourdi, who, with his older brother, leaves his homeland because of the Iranian Revolution and finds his way to the United States where he struggles to settle. The book is, in many respects, about the difficulties and dilemmas faced by forced migrants and their struggle to build a new life and home in a country far from their homeland, culture, family and friends. Saladin's struggles are, according to one reviewer, oriented "within the greater philosophical and psychological framework of immigration" ("*The Walking*" n.p.). Despite the familial continuity in the three novels, I will not discuss the earlier two books of the trilogy in this chapter because they are tangential to my primary focus, although I note the significance of Rez's father's status as a first-generation immigrant. As Karthik Shankar suggests, "[o]ther than a few stray references, including an obtrusive one where Rez discovers a photo of his grandfather, *A Good Country* works as a standalone read" ("Voices in the Head" n.p.). Khadivi made a similar point in an interview with Jennifer Kaplan in 2017, saying,

> The trilogy is very loose. I wanted people to be able to enter into any of the books and feel a completeness without having to be tied to the other books. *A Good Country* stands alone in that it's a book that takes place today or maybe five years ago, and captures a phenomenon in the west that is recognizable: the radicalization of the children of immigrants. The ancestors of the main character Rez, his parents and his grandparents, are very faintly mentioned. If you haven't read the other books you won't notice. But if you have, the connection with the grandfather and the father, who Rez does not have a connection to, which I think is true of many immigrant kids, will add to the wealth of your imagination. ("The Making of a Teenage Radical" n.p.)

Khadivi's focus on immigrant concerns is very evident in this statement. Apart from her comments on the "phenomenon" of "the radicalization of the children of immigrants," she also speaks of the lack of connection between Rez and his father, suggesting this is "true of many immigrant kids," a point to which I will return.

A Good Country portrays the (ostensible) radicalisation of Rez, the teenage son of Iranian immigrants to the United States. I will pay particular attention to the author's focus on her protagonist's psychology and how his motivations and actions are intimately bound up with his relationships with his father and his peers. The external social pressures faced by Rez are exacerbated by his intra-family conflicts, and the sources of conflict within the Courdee family are related to Rez's social behaviour and decision making which his parents, his father in particular, disapprove of. Both factors are magnified by the racial profiling to which he is subjected in his community, especially after the Boston Marathon bombings. Specialised studies point to the fact that first generation immigrants, those who initially migrated to and settled in a host country, have different notions of home and belonging compared to their children who were either born in the host country or arrived at an early age and experienced their formative years there. First-generation immigrants often retain memories of their homeland and usually maintain several aspects of their cultural identity which reinforce their sense of belonging somewhere 'foreign,' while the second generation have only heard stories of their parents' homeland(s) and have no experience of living there. They thus have different, even conflicting notions of "home" and "belonging." Khadivi's novel recreates some of the tensions experienced by second-generation Muslim immigrants and how intergenerational conflicts within the home can have an impact well beyond the immediate family environment. In *A Good Country* these tensions are particularly evident in the differing ideas Rez and his father have of the American Dream and, ultimately, of what constitutes a "good country."

Rez is fourteen years old when the novel begins, an A-grade student and the only son of his quiet, non-religious, but culturally traditional parents. Born and raised in the US, he regards himself as American. The family lives in a wealthy neighbourhood in Southern California, Laguna Beach, and no expense is spared on Rez's education: he attends a private school where every kid has money, power, extravagant houses and apparently no care in the world. Rez's father is very strict, with a short temper and a swift hand for his son. Mr Courdee demands respect and obedience with no questions asked. In contrast, Rez's mother is largely silent, obedient, and seemingly oblivious to things beyond her small domestic world. She holds no power in the home and does nothing that might annoy, disobey, or upset her husband. Her only duty, it seems, is to serve and take care of her family.

At the start of the novel, Rez is a conventionally "good boy." He is obedient to his parents, studies hard and appears to conform entirely to his father's wishes. But peer pressure plagues his early teens. He is teased by his peers at school for his clean-cut image and responds by trying to emulate their behaviour. He begins smoking weed, loses his virginity, and starts having casual sex. Rez's American friends introduce him to surfing, which he loves, and he organises an illicit surfing trip with them to Mexico, lying to his parents about where he is going. Things go terribly wrong and while the boys eventually make it home safely, they blame Rez for the trouble they get into. Rez is severely punished physically for his insubordination by his father and his European-American friends abandon him.

Lonely after this, Rez becomes friends with another group of teenagers, children of local Muslim immigrants whose parents seem to be practicing Muslims, though not overly religious. He is welcomed into their homes and into their families. During this time Rez is sexually drawn to Fatima Hassani, and they begin spending most of their time together. However, after the Boston Marathon bombing, the youths in this new group become targets of religious hate and are bullied and discriminated against both at school and in the wider

community. After another (relatively small) terrorist attack in their neighbourhood, Fatima, Rez and their friend Arash start questioning their identities and their parents' cultural and religious learnings and start to look for answers in their own way. Returning home from an innocent surfing trip in Indonesia, Rez is roughly questioned at the airport and insulted by a customs officer and all he can do is remain silent. This racially targeted behaviour at airports is a common feature in the novels I discuss in this thesis (*The Reluctant Fundamentalist* and *Home Fire*, for example), and something very familiar to Muslims since 9/11. It has earned its own tongue-in-cheek name: "flying while Muslim" and, as I will discuss in my next chapter, brings questions about citizenship, home and belonging sharply into focus.

Arash and Fatima become increasingly religious and finally Arash disappears (to join an extremist group, we later learn). This prompts Rez to learn more about Islam and he turns to the internet for information. While researching Muslim and Iranian history, he becomes easy prey for sinister, faceless online figures who tell him that America is not a good country, and that the Caliphate now being established in Syria will be. At the end of the novel Rez and Fatima, two promising students, leave America to join ISIS instead of going to college. However, things do not go as planned and Rez loses Fatima on this journey and finally realises, too late, that the Caliphate is not what he was promised.

As I have discussed at length in previous chapters, it is widely acknowledged that when Muslims enter the West, as elective immigrants or refugees, they are often othered and discriminated against in a multitude of ways. Muslim immigrants in the West, suggests Amin Malak, regardless of what form of Islam they practice or which country they originate from, are all grouped together: "[T]he term Muslim represents the primary identity signifier, ahead of class, gender or nationalism" (*Muslim Narratives* 40). This generic labelling is manifested in anything from casual racial profiling and name-calling to general fearmongering about Muslims and their religion, to media representations of Islamic terrorism. It is expressed in the

most mundane challenges to how Muslims (especially women) dress, act and what they eat, to more formal abuse in the ways they are treated by ('real') Western citizens and authorities.

It is also widely acknowledged that the othering of Muslims in western countries increased substantially after 9/11 and subsequent attacks by radical Muslims in cities like London (2005), Boston (2013), and Paris (2015). According to research undertaken by Eric D. Gould and Esteban F. Klor, hate crimes reported against Muslims, in the United States, rose from 28 incidents in 2000 to 481 in 2001 ("The Long-Run Effect of 9/11" n.p.). A study by Sarah Lyons-Padilla et al. reports that Muslims in France found it much harder to be accepted as part of French society after the 2015 Paris attacks and felt restricted in their ability to express their religious identities in public places. Similarly, the authors found, British Muslim students said that if they showed any signs of religiosity, they were often perceived with suspicion because of concerns that they might become radicalised ("Belongoing Nowhere" 10). This is exactly the ground traversed in Khadivi's novel. Rez was always something of an outsider amongst his school peers because of his immigrant origins but was broadly accepted, initially, because of his parents' affluence and apparent assimilation. *His* assimilation was generally accepted after he began surfing, like the other teenagers at his school. However, this changed after the Boston Marathon bombing, and he became the object of distain and fear amongst many of those ("OC" [Orange County] Americans) he formerly thought of as friends. Seeking friendship and belonging, he turns to the children of other Muslim immigrants and is eventually radicalised. Khadivi invites readers to reconsider the many reasons that might drive the young, disenfranchised sons (and daughters) of Muslim immigrants to seek a new "good country" when they discover the American "good country" in which their parents believe is not so good after all because it rejects them.

Khadivi's novel can be classified, in broadest terms, as an "immigrant novel," a genre that has received growing popular and scholarly attention in the past half century. Immigrant

fiction has a long history in the US, a country often referred to as "a melting pot" of nationalities, ethnicities and cultures. What this term implies is cultural assimilation and acculturation but as is well-known, this is also resisted by some Americans (even those whose not-too distant ancestors were immigrants themselves). Forty years ago, William Q. Boelhower defined the key topic of immigrant fiction as the "principle of inclusion and exclusion" ("The Immigrant Novel" 4) and suggested the plot trajectory of most fiction of this kind consists of "an immigrant protagonist(s), representing an ethnic world view, [who] comes to America with great expectations, and through a series of trials is led to reconsider them in terms of his final status" (5). This trajectory is found in Khadivi's novel, too. More recently, writing specifically of Iranian diasporic fiction, Sanaz Fotouhi suggests the genre deals with immigrants' sense of nostalgia, placelessness, their identity crises, and hopes for a better future in the host country (*The Literature of the Iranian Diaspora* 2). The immigrant sense of placelessness and identity crises are very evident in *A Good Country,* of which Khadivi, in her interview with Jennifer Kaplan, says:

> [Although the books can stand alone] the idea of the trilogy is really important to me, to be able to place Rez in a historical context. I wanted to show how he's inherited the trauma of landlessness and not belonging. This robbing of a person's sense of belonging and identity is the first scar. Rez's father inherits the damage, the ways in which men are made vulnerable by nationalism and by that kind of citizenship and that kind of desire for belonging to a nation. … Rez [also] feels the need to find his origins and to be in a place where his persona is not questioned or discriminated against. ("The Making of a Teenage Radical" n.p.)

Carol N. Fadda, in a chapter in *The Oxford Handbook of Arab Novelistic Traditions*, argues that while concerns about belonging and home are still evident in contemporary (Arab)

immigrant fiction in the United States, which encompasses foci such as "cultural and transnational in-betweenness, collective and individual marginalization," they are amplified by contemporary geo-political concerns "including immigration laws, the pressures of assimilation, and the involvement of the United States in various wars and conflicts in the Middle East" (692). Indeed, in the last two decades, the concerns of the (western) immigrant novel have become far more politicised. How protagonists in these novels' "reconsider" their "great expectations" about America (or other western nations), in Boelhower's terms, or deal with their sense of placelessness and their identity crises, are intimately linked to contemporary global political concerns. This is certainly the case in *A Good Country*, and although Rez is not strictly an immigrant, his actions and behaviours are shaped by those of his immigrant parents, especially his father.

Khadivi illustrates how Rez's sense of not belonging and lack of support, from both his family and the host/American society, eventually results in his desire to leave the US for a "good [Muslim] country." The novel makes clear that the effects of othering are felt not only by first-generation Muslim immigrants, but by their American-born children, too. In the interview with Kaplan, Khadivi speaks about her experiences as the child of immigrants, and of her desire to portray the effects of this in her fiction:

> I grew up in this country as an Iranian American, and I get it. There was always a sense that there was a ceiling for who I could be. I didn't know how that worked, and I wanted to investigate it. That was what brought me close, the question of: *How do you get to be American?* And by American I mean, how do you get to be comfortable here? Not just financially comfortable. How do you get to be comfortable in your skin? With your hair and your face and your name? ("The Making of a Teenage Radical" n.p., my emphasis)

Khadivi's question, "How do you get to be American?" is pessimistically answered by Rez's girlfriend, Fatima, in *A Good Country*. When he declares he is an American, she replies, "You are kidding yourself if you really believe that. You can only be American if you turn into one. Which means a new name, a new nose, new skin, new tongue, new everything. Otherwise you are an immigrant, or the child of an immigrant, and this is not your home" (99). Whether children like Rez arrived in the host country in their early years or whether they were born there, they face a difficult double bind: they are caught between the desire to fit into the host country on the one hand, and on the other, their parents' demands of loyalty to the cultural and religious traditions of what was formerly home.

Young second-generation immigrants are often confused by discrimination and hostile treatment from a society which they regard as home, as well as the claims made on them by their parents and their (sometimes nostalgic) recollections of the (pre-immigrant) past. Cynthia White Tindongan argues that it is important to explore how multiple identities are managed by the children of Muslim immigrants in the US, and how they are perceived by their peers, because their identities as Muslims and as American students are sometimes in conflict ("Negotiating Muslim Youth Identity" 75). She draws on Loukia Sarroub's study of a young Yemeni woman attending a US public high school, and her difficulties in trying to make sense of her Yemeni-American identity and keep a balance in both worlds, to claim:

> It is often easy to overlook that American children of immigrants straddle two or more worlds and must negotiate various systems of beliefs that may not complement one another. That this process is further complicated by a combination of factors such as religion, ethnic identity, gender, language, social economic standing, and school socialization norms emphasizes how much we need to know to make decisions for improving schools and relations among schools, communities, and homes. (77)

Marja Peltola, in an essay on intergenerational relations in families with an immigrant background, notes that most sociological research on immigration experiences focuses on the individual's ability to integrate or assimilate and argues that there is a growing need for greater knowledge about familial and intergenerational relations and conflicts within immigrant families. She quotes from research undertaken by Anne Alitolppa-Niitamo who has similarly suggested that research on immigration has, for the greater part, focused on adult immigrants and consequently, the perspectives of young immigrants and questions about intergenerational relations inside immigrant families have been largely overlooked in the research that considers acculturation and integration (Peltola 36). She argues that the experiences of second-generation immigrants are different to those of the first generation, since besides going through the transition from one cultural environment to another, they also undergo developmental transition, adolescence, with its multiple challenges, at the same time. Their position is, therefore, one of "double-transition" (qtd. in Peltola 4).[52] Family relations have an impact on the second generation's social behavior and adolescents' social relations affect their intra-family relations and contribute to the conflicts that they are experiencing. Therefore, external and internal events, and their consequent outcomes, are interwoven and cannot be studied in isolation. This is portrayed in Khadivi's novel. Rez's choice of friends and his desire to experience an American lifestyle are often in conflict with his parents' principles and expectations of their son. These conflicts affect his search for identity, belonging and social behaviour. While it is not my intention to reduce Khadivi's novel to a sociological case study, I believe that it offers readers insight into the nature and consequences of the "double-transition" experienced by many second-generation Muslim youths in the West.

[52] Similarly, Thanh V. Tran suggests that adolescents of immigrant parents can experience a "double jeopardy" through discrimination in schools/the community and lack of parental support at home. Her findings of the causal association among perceived discrimination, lack of parental support, and depression confirms the long-lasting and harmful impact of discrimination on psychological wellbeing in the absence or lack of parental support ("Double Jeopardy Effect" 676).

It is interesting to note that Khadivi has chosen to write from the perspective of a teenage boy rather than a female character. This is also the case in the first two novels in the trilogy, which are likewise written from a male perspective. In her discussion with Kaplan, she explains this choice on beginning the trilogy:

> I kept trying to write from a female perspective but in the Middle East at that time [1920s Iran which is the setting for the first novel in the trilogy] if you were a woman you couldn't just traipse down to the square and have a conversation. It wasn't allowed. I couldn't get them [women] to the places I needed them to go, so I started to write from a man's perspective, and I could go wherever I wanted. ("The Making of a Teenage Radical" n.p.)

In the same interview she also talks about her choice of writing from a teenager's perspective stating that adolescence is a time in which "everything is happening" and that young people are continually experimenting with and exploring their fluid identities and "trying to figure out where [they] belong" (n.p.). Khadivi employs a third person limited point of view in *A Good Country* and the extent of this limitation—to Rez' thoughts, feelings and memories—is a notable feature of the novel. While this offers valuable insight into Rez, at the same time it limits access to other characters' thoughts and emotions and the reader is left to guess the underlying reasons for their behaviour and must attempt to judge them based on what Rez reveals about them (although readers of the earlier novels in the trilogy have considerably more insight into Mr Courdee). This said, we come to realise that Rez is an unreliable focaliser, a teenager who sees the world through eyes that do not always understand events and people around him. The reader is thus given no insight into other significant characters like Mr and Mrs Courdee (if the novel is read as a stand-alone), Arash, Fatima or any of his European-American friends, which he calls "the apostles." All we learn is what Rez *thinks* they may be

thinking or feeling, and the fallibility of his comprehension and the insularity of his thinking becomes more and more evident as the novel progresses.

It could be that Khadivi chose to employ this mode of narration precisely to emphasise Rez's teenage self-absorption and his lack of understanding, and empathy, for his parents, especially his father, and others with whom he engages. Access to Rez's inner thoughts allows readers to learn that he is very afraid of his father (at least for the first part of the novel) and always imagines his presence and his supposed anger. However we are given little explanation for Mr Courdee's behaviour in *A Good Country*, and for a reader who has not read the previous novel in the trilogy, the characterisation of Mr Courdee seems rather unconvincing: at the start he is a stereotypically harsh immigrant parent, expecting obedience and high achievement from his son, but part-way through the novel he seems to soften, for reasons that are not fully explained. It is similarly hard to know what drives or motivates Fatima, and here Khadivi's decision to focalise events only through the eyes of her male teenage protagonist can be uncomfortable. Through a few discussions that Fatima has with Rez and her peers she is shown to be an intelligent young woman who is aware of her position as a female Muslim immigrant living in the US, but she also takes drugs and engages in (premarital) sex, acts that cut against her apparent Muslim identity. Despite her ostensible independence and strong will, revealed in some of her dialogue, for much of the novel she remains little more than a sexual object for Rez. Rez's thoughts, the only interiority to which readers have access, characterise her in overtly sexual terms. It is hard to intuit her independent desires, and even if we realise there is more to Fatima than what Rez knows or (mis)understands, she remains elusive. Her reasons for joining Rez in his abandonment of the US to become part of an extremist Muslim fighting cell in Syria are not fully explained, especially in light of her scepticism about the mode of Islam evoked by extremists, but she appears to fear she will be forced into an arranged marriage by her parents, something that seems unlikely given what we do come to know about her and

her family. The focus remains on Rez's motivations with respect to Fatima, rather than on her own desires. She is objectified by him not only in sexual terms but also, increasingly, as an ideal Muslim wife in the (imagined) good country he hopes to find, and to which he hopes to belong.

Khadivi's choice to use Rez as the sole point of focalisation reveals his limited capacity for empathy and understanding and his somewhat shallow approach to life. For much of the novel he appears to have little grasp of reality, with no clear sense of identity, and only looks for pleasure by indulging in casual sex, drugs and surfing. His radicalisation, then, towards the end of the novel, may appear sudden and unexpected. Young and naïve Rez is looking for somewhere to belong in an increasingly Islamophobic society where he is constantly subjected to social discrimination. But Rez is by no means portrayed as a staunch Muslim or true believer. When Arash leaves unexpectedly and Fatima begins to wear a veil, attend the mosque and refuses to sleep with him anymore, Rez decides to learn more about Islam. This appears to be motivated less by an interest in the religion than by fear of losing his friends – and his former lover. There is no suggestion that he hates America or wants to hurt Americans. He is less an extremist than a confused young man.

According to a 2017 article in *The Washington Post*, about 250 Americans have tried to join Syrian jihadists (Nayeri n.p.). This is a small number relative to the number of Muslims living in the US (at that time estimated to be 3.45 million) and yet this is the fate Khadivi has chosen for her largely unreligious protagonist. Perhaps the author sought to challenge the western stereotype that imagines Muslim youths as anti-Christian haters (like Ahmad Ashmawy Mulloy in John Updike's *Terrorist*) or as inherently, senselessly violent and evil (as in Martin Amis's "The Last days of Muhammad Atta"). Or perhaps she realised that a "radicalisation narrative" was far more likely to sell multiple copies than a story focused only

on an immigrant teenager's angst?[53] Dina Nayeri writes of radicalisation that "[I]t's tempting to call it ungratefulness, cunning indoctrination or stupidity. And it *is* all those things, though none suffice as an explanation. What Khadivi offers instead is a frighteningly believable study of one boy's psychological transformation" ("A Nuanced Novel" n.p.). She continues:

> First a rift with his white friends, then a community with ties to his ancestral home, then a promise of a better country, a place where he can finally belong. Meanwhile, all Rez wants is to love. To be good. To be himself, free from suspicion or blame. To help build a new country. And he wants to understand his own history, and the history of Islam's troubles with the West. (n.p.)

Whether or not the novel offers a "frighteningly believable" portrayal of Rez's radicalisation is a question open to debate. This is a point raised by Robin Yassin-Kassab who argues that "[s]ometimes Rez's transitions in belief seem too abrupt and not entirely credible. It is somewhat implausible that he wouldn't be deterred by evidence of ISIL atrocities, which he doesn't so much justify as immediately forget. Despite his difficult social status, he is not a character filled with rage, and therefore seems an unlikely candidate for terrorism" (An American Muslim Teen" n.p.). Rather than regarding this as a flaw in the novel, however, Yassin-Kassab suggests, "this may well be Khadivi's point. … [S]he shows that some western recruits for ISIL are driven not by evil but naivety, peer pressure and the second-generation immigrant's sensation of being out of place" (n.p.). To this list of drivers, we might add intergenerational tensions and intra-familial conflict in migrant families. The representation of these, and their consequences, *are*, I argue, not only believable but successful.

The novel traces Rez's development through the crucial years from early adolescence to the end of secondary school, offering an astute portrait of the internal and external pressures which influence his relationship with his parents. As noted, Mrs Courdee is a silent figure and,

[53] See Jago Morrison's, "Jihadi Fiction: Radicalisation Narratives in the Contemporary Novel."

at least from Rez's perspective, does not have a very significant role in the family. Rez describes his father as "powerful" and his mother as "silent, dutiful" (*A Good Country* 16). Mrs Courdee remains at one remove from the action for most of the novel. We are first introduced to her in the scene in which Rez comes home from school to find his father waiting for him on the front steps with his midterm grades; Mr Courdee is not satisfied with his son's B grade in history. During the angry altercation that follows, we learn that "his mother came to the kitchen window" (8) but she does not come outside to calm either her husband or son. Mrs Courdee appears to be similarly distant following the beating her husband gives Rez after the disastrous Mexican surfing trip. Rez is badly hurt and spends five days in bed recovering: "His mother came and went. If he was watching reruns of *Seinfeld* or *The Simpsons,* she would sit on the chair beside his bed and neither of them would laugh or say anything beyond *Are you hungry?* And *No thanks* and *Yes* and *Maybe later"* (48). Given the lack of meaningful communication between them, it appears that Rez is unwilling or unable to discuss the events with his mother. Limited to Rez's perspective, we have no idea about what Mrs Courdee thinks of the brutal punishment of their son and no conversation between her and her husband about this is relayed to readers.

One of the few indications we get of the relationship between Mr and Mrs Courdee is in the following comment (from Rez's perspective), which implies that they do not share much affection and that he has considerable control over her, determining what she is "allowed" to do: "Rez's father did not like to entertain and Rez's mother was not allowed to have her own friends. When the family sat together at the table, they did not talk beyond the necessities of the day" (100). When Rez and Fatima are at the train station, saying goodbye to their families and departing to go to what their parents think of as college, we are told Rez's mother "stood alone with her face pressed in and down and no one put an arm on her shoulder" (218). The

reader is invited to infer, from comments such as these, that Mr and Mrs Courdee do not have a strong emotional tie or a mutually supportive relationship.

Khadivi appears to portray Mrs Courdee in stereotypical terms as a submissive "Muslim woman" reduced to silence and self-effacement by her controlling husband.[54] However, her absence and silence in the novel may be the result of the fact that her self-absorbed teenage son, from whose perspective the novel is focalised, fails to think of her as a real person with a life and a personality. This changes briefly after Rez becomes friends with Arash and Fatima. He sees the close bond that Arash and his mother share and, importantly, begins to think about women differently as he falls in love with Fatima. Rez tries to connect with his mother:

> He stopped sleeping in and woke up early to meet his mother in the kitchen and talk to her as she made breakfast. He forced himself over the fear and told her what club he went to the previous night and the fake ID he used and the half-naked girls dancing on platforms. She stayed quiet but stayed open and he went on and talked about Arash and how none of them had girlfriends yet and he didn't have one but wanted to and after a few weeks she began to tell her own stories of afternoons smoking apple tobacco in the cafés in the north of Tehran and long evenings driving in cars with her sisters and boys from their high school class. Rez could barely believe she'd ever been a teenager. Within the month they were talking, back and forth, story to story, every morning as she

[54] See Glory Joy Gatwiri and Karanja Anne Mumbi's discussion of the ways in which gender discourses associate women's silence with disempowerment and the failure to speak out and/or act against gendered oppressive situations, employing silence as a protective measure against "the hostile patriarchal gaze" ("Silence as Power" 13). They suggest that silence may also be used as a source of power to protest, rebel, and challenge oppression ("Silence as Power" 14), although Mrs Courdee is insufficiently characterised in the novel for this to be judged as the reason for her silence in the familial home. See also Salam Aboulhassan and Krista M. Brumley in "Carrying the Burden of a Culture." They argue that Arab women in the United States bargain with patriarchy by "being unnoticeable," relying on faith, or accommodating their in-laws to maintain peace in the family or to avoid spousal abuse (641).

> set out the breakfast and his father joined them and they ate together in one long silence (75).

Rez's attempt to connect with his mother seems to be mirroring how Arash behaves towards his mother, rather than springing from his own desire to connect with her. Rez idolises Arash and tries to repeat what he does, so when he sees Arash's easy and cheerful relationship with his mother he tries to replicate it. The above passage is the only time in the novel that Mrs Courdee is personalised as a curious woman with an exciting past. However, after the Boston marathon bombing, Rez stops trying to connect with his mother. He, the focalising character, has other concerns and her presence fades from the novel.

Rez's radicalisation occurs over a relatively short period of time towards the end of the book. Prior to this, a great deal of attention is given to his relationships with his (largely male) peers, and with his father. This may, of course, be due to the patrilineal focus of the trilogy of which this is the final novel, as suggested by Karthik Shankar: "Khadivi's novel … [is] interested in navigating *masculine identity* and mining the totalitarian nature of *brotherhood*" ("Voices in the Head" n.p.; my emphasis). Khadivi herself has stressed the masculine focus of her trilogy. "I wanted to trace over three *generations of men* how they inherit a sense of place, a sense of belonging" she said in a conversation with Persis Karim and Sholeh Wolpé in *World Literature Today* ("We Carry Home within Us" n.p.; my emphasis). Talking with Kaplan she asserted that her interest was:

> In the ways in which men are made vulnerable by nationalism and by that kind of citizenship and that kind of desire for belonging to a nation. For me to see the ways in which—over generations, especially through *generations of men*—a sort of tragedy plays out was very important. ("The making of a Teenage Radical" n.p.; my emphasis)

Given this emphasis on "generations of men" and "masculine identity" it is perhaps not surprising that so little attention is awarded to Mrs Courdee in the novel, except peripherally as wife and mother, and so much attention is given to the relationship between Rez and his father. This, nonetheless, risks stereotyping Muslim familial structures as oppressively patriarchal and women as silent and disregarded.

Rez goes through a developmental transition as he moves through his teenage years, and a cultural transition as he moves between the family home and the wider society around him. He wants to secure his self-identity and at the same time establish his social identity among his peers and this means he begins to challenge his father and the cultural values Mr Courdee upholds. The novel thus appears to confirm the idea, noted by sociologists like Sarah Rasmi, Timothy Daly and Susan Chuang that intergenerational conflict represents one of the major challenges faced by Arab immigrant families in the West (they focus on Canada). Their extensive studies reveal that in adolescence, second-generation immigrant youth undergo numerous changes to their senses of identity, cognitive capabilities, and peer relationships, and it is during their emerging adulthood, that youths learn to self-regulate and develop their own belief and value systems. In western families, these changes are typically accompanied by adolescents' greater expectations for autonomy, which can result in disruptions in the family system, which are usually resolved by parents increasing youth involvement in decision-making processes, reasoning with them, or by granting them increased autonomy. Both generations are engaged in frequent and continuous negotiations concerning the space, borders and responsibilities of the young. Rashmi et al's study reveal that in Arab culture, however, the family is the most important unit of society and families often consist of powerful parents and subservient children; fathers are the leaders and disciplinarians of their families and mothers are the primary caregivers. Arab parents expect their children to be obedient, deferential, and interdependent ("Intergenerational Conflict Management in Immigrant Arab Canadian

Families" 1125-1126). Likewise, Min Zhou argues that the typical strains between adolescents and parents in the United States are heightened in immigrant families, because of cultural differences between parents' home-country values, norms, and behavioural patterns and the mainstream American culture to which their US-born and raised children are exposed and drawn ("Stradling Different Worlds"). Inga Jasinskaja-Lahti and Karmela Liebkind assert, similarly, that it is important for second-generation immigrants to have some sort of parental support to ease both developmental transitions and the social integration process. The more adolescents experience support and understanding provided by at least one parent, the less they experience acculturation stress, and the higher their self-esteem and degree of life-satisfaction ("Perceived Discrimination" 174). However, since second-generation immigrants grow up in a different cultural environment than that of their parents, conflicts within the family inevitably often arise.

Migration affects everyone in the family, but experiences vary from one generation to the other. Mr Courdee sees America as a land of opportunities compared to his own country of origin, Iran. He appears to believe in the American Dream of equal opportunity, freedom and upward social mobility: "*America is a good country"* (40), he tells his son, and continues: *"A good country. We should be grateful. A fair place where even an immigrant like me, no papers, no schooling, can succeed*" (40). He does not talk about his past or offer romanticised visions of his earlier life in Iran which leads the reader to assume that he does not have happy memories, even if they have not read the second novel in the trilogy. He appears to want to forget the past, saying, "*I am an American. Whatever happened before was before. A long time ago. Those things don't matter now*" (86). Yet he holds onto many of the values and beliefs from his Iranian upbringing. Rez and his family can be characterised as what Milad Milani refers to as "cultural Muslims." The term denotes members of the Muslim community who are non-practicing but retain an attachment to elements of Islamic culture ("Cultural Muslims"

n.p.). The Courdee family are not practicing Muslims in a religious sense, however they adhere to traditional Muslim Iranian customs and practices:

> Rez thought of the practicing-Muslim families he knew, Omid's, Yuri's, Arash's, Fatima's, and he thought about his own, his mother's prayers when they left the house, the no-pork rule, the undercurrent of devotion from something long-ago believed in practice. Every house was different. Some had prayer rooms, some did not. Some of the women covered, most did not. Some fasted for Ramadan, some did not. (140)

Milani believes cultural Muslims are ordinary secular Muslims who might, however, engage in a private and personal manner with their religion (n.p.). He goes on to state that not all Muslims are religious, and an increasing number of non-practising Muslims living in the West are identified (or openly self-identify) as "cultural Muslims." Although at the start of the novel Rez sees himself as American first and only as (culturally) Muslim after this, things begin to change for him and his immigrant friends after the Boston Marathon bombing. His sense of self-identity is conflicted and compromised due to the perceptions of others about his ethnic identity. As a result of his skin colour, his race and his Arabic name, he is perceived by those in wider American society as a ("premodern" or potentially violent and hateful) Muslim, first and foremost, and so a threat to national security.

After the bombings and a terrorist attack on a nearby shopping mall, Rez and his Muslim immigrant friends notice a change in the way they are treated by their peers, and others in the wider community. They talk about how things are no longer the same and one of the boys' comments, "Something about this is different. I mean three miles from here there was a massacre. Not 9/11 bad, but bad. People died because Muslims freaked out. In our hood. All that America and equality and liberty shit goes out the window" (155). They experience the discrimination noted by Yuting Wang, in which religious markers take precedence over

national identity: “it seems that the word ‘American’ does not rhyme with the word ‘Islam’ and being a Muslim makes one an unauthentic American” (*Between Islam and the American Dream* 115). This is forced home to Rez when he re-enters the US after a short holiday in Bali. An airport security officer stresses the difference between (“real”) Americans and immigrant ones:

> Your people, who think they are worth a great deal, know that even after making all that money, they are worthless. Their children are worthless, and if this violence continues, their children’s children will be worthless too. The American dream will never play all the way out for you. (153)

Rez’s transition to adulthood sees him experiencing two different sets of demands and expectations. He wants to belong to his European-American peer group and imitate their lifestyle, but their ways contrast with his father’s principles, and Rez knows that if he breaks the rules there will be dire consequences at home. At the start of the novel, the dynamic between Rez and his father is carefully portrayed as one in which Rez fears him. But as the novel progresses, the reader sees a change in their relationship. In the first key scene of interaction, Rez’s father is furious because Rez has received a B grade in one of his classes. In this scene, Mr Courdee displays the type of behaviour that sociologists explain is very common in immigrant parents who often deeply desire their children to achieve educational success as a means of progressing up the social and economic ladder. This is one of the main reasons for the clashes and confrontations between Rez and his father. Serious and hardworking, Mr Courdee sees America as a land of opportunities, but to achieve the American Dream, he believes Rez must do well in school.

When Mr Courdee starts to verbally abuse Rez for his B grade, Rez initially remains silent and thinks: “The ceremony would begin” and then, “[i]t started the same way it always started” (*A Good Country* 7). This alerts us to the fact that what is about to happen has happened many times before, so many times that Rez responds to his father as if acting out a role in a

familiar play. Mr Courdee verbally humiliates his son, using words such as "*ungrateful, punishment, worthless, pathetic, loser"* (7). Rez knows what to do to avoid an escalation of his father's anger: "Rez knew there was only one right answer" (7); "Rez said nothing, in the script he was to remain silent, and silence was the safest bet, the fastest route to the end. He nodded his head in agreement" (7). Despite this, a few moments later his teenage self comes to the fore and he yells at his father: "What did I do? Tell me what I did wrong! I didn't do anything wrong. I got a fucking B. That's all!" (7). Mr Courdee responds by slapping him. It appears that to Mr Courdee success in America is measured in terms of material possessions and this is evident when he demands of Rez, "You have enough food to eat? Good cloths to wear? A nice school to go to?" (7). He believes that since he has provided well for his family his son must repay him by doing well in school: "Good. Then I have done my job. And yet you have not done yours" (7). Rez sees his relationship with his father as determined by the latter's greater power. In his opinion, Mr Courdee is: "[a] father, a tyrant without cause ... misguided and dim, his only power humiliation." And in contrast, he thinks of himself as "the boy in a bright light, innocent and right" (7-8). To Rez, Mr Courdee is dominant and he, subordinate, must surrender, otherwise he will be punished. However, this opening scene reveals that Rez is beginning to challenge such ideas, and this is evident in the way he talks back to his father. As the novel progresses his challenges to his father increase and, in parallel, he tries harder and harder to be part of the crowd of his European-American friends.

Rez's inner thoughts reveal the distress and conflicts he faces because of not being accepted as (fully) American by his peers *and* failing his father's expectations of how a good son should behave. Rez's desire to assimilate to American teenage life, portrayed by Khadivi (perhaps hyperbolically) as characterised by prolific sex and drug use, is clearly in contrast to his father's principles of studying hard in order to achieve the American Dream. His decision to join his (European-American) friends in smoking weed, after resisting this for a long time,

is revealed as both an act of rebellion against his father and an attempt to belong. Rez believes this enables him to be "another person in another life," a life in which he belongs to the same world as other American teenagers:

> The joint came by lumpy and crooked and he held it between his fingers and then between his lips and all he felt was fuck. I don't give a fuck. Fuck him….
>
> The apostles [his friends] looked at him and he nodded without a cough and they smiled one big friend smile.
>
> Yeah, dude. Yeah.
>
> He sat up straight, stretched his back, realigned into another person in another life, and grinned.
>
> Yeah. Totally. (8-9)

The feeling of freedom and "realignment" suggested here does not last long. Rez still needs to go home – and face his father. Mr Courdee appears to be oblivious to his son's use of drugs, but due to Rez' changing behaviour their conflict escalates.

As previously mentioned, Rez deceives his father and pretends that he and his European American friends are going on a school field trip when in fact they head off to Mexico to surf. But the trip does not go as planned. Several days into the idyllic journey, the young men are robbed of all their money and belongings and are forced to undertake a difficult journey home. After crossing the border back into America, the other boys demand that Rez call his father and ask him to come and pick them up. While waiting for Mr Courdee, Rez can only imagine what lies ahead, although he knows it will involve punishment: "Never had he committed such disobedience. There was the unknown of his father's reaction, the unknown of his punishment" (43). When Mr Courdee finally arrives to collect his son, they drive in silence and Rez's fear increases: "He can't kill me. My mother. The police. He cannot. He won't. It will be bad, the worst, but he can't go all the way. He won't go all the way" (45). Rez starts thinking about the

consequences should he stand up to his father: “And I can’t kill him. No. My mother. The police. Prison. If I had to…?” (45). Mr Courdee drives Rez to an unknown place in the desert to punish him.

While Rez is clearly still afraid of his father, something between them has changed. Rez looks at Mr Courdee as if he is seeing him for the first time:

> He looked at his father, the profile of him in close-up now, an old man, but not completely old, not old in flesh or form, only in relation to Rez. Rez saw his shoulders broad and lean, his moustache and buzzed hair mostly black, his long straight torso thin from the collarbone to the belt. He was a well-made man, and even though his head hung down as if the rocks and scrub held some information, Rez saw now that he was not old, no, but tired, too tired, and a part of Rez stepped down from the summit and gave way. (46)

In this scene, prior to the punishment, Mr Courdee and Rez are out of the car and facing each other; Rez appears to regard his father as a real, autonomous and even vulnerable person. The emphasis on the word “tired” may suggest, as it does to me, that Mr Courdee is tired of Rez’s behaviour and what he considers as his son’s wrong decisions. Or it could mean that he is worn out and worn down by the struggles he has endured through life. When the narrator announces that “Rez stepped down from the summit and gave way” this could indicate that Rez has accepted his wrong actions and decisions and thinks that he deserves the punishment that he is going to receive. Alternatively, it could mean that Rez has come to realise that his father is not (simply) a powerful tyrant but a tired, old(er) man with a life, and a past of his own. In some respects, then, this parallels the scene in which Rez (briefly) recognises that his mother is an individual with a life and past of her own. But this moment of potential recognition and possible reconciliation quickly passes. Mr Courdee demands that Rez repeats the words, “I am an idiot. A filthy idiot who keeps the company of fools” (47). And when Rez refuses to do so, “it came

in a rush. From stillness to motion in less than a second" (47). Before Rez can move he "felt the rocks of the desert digging into his back, into his side, and then into his face as his father's hand pressed down the back of his head as if to drown him in the dirt" (47). Although readers will likely find the violence of this scene disturbing, what is even more difficult to grasp is that this is not the only time that Rez has experienced such abusive behaviour from his father. This is powerfully brought home by the words of the narrator:

> [He felt] some older pain, a pain he'd carried since he was four or five, the first pain he could remember and the words that followed then, that first time, followed now, resurrected, the same words in their same ageless plea. Baba, why are you hurting me? Baba! Why are you hurting me? (47)

Nonetheless, as a result of the desert beating, the relationship between father and son alters. In the days and weeks that follow, Mr Courdee appears to be more understanding of Rez and seems to realise that he needs to compromise to resolve conflicts. The first step Mr Courdee takes is when, several days after his brutal actions in the desert, he goes to Rez's room and apologises: "I am not a perfect man. I should not have hit you. That was not right. Not in a good family. I apologize. His voice was soft with an unfamiliar tenderness" (51). He continues: "In this life, I can help you. That is what I am supposed to do. Help my son become a man. I will promise to respect you. To keep my temper calm. And in return you promise honesty. That is all I ask" (52). Mr Courdee's apology suggests that he does want to change and try to understand Rez. But notably, the apology seems to be founded on concerns about perceptions of his "good family" and a sense of familial obligation, what he is "supposed to do" and what is expected from his son in return. In apparent recognition of Rez's love for surfing and to show that he is trying to understand his son's needs, Mr Courdee gives Rez tickets to Bali, to go surfing, as a graduation present. He says, "This is what the American parents do. Send their children out for a test run" (143).

After graduating from high-school Rez is accepted into Berkeley University to study Chemistry. When the Courdee family attend a Berkeley open day for prospective students, Rez deliberately asks provocative questions of administrators: "[Are there] services for Muslim students on campus. Is there a mosque? Are there halal foods offered? What sort of support is there in case of discrimination, harassment, you know, because of recent events?" (189). Rez knows that doing so is counter to what is expected of him, which is "[not to] embarrass his family and … strike out in any way that would draw attention" (189). Here he does the exact opposite and deliberately draws attention to himself as a Muslim, despite imagining his father's angry response. From previous experiences he believes that there will be "Hell to pay" (189) from his father. But afterwards, instead of another confrontation, Mr Courdee (uncomfortably) buys beer and takes Rez outside to have a chat. During this conversation Mr Courdee tells Rez why he has not brought him up as a practising Muslim:

> You know that to be a Muslim in this country right now [in the aftermath of Boston Marathon bombing and, of course, 9/11] is not something to joke about?
>
> I wasn't joking. A lot of my friends are Muslims.
>
> And they will have a hard time. They are having a hard time.
>
> And it's not fair.
>
> No it's not. When I came to this country, I saw religion separate people. So many different beliefs, all against each other, and I thought, why put my kid through this? This is going to make their life harder, not easier. We have Islam in our background, yes, in the way we eat or think sometimes, but it is not who we are. We are people first, then a family, and then Americans. That has served us very well. (191)

In order to assimilate, Mr Courdee has chosen to deny his own ethnic and religious identity. Through personal experiences, he knows that discrimination against Muslims exists in his

adopted country and, for him, denying his religious identity is a way of protecting his family. Mr Courdee's talk supports Peter Morey's statement that:

> Muslims and Islam have emerged as the focal point of anxieties about citizenship, loyalty, and liberal values. They have been the object of heightened levels of criticism, intolerance, and abuse – their cultures homogenized and vilified and their religion depicted as backward and warlike. (*Islamaphobia and the Novel* 2)

He knows that discrimination exists and to avoid this, Rez should not draw attention to himself by actively talking about his ethnicity or heritage. Mr Courdee seems to consider it fair to give up his religious identity in America in exchange for material possessions and opportunities for his son to be educated and achieve success.

However, despite encouraging Rez not to embrace his Muslim identity, Mr Courdee also objects to his attempts to (fully) assimilate into American teenage life. At the start of the novel, Rez wants to fit in with his school friends. He tries hard to belong to "the apostles," a group of European-American boys who attend his school, including Peter Matthews, James Johnson and John Kelly. Rez attends parties with them but when they start smoking weed, he initially refuses to join in. Although he wants "to be inside the circle, to stay and smoke and laugh and feel whatever it was that was so good" (4), he is fearful of both his father's reaction and his peers' ridicule: "What if I lose it? What if I black out? What if I start crying? What if I get addicted? How much trouble I will be in if Dad finds out? All the trouble. I'll be in all the trouble" (4). His friends tease him, linking his refusal to his cultural and ethical difference: "We all know you can't hang, Rez. Never have. Never will. Those Persians keep a tight leash on their kids…" (3). Rez's friends refer to him as "Mr. Strictest Parents in America" (23). Throughout the novel Rez either imagines his father punishing him or has flashbacks of previous punishments, "In the dark yard he felt his father about him, a thick outline traced atop

his own body" (4), but even this fear is not as great as his desire to fit in and eventually he starts smoking, drinking and having casual sex in an attempt to belong. He knows that he needs to do this "if he wanted things to stay as they were [with his friends]. If he wanted things to get better" (5).

He is still not quite accepted, however. Looking at his carefree peers he knew that: "It wasn't enough to smoke or have sex, but to be like that, to be easy and always happy, he had to surf too and so one afternoon he found Matthews and tried out the new tongue" (19). He presumes that by surfing he can be one of the boys that he admires, "boys who let their hair grow as long as was allowed, who wore caps as soon as they were outside, the juniors and seniors with orange-brown skin from days and days of salt and sun" (19). Surfing becomes his new passion, loving "this feeling [when surfing] more than all other feelings" (103). The imagery used to describe Rez's surfing in the novel is suggestive of freedom and even a kind of loss and renewal of identity, of a baptism of sorts: the water "welcomed them and made them new again" (34). In the water, perhaps, his difference from the others is less evident – all he faces are just the challenges of the waves, unlike the real-life struggles to belong which he faces when back on dry land.

Mr Courdee does not approve of Rez's European-American friends, and he voices his concerns when a group of them greet him one morning:

> Peace signs and nods and their hair still wet from surfing before school:
>
> Those boys.
>
> His father shook his head.
>
> They will wake up twenty years from now, part-time jobs, divorced, living in shitty apartments, or worse. But now, hey, now life is good. What a waste. (19)

Mr Courdee repeatedly voices such concerns to Rez: "Those boys, the ones you think are your friends, will always think of you as an outsider, the foreign kid. If you go with them, try to be

as they are, I will not be able to help you in that life" (51). However, he seems to approve of the children of other Muslim immigrants, the new friends Rez makes after the apostles drop him from their circle. They also drink, smoke and have casual sex, just like Rez's European American friends and "hanging out with them was a lot like last summer with the apostles" (61). But these teenagers are, in the words of Anita Felicelli, "more like [Rez] – smart, accomplished code switchers" ("A Good Country" n.p.). While *acting* like American kids they also maintain their Muslim (cultural) identities, especially at home. Rez's father particularly approves of the charming, well-behaved Arash who introduces himself to Mr Courdee as "Syrian. Born here. Parents, doctor, housewife. … Two brothers. Both older. One a surgeon. One the president of a tech company, lives in Newport" (*A Good Country* 63). Mr Courdee is clearly impressed with Arash and credits him with initiating "a change" in his son: "Nice to see him making smart decisions about the company he keeps. It hasn't always been that way…" (63). What seems to most impress Mr Courdee is that Rez's new friends appear to be well-assimilated, second-generation Muslim-Americans. They are not (fully) American like the apostles, but neither are they targeted and discriminated-against Muslim "others." They appear to have achieved just the difficult balance Mr Courdee hopes for his son.

The Boston Marathon bombing ruins everything for Rez and Arash. Kelly's brother is accepted into MIT after Arash takes his entry exam for him and so he is present, as a spectator, at the Boston Marathon when the homemade pressure-cooker bombs detonate. One of those seriously injured is Kelly's brother. Kelly takes out his anger and hatred on Arash saying, "[my] brother wouldn't even be in fucking Boston if Arash hadn't taken the test that got him into MIT and all cheaters should go to hell" (78). Arash is outed by Kelly and expelled for "cheating, use of false identification" (92) and "escorted" from the school premises. It is at this time that Rez meets Fatima Hassani.

Strong-willed, outspoken Fatima is also from a Muslim immigrant family, but she doesn't try to be American, believing this is impossible for the children of immigrants who will never be fully accepted because of their physical and cultural differences (99). She is not afraid to speak up for her culture. During a heated argument in English class (post-Boston bombing), where they are reading a passage from Gustave Flaubert's *Madame Bovary*, she gets into a disagreement with an American girl who says, "I forgot, Fatima. Your culture believes women are most honourable when they are invisible. That makes a lot of sense, doesn't it?" (117). Fatima replies: "Wait. Wait. Let me just point out that in your culture, Meegan, a woman can't say anything until she shows her tits and legs. Unless she is something to stare at, a woman has no voice here. That's real honourable… . Fuck this" (117). Unlike Rez who has never regarded himself as a Muslim and never defended his parent's country or religion, she is proud of her background and does not tolerate anyone questioning her religion. As Khadivi explains in an interview with Simon Scott,

> Rez is at the point where he's realized that the American idea of himself is not going to pan out. And he looks to Fatima, and he sees her, and she has never had an American idea of herself. She's had an idea of herself as belonging to her family, and to sort of a Middle Eastern subculture in Southern California, and staying within the clan. And he looks to her and sees the ways in which this brings her strength – she doesn't try to have American friends or be an American teenage girl, and this makes her endlessly fascinating to him. ("Leaving High School Behind" n.p.)

Rez is drawn to Fatima and they begin a sexual relationship, however, unlike his other casual sexual conquests, Rez falls deeply in love with her and sees her as his ideal woman, someone to marry and start a life with. Moreover, she will, it seems to be accepted by his parents. She appears to be Muslim enough and American enough in just the right combination.

Deeply affected by the social discrimination they face after the Boston bombing, Rez, Arash and Fatima struggle to make sense of the bombing and its aftermath. Fatima starts to wear hijab as a way of showing solidarity with her mother. She tells Rez: "I started to cover the day after the attacks. The day after we graduated. My mom wears it and I wanted to do something to show I was with her, with my aunts and cousins and other Muslim women to show that not all Muslims are terrorists" (162-163). Not long after, she takes to studying Islam and first shares this with Rez when they are having a picnic together: "She sat across from him and snacked on grapes and read passages from the Koran out loud to practice her Arabic, *to try out the thoughts*" (167). His initial response is to resist the "order and severity" of the verses, although he is interested in her translations of them: "He wondered about the passages, their odd directives and complete certainty, and considered the feelings they left him with—at once gentle and determined" (167). Arash, meanwhile, disappears after his expulsion from school but secretly keeps in contact with Fatima.

Fatima takes Rez to an internet café where they contact Arash via Skype. His (cliched) words leave the reader, attuned to stories about Muslim radicalisation abroad, in no doubt about where he is and what he is doing. Addressing Rez as "Brother," Arash says, "I am in the good land. The land of right and wrong. A place I cannot even describe. […] A country. A community. A homeland where there is no punishment for believing in Allah. Only rewards" (171). Rez is immediately attracted by the idea of a place where he can belong, place where he can be with his "brother" Arash and marry the increasingly religious Fatima (who has begun to deny him sex as they are unmarried). His radicalisation is thus portrayed in the novel as the result of two related factors, the discrimination he faces as a Muslim in American society and his desire for a country in which he feels he belongs, exacerbated by a home life in which his father discourages him from being fully American or fully Muslim. Rez is 'in' America but not 'an' American or 'of' America. Everywhere he turns, in mainstream society, he is reminded of

his difference from 'real' Americans. At the beach he is mocked by some teenage boys who call him "*monkey* and then *hairy* and then *Arab,* and then *I didn't know Muslims could swim. All that desert and shit*" (174). The words of the airport security officer reinforce this. He tells Rez "your people" are unwanted and "worthless":

> The people you come from, your mother, your father, their families, the people you know at your fancy school, the rich Indian and Lebanese and Syrians just like you, are not the pride of this country.
>
> …
>
> We let you in because we couldn't keep you out and you know that, your parents know it. You feel it every time someone wins the prize instead of you, gets the part in the play, gets into the better college. Gets the promotion. All of this adds up. And your people, who think they are worth a great deal, know that even after making all that money, they are worthless. (153)

At no stage is Rez portrayed as a religious extremist, or even as particularly committed to Islam, as Arash and Fatima are. He doesn't hate Americans or want to harm them. He wants to be one. And yet while waiting to be interrogated at the airport, he thinks "something inside of him was roiling, some defiance, some anger that life was going to be hard again, hard and ugly and tense" (152-153).[55] It is this kind of treatment, Khadivi seems to suggest, that leads young immigrants living in the West to become radicalised.

Soon after the call with Arash, Rez overhears several Muslims discussing Raqqah, a city in Syria, which they describe as: "the capital of a country with no borders, a country for believers, for the devout, for the citizens of Allah. And they need men. Men to move there and start their lives. Men and their wives. There is an open invitation to join in" (179). He is excited

[55] See Leda Blackwood, "I Know Who I am, but Who do They Think I am? Muslim Perspectives on Encounters with Airport Authorities."

by the idea of "[a] new place, where you could be a child of Muslims, in love with a Muslim girl, a place where he himself could become Muslim and so be accepted, taken in, left alone to live a life, among brothers, every day, every year" (180). It is not the religious ideology of Raqqah and the Caliphate that attracts him but rather the idea of a place where he can "be accepted" as a Muslim of Arab heritage and "live … among brothers." Researching online he finds contradictory images of this city. On the one hand, "images of a dusty city with traffic circles and spindly palm trees" (182); on the other hand, a city and a land described by "brothers" as offering a "*a purpose, first and above all to Allah and to [our] community and to a future of peace for all followers*" (184). According to one unnamed speaker, "*I live in a city where I can make a good living and love a woman who honors me. Before my life was not my own. I lived under so much suspicion I was sure I had done all the evil they suspected me of. Now I am myself*" (185). If a place where he can be "myself" attracts Rez; so, too, I argue, does the idea of a city in which he can "love a woman who honors [him]." I will return to this below.

Khadivi's characterisation appears to accord with, or reinforce, recent research on the causes of (religious) radicalisation. According to Julie M. Norman and Drew Mikhael, youths who see themselves as politically and/or economically marginalised, and have a pervasive sense of purposelessness and lack of hope for the future, are more likely to join extremist groups ("Youth Radicalization is on the Rise" n.p.).[56] Sociological research done on the radicalisation of Muslim youth from the West show that their diverse backgrounds disprove the common belief that would-be terrorists are always poor, uneducated and from broken homes. Rather, what they have in common are vulnerable individual identities that leave them looking for a sense of belonging in unconventional ways (Provines, "Understanding Radicalization" n.p.). Similarly, Sadeq Rahimi and Raissa Graumans comment on "the basic

[56] They quote Christian Picciolini, a reformed white nationalist: "I think ultimately people become extremists not necessarily because of the ideology. The ideology is simply a vehicle to be violent. I believe that people become radicalized, or extremist, because they're searching for three very fundamental human needs: identity, community and a sense of purpose" (n.p)

formula" that finds "a lack of cultural integration equals an increased threat of radicalization" ("Reconsidering the Relationship between Integration and Radicalization" 29), something that is also a finding in Sarah Lyons-Padilla et al.'s work on immigrants, "Belonging Nowhere," discussed above.

These studies and surveys show that those immigrants who identify with neither their heritage culture nor their adopted culture frequently feel marginalised and insignificant. Joining a terrorist group offers a sense of belonging and community. In a recent New South Wales (Australia) parliamentary report, Chris Angus lists causes and drivers of radicalisation and extremism identified in a 2013 study conducted by Victoria University and notes that:

> Issues around identity and sense of belonging were seen as important underlying factors in helping drive people toward radicalisation and extremism. These included the implications of lack of belonging; the tensions of multiple cultural allegiances and loyalties; rebellion against family or community norms; the yearning for cultural and religious authenticity; and the need for approval and attention, particularly for those whose fractured self-esteem or sense of self-worth makes them strive to feel like a 'somebody' rather than a 'nobody.' ("Radicalisation and Violent Extremism" 5)

In wider sociocultural terms, he notes that a dominant perceived driver "was the broad domain of marginalisation, racism and social exclusion. This included the rejection or marginalisation of minority groups by mainstream society" (5).

Rez's experiences, as portrayed by Khadivi, appear to match the circumstances and conditions, discussed by theorists such as the above, that drive young second-generation Muslim immigrants in the West to become radicalised. This is particularly so in relation to the religious discrimination and racial taunting to which he is subjected as a young adult. In this

respect, Khadivi's novel appears to have a didactic warning aimed at (presumably western)[57] readers about the dangerous consequences of racial bigotry and the intimate connection between Islamophobia and (potentially terrorist) extremism, each of which causes the other, in an endless and violent cycle. However, this is not the only focus of the novel, much of which traces the relationship between Rez and his father. The conflict between them is portrayed as more than the typical developmental conflict between father and (teenage) son. It is, fundamentally, born out of their immigrant-family status and conflicting views on how to achieve the American Dream. For Mr Courdee this dream is achievable, as his financial and employment success appears to confirm. As Khadivi herself says, in discussion with Kaplan, "The United States rewards its immigrants for not being devout, for coming to the god of capitalism" ("The Making of a Teenage Radical" n.p.).

Material success in this 'good country' comes at a cost, however: the relinquishment of memories, the rejection of the claims of one's former nationality and the disavowal of one's ancestral religion. Rez's father accepts that he will never fully belong, but this is part of his 'immigrant bargain.' This is not good enough for second-generation Rez. He believes he *is* American and when he is repeatedly told by European-Americans that he is not, because of a range of external racial markers, he becomes hurt and angry. Being told that he does not fully belong finally forces him to look for a place where he does.[58] Looking at himself he sees, "the face they called a monkey yesterday. A face they called brother" (*A Good Country* 186) and chooses a place where his face means the latter, communal brotherhood, not rejection. He starts attending mosque and when he asks the imam where to learn about Islam, he responds: "You

[57] The novel is written in English and published by a western publisher. The novel is not available in Iran and in an interview with BBC Farsi, Khadivi says that due to her characters' harsh comments on Iranian government officials, she does not think that her books will ever be allowed to be published there.

[58] Of writing the book, Khadivi says, "I learned a lot about what it would be like to be a teenage boy of privilege in a rich neighborhood in the United States. And a lot about what it would be like to be a boy who's both accepted and not accepted at the same time." (Kaplan interview, "The Making of a Teenage Radical" n.p.)

must begin at the beginning. Talk to your parents" (197). But this is not possible for Rez. His father has renounced being a Muslim in pursuit of his American Dream.

When the imam asks why he wants to start practising Islam, Rez replies, "Love" (197). While the imam might interpret this as meaning love of Allah, the reader knows that he more likely means love for Fatima. Rez loves Fatima and believes they can marry and start a happy and respected life together in Raqqah. Arash encourages this idea: "Build the new country. It's better than I can even describe. Real people. Real respect. Skip college, give yourself an education in truth. Bring Fatima with you" (203). While Rez searches online about Raqqah, he falls prey to an online ISIS recruiter, Daoud. He not only presents Raqqah as a heavenly place for Rez but also as a means of becoming closer to Fatima:

> Listen my brother, I don't know everything but I'll answer as much as I can. Let me just say, first off, your curiosity is a sign that Allah is present within you and that you are trying to return to your original perfect state of being. Step toward your belief and you will step toward perfection, and probably toward Fatima too. (199)

As discussed, the reasons that could drive a young (cultural) Muslim immigrant towards radicalisation include feelings of anger towards the injustice of western policies against Muslim countries, personal experiences of discrimination and rejection, racism and Islamophobia, and a fragile sense of self-identity. These apply in Rez's case but another primary reason for radicalisation is the brotherly affection he feels for Arash and his love for Fatima. Fatima is initially sceptical about Rez's suggestion that they join the Caliphate, despite her genuine commitment to Islam: "I've heard about that group in Raqqah. It's not the Islam I know…it is an interpretation; an old Islam and it can be very violent. Very bloody. Why are you even talking about it? This is stupid. You're nervous about college and this is your freak-out" (206). Rez responds, "At least in Raqqah the violence is on the surface. And temporary. At least there

we can have a life devoted to something other than lies" (207). She is finally convinced when he tells her that Arash is there and has invited them to join him. The terrible final irony is that Arash betrays them both. The young couple lie to their parents about going to college when in fact, under Dauod's instructions, they travel to Istanbul to be smuggled into Syria. At the border they are separated, ostensibly because it is safer for only one person at a time to risk the crossing with their guide. They are not reunited on the other side. Rez is forced to undergo indoctrination, military training and join a fighting call. We do not learn of Fatima's fate, but the reader can guess that she has most probably been kidnapped and forced to marry a "commander" – or raped and murdered.

In the final pages of the novel, as Rez awaits his first "mission" as a fighter for the Caliphate, it is thoughts of Fatima that sustain him, not fantasies about "the dozen faceless virgins in heaven" or "the lavish feasts of paradise" his commanders promise: "Rez no longer wanted faith. He wanted Fatima beside him and another earth under his feet" (232). He thinks, we are told, "only of Fatima; of the skin of her cheeks and the curved dip of her back and her soft mouth. That is what waits for him after this trial. That is what the commanders have promised: first he must prove himself, then he can marry" (235). The narrator's slide into free indirect discourse here stresses the naiveté and lack of (self) awareness that has characterised Rez throughout the novel. It also emphasises the very *masculine* nature of the focalising voice Khadivi has chosen to adopt. Fatima, for all her feistiness and apparent insight regarding her status as the child of immigrants in America, simply disappears at the end of the novel, only exiting as an idealised fantasy in Rez's imagination. So does Mrs Courdee, part-way through, after seemingly fulfilling her role as a means of expanding her son's awareness of the independent selfhood of his parents, and the fact that they, too, had a youthful past. Khadivi's narrational choices, limiting her perspective to the narrow and fallible position of the self-absorbed teenager Rez, certainly work to emphasise the multiple social, familial and

sociological drivers that, together, create a second-generation immigrant *male* jihadist. This limitation may be precisely her point yet also risks (re)confirming multiple negative and gendered stereotypes about the attitudes of Muslim men, and Islam more generally, with respect to women.

Talking about the novel, Khadivi says, "[t]he process of conversion [for Rez] was the most difficult [for me] to conjure, because I couldn't get it wrong. If I got it wrong, then the whole thing would sink" ("The Making of Teenage Radical" n.p.). I believe she *did* get it wrong – Rez's religious conversion is not convincing in the novel; in fact he doesn't appear to truly convert at all. But this wrongness doesn't sink the novel – indeed, much to the contrary. The characterisation of Rez may not offer a believable portrait of the conversion of a western immigrant who chooses Muslim extremism and becomes a terrorist. But it does convincingly portray the psychology of a young man who makes some disastrous choices as the result of his experiences of fear-fuelled racial/religious discrimination combined with a seemingly irresolvable conflict with his father over what it means to be American and achieve the American Dream. These drivers are, importantly, compounded by the powerful emotions that result from being in love – the kind of emotions felt by young men around the world, regardless of their race or religion – and, Khadivi suggests, encourages them to make what are sometimes very stupid decisions. His final statement, quoted above, proves that he is still naïve and delusional if he thinks that he will see Fatima again. As I have argued, family relations have an impact on how adolescents behave socially and the type of decisions that they make. For Rez, intra-familial relations are doubly important because he is a second-generation Muslim immigrant living in America, where he is judged by the mainstream society due to his ethnic identity. *A Good Country* suggests that lack of parental support, intergenerational familial conflict over personal values, both compounded by naivety and the effects of discrimination, all lead Rez to make mistakes which are not reversible. He is not a radical extremist, a convert,

but a confused young man whose actions are the result of the “double jeopardy” experienced by many second-generation Muslim immigrants in the West.

Chapter Five: Kamila Shamsie's *Home Fire*

In this final chapter I pay close attention to a novel that I believe addresses many of my concerns about first- and second-wave post-9/11 fiction featuring Muslim terrorists and Islamic radicalisation: Kamila Shamsie's *Home Fire*. This novel extends the important moves made by authors of third-wave post-9/11 fiction, such as Khadivi, in their attempts to portray the experiences of Muslim immigrants and the children of immigrants in the West, and how persistent racial profiling combined with domestic stressors in immigrant families, such as conflictual intergenerational relationships and parental misunderstanding (or absence), might lead Muslim youths down the path of radicalisation. I argue that Shamsie's novel is an outstanding model of how fiction might address some of the gaps in understanding evident in mainstream media's 'factual' accounts of both 'ordinary' Muslim beliefs *and* Islamic extremism or radicalisation. Shamsie's success, I contend, is the result of (at least three) important factors.

The first of these is her status as a 'newly minted' Muslim citizen in the UK (she gained citizenship in 2014, three years before the publication of *Home Fire*). She writes as one who is profoundly aware of what is at stake in obtaining/gaining British citizenship and the assimilation 'contract' with which it expects immigrants to comply. Secondly, Shamsie – not least due to her belief that post-9/11 fiction has failed to do justice to the complex questions involved in Muslim extremism and terrorism – has extensively researched the topic of radicalisation. She painstakingly portrays the process by which her young jihadist protagonist is groomed and prepped, drawing on this research to offer a chilling and believable account. Finally, Shamsie adopts a complex mode of narration that offers her readers access to the interiority of five distinct characters as they negotiate the same devastating series of events. Dramatic irony is the result, fitting for a novel that reworks an ancient (five act) tragedy in a modern setting. Readers know more than each of the characters; they are privy to not only the

deep fears and desires of each but also to the secrets that they keep from others. Radicalisation is shown to be not only the consequence of careful, strategic manipulation of the young jihadist's individual insecurities and needs, but also the result of familial tensions, lies, omissions and things that remain unspoken to fester and fatally wound. Moreover, Shamsie focuses on the painful cost to families when a beloved child or brother is radicalised. In this way she broadens her focus far beyond other novelists treating the same subject.

In "The Storytellers of Empire" (2012), Kamila Shamsie recalls that, after 9/11, she hoped literature would help Americans to better understand why a terrorist attack had happened on their soil:

> I found myself looking to writers. Where were the novels that could be proffered to people who asked, "Why do they hate us?", which is actually the question "Who are these people and what do they have to do with us?" No such novel, as far as I knew, had come from the post-Cold War generation of writers who started writing after the 1980s when Islam replaced Communism as the terrifying Other. But that would change, I told myself. The nation that had intervened militarily with more nations than any other in the latter half of the twentieth century but had itself come under attack infrequently would now see its stories bound up with the stories of other places. The writers would write. The novels would come.
>
> They didn't. They haven't. ("The Storytellers of Empire" n.p)

Shamsie's hopes for literary representations of Muslim alienation and denigration remained unfulfilled, as seen in her comments above. Of US literature in the second half of the twentieth century, she wrote: "largely the American novel continued to look inward even as the American government looked increasingly outward. September 11 did nothing to change that" ("The Storytellers of Empire" n.p.). 9/11 nonfiction, she notes, "takes in Iraq and

Afghanistan and Pakistan and Saudi Arabia, it discusses Guantánamo and Abu Ghraib, it reaches back to the 1980s and the U.S. involvement in the war against the Soviets in Afghanistan, it looks at the Patriot Act and drone attacks." But, she continues a bit further into the essay, "[t]he stories of America in the World rather than the World in America stubbornly remain the domain of nonfiction. Your soldiers will come to our lands, but your novelists won't." Instead, she argues, American fiction offers another kind of story: "with pitifully few exceptions, the 9/11 novel looks at 9/11, the day itself, in New York – think of the most acclaimed novels in that genre: Don DeLillo's *Falling Man*, Claire Messud's *The Emperor's Children* or Jonathan Safran Foer's *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close*" ("The Storytellers of Empire" n.p.) Shamsie is insistent about the apparent absence in US fiction of narratives that might add complexity and depth to America's relationship with the Muslim world and the issue of international Islamic terrorism. If these were written, she suggests, they might give the reader an insight into the lives and motivations of those who become terrorists; they could enable readers to explore representations of terrorist characters who are human beings with emotions, hopes, beliefs and inner struggles. They may encourage readers to begin to understand their untold stories, and why they do what they do, without justifying their heinous actions and decisions.

Shamsie's views on the slow pace at which the literary world took on the task of Muslim portrayal/representation in fiction post-9/11 echo my own, as raised in the first chapters of this thesis. My discussion there highlights the insularity of American (and also British) novelists since the world-changing events of September 11, 2001, in that their fiction, for the most part, certainly focuses on what Shamsie highlights as the "trauma experienced by (American) individuals" as a result of the attacks, but without properly contextualising the event in historical and political terms. Instead, these novels, for the most part, simplify the attack as a tragedy analogous to a natural disaster: "[i]t could just as well be about an earthquake which

occurred without warning. … [I]n American fiction, 9/11 is a traumatic event as ahistorical as an earthquake" ("The Storytellers of Empire" n.p).

Shamsie is aware that in making these remarks she may be falling into the "American trap of focusing too much on 9/11" ("The Storytellers of Empire" n.p.). She also posits the idea that American writers may shy away from writing about cultural others and other countries for fear they will be accused of appropriation, of speaking *for* the other through a western mouthpiece as she suggests is the case in John Updike's novel *Terrorist*: "the figure of the young Muslim seemed such an accumulation of stereotypes that it struck me as rather poor writing" ("The Storytellers of Empire" n.p.). But for those perhaps more qualified to speak for "young Muslims," first- and second-generation migrant writers in the US, most, she argues, write about "the politics of being a migrant in America or the histories of places their families left" ("The Storytellers of Empire" n.p). Shamsie asks more from these fictions.

Despite her insistence that stereotypes need to be challenged, Shamsie's seventh novel, *Home Fire* (2017),[59] appears to do precisely what she complains is common in fiction written by first and second-generation migrant writers – –that is, deal with the politics of being a (Muslim) migrant in the West (Britain and America).[60] Shamsie's novel, however, moves beyond these common themes and offers a sophisticated and subtle psychological portrait of both homegrown terrorism and the effects of western anti-Muslim rhetoric and behaviour as these reverberate through two second-generation Muslim families in London. *Home Fire* looks at the complex emotions associated with an individual's conceptions of citizenship and belonging and how these assumptions are complicated through the law and its materialisation in everyday social politics.

[59] Kamila Shamsie's other works are: *In The City by the Sea* (1998), *Salt and Saffron* (2000), *Kartography* (2002), *Broken Verses* (2005), *Burnt Shadows* (2009), a collection of essays titled *Offence: A Muslim Case* (2009), *A God in Every Stone* (2014).

[60] *Home Fire* is anything but a comforting read, despite Shamsie's international publishers' attempts to market the book as a love story, as evident from its blurbs. See Banerjee (2020).

Shamsie herself is a Muslim migrant in Britain and holds dual Pakistani and British nationality. Born into a great literary family,[61] she is an award-winning author,[62] a reviewer and vocal cultural commentator who regularly writes on political, cultural, social and literary issues, in articles which have appeared in newspapers and journals like *The Guardian, Dawn, The New York Times, New Statesman, Times Literary Supplement, Guernica, The Annual of Urdu Studies,* and *Index on Censorship.* Her collection of essays *Offence: The Muslim Case* (2009) provides the readers with a summary of Pakistan's history after Partition and its ceaseless pursuit of a political and religious national identity.

Home Fire is a modern-day adaptation of *Antigone* (a 5th-century BC play by the Ancient Greek writer Sophocles) which Shamsie wrote upon the request of her friend Jatinder Verma, manager of the Tara Arts theatre in London. From the classic play, Shamsie takes on the themes of familial obligations, ideas of 'good' and 'bad' citizenship, sacrifices made in the name of love and family, loyalty, and punishment. In both *Antigone* and *Home Fire,* the young female protagonists demand that their treasonous brother's body is returned home and given a proper burial, against the orders of those in authority. Arguing that "*Antigone* has been widely adapted within postcolonial contexts," Gabriella Pishotti asserts of *Home Fire* that it "draws not only on Sophocles' tragedy, but also on the postcolonial legacy it has built in serving as a discourse aiming to resist the power of a law that refuses to respect all human dignity" ("Materializing Grief" 350). In *Antigone,* the titular character is a young woman

[61] Kamila Shamsie's mother is Muneeza Shamsie, a Pakistani writer, critic, literary journalist, bibliographer and editor. Attia Hosain, her great aunt, was a British-Indian novelist, author, writer, broadcaster, journalist and actor, and she is the granddaughter of memoirist Jahanara Habibullah.

[62] Her 1999 novel *In the City by the Sea* was shortlisted for the John Llewellyn Rhys Prize in the UK and received the Prime Minister's Award for Literature in Pakistan in 1999. In 2002 she was selected as one of Orange's 21 Writers of the 21st century. *Kartography* (2002), received widespread critical acclaim and was shortlisted for the John Llewellyn Rhys award in the UK. *Kartography* (2002) and *Broken Verses* (2005) won the Patras Bokhari Award from the Academy of Letters in Pakistan. *Burnt Shadows* (2009) was shortlisted for the Orange Prize for Fiction and won an Anisfield-Wolf Book Award for Fiction. *A God in Every Stone* (2014) was shortlisted for the 2015 Walter Scott Prize and the Baileys Women's Prize for Fiction. Her seventh novel, *Home Fire*, was longlisted for the 2017 Booker Prize, and in 2018 won the Women's Prize for Fiction.

who must choose between obeying the law of the state or the law of the gods (and family). Her dilemma centres on the body of her brother Polynices, a traitor whose burial has been forbidden by the King of Thebes because Polynices declared war on the city and, in the process, killed his own brother, Eteocles. Antigone cannot bear to leave Polynices' body to rot or get eaten by scavengers, and the failure to bury him would be against religious law; but if she defies the king and gives him the necessary ritual burial, she herself will be killed.

In *Home Fire* the modern-day Antigone is Aneeka, a young British Muslim woman whose parents have emigrated from Pakistan. When the novel begins, her twin brother, Parvaiz, has left the UK to work in the media arm of ISIS.[63] While in Syria, Parvaiz is shocked by the extent of ISIS's violence, and he eventually finds a way to escape from Raqqa to Istanbul, hoping he can return *home,* to Britain. However, he is killed in a drive-by shooting in front of the British consulate in Turkey just as he is about to turn himself in. Parvaiz's British citizenship is revoked by the British Home Secretary and his body is flown to Karachi, Pakistan, for burial. Aneeka, determined to get Parvaiz's body back home to the UK, flies to Karachi. Eamonn, Aneeka's lover, calls and asks his father, the British Home Secretary, to reconsider his decision but his father refuses. While watching the news, the Home Secretary sees a report depicting Aneeka on the lawn of the British Embassy in Karachi as Parvaiz's body is delivered there. She stays with the deteriorating body on the lawn for days in protest, watched by international news media, and Pakistani citizens take up her cause and join her. Eamonn, without his father's knowledge, flies to Karachi to be with his lover. When he arrives on the British Embassy lawn, he is embraced by two men who attach a bomb on a belt to his waist and run away. As Eamonn struggles to remove the bomb, Aneeka runs to him, and the bomb explodes. The lovers die in each other's arms. It is unclear whether Aneeka is to blame for the explosion or is an innocent victim herself.

[63] Islamic State of Iraq and Syria.

As many critics have noted, both the play and the novel oppose familial loyalty and individualism with duty to the state (see, for example, Chambers (2018), Burns (2019), Ahmed (2020)). Both also explore the themes of citizenship, national identity and belonging. In the play, Polynices' attack on his city-state (Thebes) results in the loss of his citizenship and the rights that come with this. In the novel, questions about the citizenship of second-generation Muslim British citizens are at the fore.[64] As Lucy Pearson states in *The Literary Edit*, "The story speaks to nationalism, patriotism, and citizenship as a privilege, not as a birthright" (n.p). According to Sophie Karolczak, the novel thus adapts the themes of *Antigone* through the perspective of a Muslim identity in Britain. She suggests Shamsie introduces the idea of a "fragile citizenship," of how belonging and inclusion is defined for the 'other' in British society (n.p).[65] In an interview with Cora Currier, Shamsie declared that her primary motivation for writing the novel was to investigate citizenship and, more importantly, what it means to deprive people of their rights of citizenship for certain crimes (n.p).[66] *Sunday Express*'s Eithne Farry similarly suggests that in the novel Shamsie "pits the political against the personal as a family's love and loyalty are tested to the core" (n.p.). [67] Indeed, the epigraph to the novel is from Seamus Heaney's rewriting of *Antigone* in his play *The Burial at Thebes*: "The ones we love … are enemies of the state." In her analysis of the novel, Julia Felsenthal similarly focuses on both familial relationships and issues of assimilation:

[64] Shamie's novel was prescient. It was published two years before the Shamima Begum case became headline news. Begum – the child of Bengali immigrants – left the UK aged 15 to join the Islamic State. Four years later, pregnant and living in a refugee camp, Begum tried to return home but was denied. The then British Home Secretary, Sajid Javid, announced his intention to revoke her UK citizenship and force her to return to her parents' country of origin. Of this, Urszula Rutkowska writes, "In the process, Javid turned the status of a refugee into a form of punishment, weaponizing citizenship and reigniting a debate on statelessness" (872).

[65] Shamsie writes about the fragility of citizenship in her essay "Exiled" (2018).

[66] In an interview with Cora Currier, Shamsie talks repeatedly Theresa May's government's slogan that "Citizenship is a privilege not a right." She states: "And that's simply legally untrue, but increasingly they want to be able to take away citizenship for people who they think are unworthy. And they get to decide" ("Novelist Kamila Shamsie Talks About Radicalization" n.p.).

[67] See: Peter Ho Davies (2017), Natalie Haynes (2017), Claire Chambers (2017), Katherine Weber (2017).

> *Home Fire* is about the myths that sons tell themselves about their fathers, and the damage that fathers pass down to their sons. It's about assimilation and individuality, borders and crossings, the fluidity that so many take for granted, and the lack thereof that others accept as a matter of course. (n.p)[68]

Evoking the five-act structure of the Greek tragedy, *Home Fire* consists of five chapters, each told from the perspective of one of the major protagonists: Isma, Eamonn, Parvaiz, Aneeka and Karamat. Together, the chapters elaborate on the same key events and relationships, adding further layers of complexity for the reader. Furthermore, as Urszula Rutkowska notes, "The omniscient narrator is not judgmental, holding back on any condemnation of Parvaiz, all the while humanising Karamat. Including various forms of contemporary media allows Shamsie to shift between accessing the interiority of a character and how they are received in the world she has created" ("The Political Novel in Our Still-Evolving Reality" 873). Isma Pasha, the older sibling of the Pasha family, is the focaliser in the first chapter. Orphaned at 19 (her jihadi father died enroute to imprisonment at Guantanamo, her mother of cancer some years later), she became a maternal figure, responsible for her 12-year-old twin brother and sister, Parvaiz and Aneeka. When the chapter opens, the twins are now grown up and, released from her duty to care for them, she is moving from London to Massachusetts to do her PhD in Sociology at Amherst, US. She is horrified when she learns Parvaiz has joined ISIS. Having experienced living under the surveillance of the state as a direct result of their father's decision to join a jihadi group, she has a reasonable idea of what their life will be like next. (Her father is the Oedipus equivalent

[68] See also Constance Grady: "As *Home Fire* telescopes out to accommodate *Antigone*'s structure, it loses some of what made the first half so compelling. The careful portrait of this specific family unravels so that Shamsie can shift her focus to enemy states. Clever, practical Isma all but disappears (her analogue in Antigone is a very minor character), and she is so clearly Shamsie's best invention that her absence leaves a noticeable void in the story. And Parvaiz's slow brainwashing by ISIS, and subsequent struggle against his brainwashing, only narrowly avoids becoming a wholesale cliché" ("This Stunning New Novel" n.p.)

from *Antigone*.) She is serious and logical and, as readers later learn, her logical thinking and realistic vision costs her, her family.

Parvaiz is an impressionable green grocer's assistant who helps in the local library and is deeply attached to his twin sister, Aneeka. He is not a devout Muslim, nonetheless his obsession with their late father leads to him being recruited by the media wing of ISIS (as I discuss below) and he moves to Raqqa, Syria, in search of answers about his father. A neighbour, Gladys, and his old friend Abdul are at a loss to understand his radicalisation or how he is "being turned inside out" (*Home Fire* 251). The portrayal of his recruitment has been widely praised. According to Sarah Johnson, the "[s]cenes showing Parvaiz's mindset as he is indoctrinated into ISIS are daring and incredibly disturbing": "In accessible, unwavering prose and without any heavy-handedness, Shamsie addresses an impressive mix of contemporary issues, from Muslim profiling to cultural assimilation and identity to the nuances of international relations" (n.p.). Debjani Banerjee similarly expresses admiration for Shamsie in this regard, claiming that she does not resort to the all-too-familiar explanations for terrorist recruitment as being Islamic religion or "vocal or active opposition to fundamental British values" ("From Cheap Labour to Overlooked Citizens" 293; quoting Prevent strategy). Banerjee claims that Shamsie's novel points out that policy makers' assumptions about radicalisation, as reflected in the UK government's counter-terrorism strategy Prevent (Preventing Violent Extremism Policy, 2007, revised 2011, 2013), are insufficient, based as they are on a simplistic causal link between "resistance to assimilation and extremist ideology" ("From Cheap Labour to Overlooked Citizens" 293).

Shamsie said much the same in a recorded video interview for *The Update*. When asked where she got the inspiration for the "believable and frightening" account of Parvaiz's indoctrination by ISIS, Shamsi replied,

> when I started the novel I thought, like most people did, that it's a very simple issue where certain young men who are very drawn by violence and anger get pulled into ISIS. But I started doing quite a lot of research around the subject and one of the things I discovered is how sophisticated and complex ISIS – their recruitment – was, and how it drew on all kinds of vulnerabilities of the young. So, really it was through the research. … I read some interviews with people who had either been in Syria or near people who had, and I also read quite a lot by people who had been radicalized at other points, or in different ways, so not necessarily with Syria and ISIS but who had gone through a process of radicalisation and had come out the other side and were able to talk about how that went. ("Kamila Shamsie on *Home Fire*" 2.33- 4.25)

Parvaiz does not fit the stereotype of a young man who is drawn to terrorism because he is angry or violent or overtly religious, as is common in many media narratives of radicalisation. His ISIS recruiter plays on his insecurities, loneliness and desperate need for brotherhood or a father figure.

While in Massachusetts, Isma becomes friends with Eamonn Lone, the privileged 24-year-old son of Britain's Home Secretary, Karamat Lone. Later in the novel is seduced by Aneeka although her reasons for the liaison are not straightforwardly about love or attraction.) Karamat Lone, although a Muslim, has decided to distance himself from the Muslim community to advance his career and often makes derogatory remarks about Muslims in public. In this respect, he is (or pretends to be) what Mahmood Mamdani has described as a "good Muslim," one who has managed to successfully assimilate and become a model immigrant with strong British values. Mamdani writes that since 9/11,

> [w]e are now told to distinguish between good Muslims and bad Muslims. Mind you, not between good and bad persons, nor between criminals and civic

> citizens, who both happen to be Muslims, but between good Muslims and bad Muslims. We are told that there is a fault line running through Islam, a line that separates moderate Islam, called 'genuine Islam,' from extremist political Islam. ("Good Muslim, Bad Muslim" 767).

Home Fire explores what Britain defines as a "good Muslim," how this might conflict with what Muslims understand a "good Muslim" to be, and how first- and second-generation immigrants negotiate between these conflicting perceptions.

There is nothing one-dimensional, or binary, about Shamsie's Muslim characteristions, however. The perspective in the final part of the novel is Karamat's and this enables Shamsie to reveal him as more than a shallow, self-serving politician. He is proud of his nationality because of the opportunities Britain offered to his immigrant parents. He loves his son deeply, and his ostensible betrayal of Eamonn destroys his family. It is too hasty, I think, to state, as does Kuğu Tekin, that "The novel's ending shows that Karamat Lone's capability of doing anything to defend his State, his uncompromising Englishness, and his political power leads to the death of his only son" (Tekin, "Kamila Shamsie's *Home Fire*" 1176). In my opinion, Karamat is a far more ambivalent and ambiguous character than Tekin suggests. Although he is Shamsie's equivalent of Sophocles' King Creon, concerned with the letter of the law rather than (moral) justice, Karamat is shown to "struggl[e] with the contingencies of his own belonging [in Britain], his position being characterized by a gap between his private and public persona" (Sarkowsky, "Expatriation, Belonging and the Politics of Burial" 37). Katja Sarkowsky concludes of him that he "embodies assimilation, but his character also represents the price that comes with it" (37).

Revealing the price of assimilation, and citizenship, is achieved by Shamsie through her complex juxtaposition of characterological interiority and external persona. In an interview for the Shakespeare and Company Bookshop, Shamsie was asked about the reasons why she

chose to narrate the novel from five different perspectives. To this question she responded that from early in the process of writing the novel she knew that she wanted to emphasise the difference between a person's outward persona and public actions and their inner emotions and desires. *Home Fire* explores, in part, the notion that even if you think you know an individual intimately and well, there is still always something that they can keep secret and hidden from you. In the interview Shamsie asserted that these personal secrets, "the unknown," was what fascinated and interested her, as well as the misinterpretations and the misjudgments of others who assess you from "outside" ("Kamila Shamsie on *Home Fire*" n.p.) According to the author, even if you have known someone all your life, you might not notice when they start to change, and this tension between (the mixture) of intimacy and ignorance/unknown is in some ways where the heart of the novel lies, as well as at the heart of racial or religious prejudice. In the interview, Shamsie relates how she decided that the best way to portray this was to tell the story from five different perspectives so the reader can see how one character views the others, how they (mis)interpret each other, and how this can differ from what each character really thinks and feels (Shamsie "Kamila Shamsie on Home Fire"). In her exploration of the novel, Debjani Banerjee extends these ideas to suggest that the narrative style adopted in the novel is a reflection of the numerous layers of (cultural) belonging accorded to individuals, as they exist in British society "where different groups share geo-political boundaries" (291). Moreover, each character has different layers of feeling and emotion towards their British Muslim identity. This, suggests Banerjee, encourages the reader to ask a series of questions about citizenship and belonging: "what are the rights of a citizen and what does each character owe to the state and the family in love and loyalty?" (291). The integration of the familial perspective is perhaps Shamsie's most significant addition to radicalisation narratives. Her research, she said in her interview with Currier, reveals "little compassion" for the families of radicalised youths: "families facing

the most horrendous thing – your child or your sibling who is very young or very stupid or angry – has gone to a place from where you know they will probably never return. And these families are treated as though they are guilty, rather than as if they are mourning" ("Novelist Kamila Shamsie Talks about Radicalization" n.p.). As a result of her choice to use five distinct focalisers, Shamsie can portray this "horrendous thing" as experienced by families – especially sisters and mothers.

The novel begins with an emblematic episode of airport interrogation that introduces Isma (the voice of reason in the novel), and foregrounds many of the thematic concerns that will be addressed in what follows. The opening scene portrays events so familiar that they have earned their own label, "Flying while Muslim."[69] Departing for the US, Isma is interrogated for three hours by airport officials at Heathrow, which results in her missing her flight. According to Leda Blackwood et al., the phrase "Flying While Muslim"[70] has now entered the general lexicon in order to draw attention to the "problematic experience of undertaking what for others is a more routine activity" ("'Flying While Muslim': Citizenship and Misrecognition in the Airport" 150). The label "is now widely used to capture a set of intimidating and humiliating experiences Muslims report having, when travelling in non-Muslim countries" (Blackwood 340). It can, of course, also refer to the experiences of British (or American, or Australian, etc.) Muslims who are questioned/challenged by airport authorities when they are about to arrive home after travel abroad.[71] In another study, Blackwood et al. state that British-Muslims are unhappy about the "formal and informal surveillance" that they are subjected to because "British and Muslim identities have been turned by others into topics of concern" ("I Know Who I Am" 1092-93)

[69] See Ellen Baker, (2002), Saher Selod (2018) and Leda Blackwood (2019).
[70] According to Saher Selod's research, a 2011 report by the Pew Research Center shows that: "52% of Muslims feel they are singled out by the government's anti-terrorist initiatives with 21% feeling singled out by airport security" ("Targeting Muslim Americans").
[71] See Nathalie Handal's poem "Flying While Muslim" (2008), about her experience in airports.

Shamsie appears to have intentionally chosen the airport interrogation scene as the starting point of her novel because airports, especially international terminals, are communal spaces which are occupied by passengers from all backgrounds, so this highlights the fact that it is a particular type/kind of passenger – Muslim or Muslim in appearance – that is so often singled out for this special treatment. Isma's conservative attire visually highlights her faith, and the line of her questioning is an illustration of the way officials identify her due to ethnicity and religion, not the passport that she is holding, and seek to know where her (assumed conflicting) loyalties lie.

Also, significantly, airports are the point of entry and exit from a country. This serves to draw readers' attention not only to the issue of borders, but also to the instability of certain claims to citizenship. Research conducted by Gabe Mythen reveals that after 9/11, "issues of (inter)national security have been firmly connected to ethnicity and religion in many Western nations" (409). He further explains that after 9/11, Muslims have been portrayed in dominant media narratives and political circles in the West as "potentially risky and dangerous" (410). As a result of such narratives and policies, especially counterterrorism policies, Mythen believes that Islam has been considered as a "problematic faith" and Muslims "a tangible threat to [Western] national security" (410).

Shamsie is certainly not the only immigrant writer who has portrayed the experience of airport interrogation of their Muslim characters in Western airports. Laleh Khadivi's character Rez, in *A Good Country* (2017), is also singled out, taken aside, and questioned by airport officials on his return to the US from an overseas holiday, as discussed in my previous chapter. Mohsin Hamid, in *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*, similarly highlights this experience when Pakistani Changez, who resides and works in New York, returns there from Manila soon after 9/11 and is made to join the queue "for foreigners" at the airport, unlike his co-workers. He is asked the purpose of his visit to New York and, according to Sobia Khan's analysis of the

novel, "he is reminded of his 'real' status as that of an Other at the airport, as a 'foreigner' in a New York that was still recovering from the attacks" (143-44). Arvin Ahmadi is one of the latest Muslim authors who explores this theme of airport interrogation in his novel *How It All Blew Up* (2020).

In my first chapter I discussed "Flying While Muslim." Given how often similar airport scenes occur in other novels about Muslims living and travelling in the West, the opening to *Home Fire* risks falling into the category of stereotyping that Shamsie has written against. However, Shamsie goes a step further, because the opening scene is not just a reiteration of a common motif in many novels by contemporary Muslim writers, but is in fact integral to the novel's concern with "hyper-surveillance by the authorities" as this is experienced by Muslims in Western countries, even when they are citizens of those (Blackwood et al. "'Flying While Muslim': Citizenship and Misrecognition in the Airport" 150). Shamsie's portrayal of Isma's airport interrogation brings to attention how Isma, a British-born Muslim character, is treated as a national threat while *at home* by members of her own nation. Isma here is a member of the "suspect community,"[72] like an unwanted family member.

Certainly since 9/11 it may not be unexpected for a woman wearing hijab to be questioned at an airport, since her dress code marks her as Muslim.[73] Isma, we learn, was well aware of this and, concerned that she would be searched at the airport and to avoid drawing attention to herself, had taken precautionary measures: "She'd made sure not to pack anything that would invite comment or questions – no Quran, no family pictures, no books on her areas of academic interest" (*Home Fire* 3). This, especially the mention of the Quran, along with the

[72] Christina Pantazis and Simon Pemberton in a 2009 study borrow the term "suspect community" from Paddy Hillyard's 1993 book of that title, to apply to Muslims living in the UK. Their study is about the contemporary experiences of British Muslim communities, which is the result of the war on Terror: "Within the United Kingdom, and beyond, this political discourse has designated Muslims as the new 'enemy within' – justifying the introduction of counter-terrorist legislation and facilitating the construction of Muslims as a 'suspect community'" ("From the 'Old' to the 'New' Suspect Community").

[73] See Michael T. Luongo (2016), Homa Khaleeli (2016), Aatif Nawaz (2019) and Qasim Rashid (2018).

use of the phrase, "[s]he had expected the interrogation," clearly establishes her, for readers right at the very start, *as a Muslim*, without the narrator ever telling us this directly. We know and understand the stereotypes at work, and in this way, Shamsie immediately makes us complicit in the activity of identifying others based on familiar religious identity markers. In the paragraphs that follow, the type of questions which Isma is asked, indicate that, already made suspect, she must prove herself a worthy and true British citizen.

Drawing their conclusion from Shamsie's own views, Lisa Lau and Ana Cristina Mendes see Isma's interrogation as being "deeply political" (57). What is at stake cuts to the heart of questions about identity, belonging and otherness. Pei-chen Liao, in an analysis of Shamsie's writing, has concluded that many of her works are politically motivated, and as a writer Shamsie believes that it is her human duty to engage in politics. Liao quotes Shamsie on the matter: "if you grow up in Karachi, you don't have that separation between what is happening at the political level and what is happening in people's lives" (265). Interestingly, however, Shamsie has said in interviews that she would never have risked writing *Home Fire* before she was granted a British passport. It seems clear to her, apparently, that there are limits to the politics a non-British writer can espouse if they want to retain UK residence. The author's own material fear of exclusion is echoed through the fears of Isma.[74]

Isma, however, is not an immigrant who has newly been granted British citizenship. In the airport, the authorities second-guess Isma's citizenship despite the fact she was born and bred in Britain, the daughter of Pakistani immigrants. She is clearly judged based on her ethnicity, race, apparent religious group membership and, as the reader finds out only later, on her father's wrongdoings. This information is withheld from readers until the end of first

[74] In an interview with Patricia Nicol, Shamsie says that she would not have dared to write such a book before becoming a British citizen in 2013 for fear of: "someone at the UK Border Agency or Home Office – one of its central characters is a hardliner Conservative Home Secretary of British Muslim descent – would have taken against the novel and used it as an excuse to turn down her citizenship application" ("Author of the Moment" n.p.).

chapter. In this way, Shamsie tests her reader's empathy for Isma and invites them to see her simply as a discriminated-against Muslim woman. There are clues, however, that this is not all that is at stake. At various points, we gain insight into what Isma is thinking during the interrogation. At one stage, the man asking questions leaves and a woman takes over. In a sentence of free indirect discourse, the narrator reports on Isma's thoughts: "Perhaps she [the female official] would be the one to ask the family questions – the ones most difficult to answer, the most fraught when she had prepared with her sister" (*Home Fire* 6-7).

What is in question in the scene is her sense of belonging to *her home country*. It is her Britishness (and its implied allegiance to the Empire) which is under investigation here:

> Seen as non-British, or as outsiders, she and other Ismas have to tread with particular care, not being free to embrace and proclaim whatever politics they believe in, but always acting and speaking in such a way that would reassure authorities they are no threat, that they are 'good' citizens, that they have no radicalized inclinations and no 'wrong' sympathies (Lau and Mendes 58).

Isma is asked a series of questions to determine whether she is a true British citizen with British values or not:

> "Do you consider yourself British?" the man said.
>
> "I am British."
>
> "But do you consider yourself British?"
>
> "I've lived here all my life." She meant there was no other country of which she could feel herself a part, but the words came out sounding evasive. (*Home Fire* 5)

The fact of her citizenship is irrelevant to the interrogator; her *belonging* in Britain is in question. The implication is that Isma is less British than non-Muslim Britons because of her Muslim identity.

Aisha Phoenix, in a study of how two young female practicing Muslims in Britain navigate their identities as undergraduates and then as young professionals during the time when Muslims were routinely targeted, has determined that in Britain, Muslims are usually regarded as "holding values incompatible with Britishness" (1632). A recent survey (2019) has found that almost half of UK adults regard Islam as incompatible with British values and 29% of respondents think that Islam encourages Muslims to commit violence against those who are non-Muslims (Grant n.p). This construction of the Muslim Other as opposing British values, raises the central question of what these values are. Ironically, The British Department of Education states that British values are democracy, the rule of law, individual liberty and mutual respect and *tolerance of different faiths and beliefs* (Prevent Duty and British Values," n.p.; my italics).[75]

In her book *Young British Muslims: Identity, Culture, Politics and the Media* (2010), Nahid Afrose Kabir[76] examines the lives of 15-30 year-old British-Muslims living in Bradford, London, Leeds, Leicester and Cardiff, to explore how their identities and values are shaped within their family, cultural and wider societal environments. In her introduction, Kabir declares that she was fascinated to hear the participants' life stories and how they define their senses of belonging. According to Kabir, while "Britishness" ostensibly refers to the sense of national identity of all British people; after 7/7, "Britain entered a new phase in defining British national identity and citizenship" (11). She argues that western media has helped to construct "an Islamic identity that is distinct from and irreconcilable with citizenship in the UK" (4). Kabir quotes Bhikhu Parekh's observation that for most people in the UK, "Being British basically means three things: commitment to Britain and its people, loyalty to its legal and political institutions, and respect for the values and norms that are central to its way of life"

[75] "Prevent Duty and British Values for Adult Learners." edited by Education and Training Foundation, 2018. https://preventforfeandtraining.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/06/Prevent-and-British-Values-resource-30-May-2018-003-1.pdf.
[76] Australian academic of Bangladeshi extraction.

(11).[77] Increasingly, she stresses, "politicians have begun to perceive that integration, along with fluency in English, is also crucial to 'British identity'" (11). She quotes (former) British Prime Minister Tony Blair who, in a December 2006 "Our Nation's Future" lecture series, declared that "no distinctive culture or religion supersedes our duty to be part of an integrated United Kingdom" and that "we should set the use of [a common] language as a condition of citizenship" (11). Later in the book, she offers a definition based on the interview responses she received from young British Muslims for whom British national identity or Britishness is understood as "possessing fluent English skills, loyalty to Britain, integration with the wider community, belief in democracy, tolerance, acceptance of equal treatment for all and respect for the country and its shared heritage" (79).

Such definitions, particularly their emphasis on integration, seem to inform the type of questions that Isma is asked by the airport security officer to determine whether she is a true and good British citizen or not. In her interrogation she is asked to give her views on a variety of subjects including Shias, homosexuals, the Queen, democracy, the invasion of Iraq, Israel, suicide bombers, dating websites and the *Great British Bake Off* (presumably only a true Brit would be familiar with this TV series!). During the lengthy interrogation Isma is in a powerless situation and must stay obedient. Not only is she expected to provide answers, but she also needs to give the correct ones. She fears that even her most innocent answers "came out sounding evasive" (*Home Fire* 5). It is in anticipation of this that she and her younger sister, Aneeka, had practiced the "correct" answers in their role playing sessions (*Home Fire* 4), where Aneeka jokingly suggested that when asked about the Queen, Isma should reply: "As an Asian I have to admire her colour palette" (6). However, Isma is very serious when responding and does not want to jeopardise her situation with a lighthearted remark. Her responses will determine her Englishness, her upholding of British values, and how well she, the child of

[77] Bhikhu Parekh (2007).

immigrants, has integrated into British mainstream society. This line of enquiry at the airport proves that although the Pasha family hold legal documents which prove their citizenship and their national inclusion in Britain, belonging to a society and being part of it (social inclusion) is a different matter. Sercan Hamza Baglama, in an analysis of Shamsie's *Home Fire*, discusses how British "white" society westernise and acknowledges only "proper" Muslims "while those who do not fit into the 'proper' Muslim image are demonized and criminalized" (1642). Baglama uses the term "conditional inclusion" to describe this process through which "acceptable otherness" is achievable only if Muslims are able to become "to westernized and perform [an] identity [determined by "mainstream 'whites'"] in return for acceptance and visibility" (1642). He continues,

> As in the process of the construction of national identities, the 'proper' identity for the otherised – colonial subjects, immigrants, refugees, and those who are 'different' – is identified with particular qualities and characteristics, including the manners, habits, perceptions, and moral values of the neo-colonial centre, and implicitly presented as the requirements of inclusion and integration through different control mechanisms such as education, media, and politics. (1646)

Isma "frantically" tries to perform a "'proper' identity" in the face of (white British) authority, the airport officials who question her to see whether she meets "the requirements of inclusion and integration." The fear of being classified as a terrorist prevents her from freely expressing her own views and she gives calculated responses. Here Isma must prove herself as not only a worthy ("proper") citizen but also as a good Muslim. As we come to learn, this is not the first time that she has had to prove herself as a "good" Muslim and, repeatedly in the novel, she practices and tries to be that: "good." In fact, it is her "goodness" that results in her reporting to authorities her own brother's departure to join a jihadi group. She is not the only

Muslim in the novel who goes to extremes to appear "good;" Karamat Lone, the Muslim British Home Secretary is another. He and Isma are both contrasted to Parvaiz and Aneeka, the "bad" Muslims who are part of *Home Fire*'s main cast.

In *Good Muslim, Bad Muslim* (2004), Mamdani argues that the value-laden terms in his title had their genesis in President Bush's speech in the aftermath of 9/11. According to Mamdani, for Bush, "'Bad Muslims' were clearly responsible for terrorism. At the same time, the president seemed to assure Americans that 'good Muslims were anxious to clear their names and consciences of the horrible crime and would undoubtedly support 'us' in a war against 'them'" (*Good Muslim, Bad Muslim* 15). Mamdani believes that the central message of this speech was that "unless proved to be 'good' every Muslim was presumed to be 'bad,'" which resulted in Muslims feeling obliged to prove themselves worthy by joining in a war against "bad" Muslims. He further states that: "judgments of 'good' and 'bad' refer to Muslim political identities, not to cultural or religious ones" (*Good Muslim, Bad Muslim* 15).

In these terms, "good" translates as westernised and secular, and "bad" means premodern and fanatical. In a similar vein, Uzma Jamil writes, in the context of a discussion of Amy Waldman's *The Submission*, that after 9/11, an "idea" began to circulate in the West:

> [T]he idea that Muslims – all Muslims everywhere – must take moral responsibility for the 9/11 attacks because they are all Muslim. Thus, they are asked to denounce terrorism and to apologize for the actions of others on the basis that their shared religion is responsible for the violence. And they are asked to do this, not just once after the 9/11 attacks, but after every terrorist incident, or attempt, involving Muslims anywhere in the world. The criticism that 'Muslims are not doing enough to condemn terrorism' is often circulated in the media after any such event. Through this, Muslims are asked to soothe the fears of the west and to defuse their anxieties by reassuring them that they are

> ‘good Muslims’ or ‘moderate Muslims,’ not the violent, blowing-up-things kind of ‘bad Muslims.’ However, both ‘good Muslims’ and ‘bad Muslims’ confirm and validate the superior position of the west in relation to the violent and threatening Muslim Other. (33)

What I take Jamil to mean here is that it is the West that assumes the responsibility – and the authority – to determine which Muslims are “good” (or “bad”) and why. The West sets the terms and applies the distinctions between them, in ways that have little to do with religion and everything to do with politics. All this is neatly encapsulated in the opening pages of *Home Fire*.

Throughout the novel Isma is desperate to prove herself as a good and model British-Muslim – and doing so comes at a huge familial cost. Reporting Parvaiz’s departure to join ISIS is motivated by her desire to prove that she is a ‘proper’ citizen. Parvaiz and Aneeka are not only Isma’s siblings, but they are the only family that she has left, following the death of their parents. Isma is desperate to secure and reconfirm her own and Aneeka’s place in British society. She must convince the authorities that she is a worthy citizen who is concerned for the safety and security of her fellow British citizens. But this results in her selling out her own brother, whom she has put her own life on hold to raise. Isma struggles to navigate the tension between being a good Muslim and a good sister.

Isma’s desperate attempt to stress to the British officials and the British public that she and Aneeka are decent citizens and not a threat to the country’s security is asserted in the press statement she gives after Parvaiz’s collaboration with ISIS and his death in Istanbul becomes public knowledge. In the statement, Isma affirms that the sisters were both “shattered” and “horrified” upon learning that their brother had joined the “people we regard as the enemies of both Britain and Islam” (*Home Fire* 197). In another frantic attempt to highlight her “goodness,” Isma points out that it was the family who “informed Counter Terrorism

Command immediately" (197). Additionally, Isma is determined to let the public know that the sisters have no intentions of bringing Parvaiz's body back for a funeral and her last announcement, that "relatives will make plans for his burial, as an act of remembrance to our late mother" (197), is a clear attempt to prove that not only the Pasha sisters, but also their relatives are aware of the wrong doings of Adil and Parvaiz and do not want to be associated with either one. Similarly, like Isma, their local mosque also issues a statement to stress that they too will not hold funeral prayers for "the dead man, and condemned rumors to the contrary as 'part of a campaign of hatred against law-abiding British Muslims'" (197).

As pointed out above, Karamat Lone is another character who is determined to prove to mainstream British society that he is a good Muslim and a model citizen. Karamat has assimilated into his host society and enjoys the privileges of social inclusion. He has been so successful in this that he has become the UK Home Secretary whose decisions have consequences not only for the whole country and for British-Muslim communities in general, but also for his own family. The son of Pakistani immigrants, Karamat grew up a practicing Muslim but as the story progresses it becomes evident to the reader that he has turned his back on his faith to gain acceptance and to progress in his political career. He is first introduced to the reader through the eyes of Isma, early in the novel. She remembers her grandmother calling him "shameless" and her uncle describing him as an opportunist. The real reason for the accusation of shamelessness is not openly discussed at this stage, but in a passage in which Isma recollects learning about Karamat, who featured in one of her uncle's childhood photographs, she remembers her grandmother talking of the "cruelty he'd recently shown to their family when it would have been so easy for him to act otherwise" (*Home Fire* 15). Isma compares Karamat to other men of the same background, men like her uncle: "In the years after that she'd paid close attention to him – the only one in the picture to grow up slim and sharp, bigger and brighter trophies forever in his sights" (15-16). She recalls that her family believed

that when naming his son, Karamat had used "an Irish spelling to disguise a Muslim name – Ayman became Eamonn so that people would know the father had integrated. (His Irish-American wife was seen as another indicator of this integrationist posing rather than an explanation for the son's name)" (15-16).

In an article for *The Guardian*, Shamsie talks about Karamat's character. Initially the idea of "A Tory with a Muslim background holding one of the great offices of state" was ridiculous to her and she dismissed the idea as too far-fetched to be believable ("True Story" n.p.).[78] She continues to say that if it had been a few years earlier she would have given up the idea and moved to another one, but it was the summer of 2015 and the political landscape of Britain was changing. She saw a newspaper photo that included three UK politicians with a Pakistani Muslim background:

> So, you could say that while Karamat Lone is a product of my imagination, [but] I wouldn't have been able to imagine him if I hadn't first looked at that trio of politicians and believed that one of them might one day occupy one of the highest political offices in the land. ("True Story" n.p.)[79]

Karamat Lone turns his back on his familial religion and culture and is excluded by the Muslim community but he is rewarded by British society for his efforts to assimilate. When Eamonn first talks to Isma about his father becoming the Home Secretary, he mentions "*All the old muck*" (*Home Fire* 35) that the newspapers scrape about Karamat. The "old muck" that Eamonn is talking about is a picture of Karamat walking into a mosque which had been in the news for its "hate preacher." Karamat had responded to the media interest by saying that he was only there for his uncle's funeral prayers and "would otherwise never enter a gender-segregated space" (35). He was sure to be seen (and photographed) a few weeks later, with "his wife

[78] This is also discussed in Simon Hoper and Daniel Hilton (2018).
[79] The trio were Sajid Javid, Sadiq Khan and Sayeeda Warsi.

walking hand in hand into a church" (35) and this resulted in him being voted out by his Muslim-majority constituency.

Shortly after, he was returned to parliament as the result of a by-election in a largely-white constituency, while also winning the British tabloids over for what they believed as "taking on the backwardness of British Muslims" (35). Karamat is referred to by the press as a "Lone Crusader" and a "Lone Wolf" (35) – a perhaps ironic gesture by Shamsie towards the "lone wolf" title given to (Muslim) terrorists who operate alone. The speech that he gave in a "predominantly Muslim school in Bradford" is an important example of how Karamat publicly comments on his own religion and prioritises the importance of assimilating and adopting British values. In his speech he creates a utopian image of Britain where anything is possible. He insists that "if I can do it, then you can too" but achieving the dream involves repudiating cultural or religious identities regarded as "different" by the mainstream:

> There is nothing this country won't allow you to achieve, Olympic medals, captaincy of the cricket team, pop stardom, reality TV crowns. And if none of that works out, you can settle for being Home Secretary. You are, we are British. Britain accepts this. So do most of you. But for those of you who are in some doubt about it, let me say this: don't set yourselves apart in the way you dress, the way you think, the outdated codes of behaviour you cling to, the ideologies to which you attach your loyalties. Because if you do, you will be treated differently – not because of racism, though that does still exist, but because you insist on your difference from everyone else in this multi-ethic, multi-religious, multitudinous United Kingdom of ours. And look at all you miss out because of it. (87-88)

Karamat's speech not only potentially influences how Muslims are perceived and treated in British society but also puts a strain on his son's relationship with Aneeka. When Eamonn asks

Aneeka if anyone gives her a hard time for wearing a hijab, she responds by saying that, like any other 19-year-old female, she gets some harsh treatment for whatever she is wearing. What aggravates public opinion and makes people hostile, she clarifies, is: "Terrorist attacks involving European victims. Home Secretaries talking about people setting themselves apart in the way they dress. That kind of thing" (90). She asks, "What do you say to your father when he makes a speech like that? Do you say, Dad, you're making it OK to stigmatise people for the way they dress?" (90). This conversation between the two lovers continues until Eamonn says that the reason his father advises the Muslim community to adapt to British ways, mostly insisting on changing the way they dress, is so that "people like you" would "suffer less" (91). Eamonn uses a cliché that helps depict the lovers' different places in British society, and the fact that this difference is due to not only how well they have assimilated but also to how their fathers have behaved.

Eamonn is from a mixed-raced, affluent family, and despite having a Muslim father he does not identify himself as a Muslim or of Pakistani decent. His lack of understanding of Islamic faith, based on his father's views on Islam, results in him having differences of opinion with the Pasha sisters. Eamonn mingles with his white European friends and to some extent he is accepted in their circle. He starts to live a double life: one he shares with his secretive lover Aneeka who contends that they must keep everything a mystery, and the other he shares with his friends. But he is troubled by the fact that he must hide Aneeka from his friends: "What was the point of hiding yourself with other versions of yourself all the time?"

As his relationship with Aneeka develops, he becomes withdrawn and keeps more to himself. His upper-class friends tease him, with Max saying, "Twenty-something unemployed male from Muslim background exhibits rapidly altered pattern of behaviour, cuts himself off from old friends, moves under the radar. Also, are we sure that's an evening shadow rather than an incipient beard? I think we may need to alert the authorities" (*Home Fire* 82). The reader

might assume this as a joke amongst friends, but Max's simple and lighthearted comment cleverly points to how British citizens have internalised current public security policies, such as the 'Prevent' strategy in the UK. This (controversial) counter-terrorism strategy seeks "both to educate communities on the risks of radicalisation and to stage interventions with vulnerable individuals long before any crime has been committed" (Warrell n.p.). As of 1st July 2015, childcare providers in the UK were subject to a duty, known as the Prevent Duty: "the need to prevent people from being drawn to terrorism." Schools and childcare staff are now required to "identify children who may be vulnerable to radicalisation and know what to do when they are identified" ("Protecting Children from Radicalisation" n.p.). The most important and essential part of this strategy is the demand on schools and childcare providers to "build resilience to radicalisation by promoting fundamental British values and enabling them to challenge extremist views" ("Protecting Children from Radicalisation" n.p.). Since the implementation of this strategy, British students are monitored and surveilled, even from a young age. According to the guidelines, it is understood that the risks of radicalisation in children and youngsters varies from area to area and according to their age. Education staff are required to track changes in children's behaviours to help and 'offer protection' or otherwise intervene, and to report any suspicions they may have. They are asked to effectively engage with children's family members as it is thought that they are "in a key position to spot signs of radicalization" ("Protecting Children from Radicalisation: The Prevent Duty").[80]

In the novel, although Karamat chooses to distance himself from the Muslim community for what appears to be political advancement, Eamonn has truly internalised his father's views that to be an acceptable member of British society he has to stop *being* a Muslim in religious or cultural ways. To Eamonn, the Muslim community is wrong in having voted his

[80] For further reading see: "Prevent Strategy." edited by Home Department, June 2011. https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/97976/prevent-strategy-review.pdf.

father out. The extent of this internalisation is evident in passages such as the following in which free indirect discourse offers us insight into Eamonn's thoughts:

> All because he expressed a completely enlightened preference for the conventions of a church over those of a mosque, and spoke of the need for British Muslims to lift themselves out of the Dark Ages if they wanted the rest of the nation to treat them with respect. (*Home Fire* 59).

The final word in the above extract is telling. Eamonn believes that for Muslims to be treated with *respect* in mainstream society they need to discard their religion and beliefs. This can be seen in his conversation with the Pasha sisters regarding their dress code. In his first encounter with Isma he questions her on her hijab and asks: "The turban. Is that a style thing or a Muslim thing?" and, when she responds that others who had questioned her on her hijab wanted to know whether it was part of her style or a "chemo thing," Eamonn laughs and jokingly says, "Cancer or Islam – which is the greater affliction?" (21). Almost immediately, he realises that maybe he should not have made such a remark, and asserts "it must be difficult to be Muslim in the world these days" (21). Her response discomforts him: "I'd find it more difficult to not be Muslim" (21). Deftly, Shamsie makes the reader privy to Isma's thoughts: "She had assumed that in some way, however secular, however political rather than religious, he identified as Muslim" (21-22). But Eamonn appears to have realised, as she has yet not at this stage in the novel, that one cannot identify as *both* Muslim and British. Ultimately, she will learn this lesson and be forced to make a choice between the two. Unlike Isma, who observes Islam by not only wearing her hijab and praying but also in her relationships, Aneeka is forced to sacrifice her belief in her Britishness to return her brother's body home.

Just as Eamonn has internalised his father's assumptions, the airport scene reveals to the reader how Isma has internalised social assumptions of "Flying While Muslim." In the airport interrogation scene, readers have access to Isma's thoughts and see that she is aware of

the psychological game the officers are playing. While they are checking her passport, laptop, and phone in another room, she repacks her suitcase in the interrogation room and then starts worrying about how this might look. Readers are shown the extent to which she is both self-aware, and self-policing. In this respect she appears to be the modern 'subject' theorised by Michel Foucault, one who fears the *possibility* of appearing 'abnormal' and so regulates their own behaviour in expectation of discipline or punishment by authorities. In *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (1975), for example, Foucault articulates an idea of the gaze via the metaphor of the panopticon envisaged by Bentham: a means by which the threat of surveillance results in personal self-regulation.

The topic of gaze and surveillance does not only present itself in the interrogation room. This, the internalisation of the societal gaze, is highlighted throughout the novel, recreating a context where, as the Prevent strategy briefly discussed above shows, there is every reason why a Muslim in Britain would feel the need to modulate their behaviour and actions. Like most Muslims (at least since 9/11 and 7/7), Isma has had to carry the burden of the normative British gaze through her life, but this has been exacerbated courtesy of her absent father, whom the reader later learns has joined the jihadi.[81] The extent to which she feels under surveillance is gradually revealed, starting with the revelation that Isma rejects renting an apartment with a skylight because the only thing that she can think about is "surveillance satellites wheeling through the sky" (*Home Fire* 9). However, the reader needs to wait before they learn of the reasons for her fear of being watched and this doesn't occur until the third section of the novel, focalised by Parvaiz. Here we learn of the arrival of MI5 at the Pasha family home when he

[81] At the end of Chapter One, focalised by Isma, the reader is encouraged to suspect that Adil Pasha was radicalised and joined a jihadi group. However, Shamsie does not enclose this information directly to the reader. The reader infers this through a series of clues from the locations of war which he has joined: Bosnia, Kashmir, Chechnya, Kosovo and Afghanistan. But perhaps the most significant pointer is when it is mentioned that MI5 and the Special Branch had made inquiries about Adil and despite Isma's grandmother's insistence that they should seek government help in trying to locate him, Isma's mother refused, saying: "if we tried looking for him we'd be harassed by Special Branch, and by people in the neighbourhood who would start to suspect our sympathies" (49).

was still a child. He remembers the intelligence services as friendly on the first day that they had come to their house. He even remembers one of the officers playing racing cars with him before taking his father's pictures away (124).

As the novel progresses, the reader comes to realise that the Pasha siblings are not wrong to assume that they are being watched. For instance, Aneeka insists that Eamonn should keep their relationship a secret. Towards the end of Chapter Two, Eammon goes to see his father to talk to him about Aneeka and ask for his help to bring Parvaiz back home. When Eammon starts to describe the woman he loves, Karamat puts the pieces together and realises that his son has been in a relationship with the daughter and sister of terrorists. The conversation that Eamonn and Karamat hold at this moment proves Aneeka's point that the British intelligence services have kept an eye on her, and she needed to be cautious:

> I haven't done anything. The officers who were called in when her brother left were concerned about her. They said she was clearly shocked by what he had done, but seemed more upset about being kept in the dark than the fact of his going. They thought she might be at risk of trying to join him. So there've been some people keeping an eye on her, for her own safety. But apparently there've been no phone calls, no texts, no communication of any kind that could be intercepted to suggest she was in touch with my son. Nothing to set off alarm bells. And now, this. (111)

It is interesting here to note how Aneeka has managed to master the art of being invisible. Since their father left, the Pashas have been under scrutiny and each member of the family has responded in a different manner. While Aneeka has managed to go unnoticed, Isma has internalised the hegemony of the MI5.

Isma's thoughts on her browser history while being interrogated at the airport aligns with Shamsie's own self-awareness about her activity on the web. Julia Felsenthal reports that

Shamsie confessed to being very aware of "Googling while Muslim" when she was doing research on the book. She was concerned her searches on aspects of radicalisation and Islamic terrorism, for example, would attract attention especially given her Muslim identity. She explains that to avoid this she would look at several relevant websites, and then go and look at celebrity websites. Just like Isma, who had practiced careful answers for a potential interrogation, Shamsie says she constantly surveilled herself and prepared answers should intelligence agencies knock on her door and question her about her research: "But of course it all feeds into the novel as well. I am a novelist. I write for *The Guardian*. I'm on the BBC. There are 20 people I know who can vouch for me" (n.p). As Mythen suggests:

> Understandably, the uncertainty around the limits and boundaries of counterterrorism law has encouraged a tendency towards the muting of personal and political views [by Muslims] that may, however tenuously, be construed as endorsing terrorism. … In so far as the right to free speech for Muslims in Britain has been a long-standing problem (see Werbner 2000, Modood 2002), since 9/11 the range of political expression has perceptibly narrowed. This narrowing is demonstrated at a micro level by the acts of self-censorship routinely practised by participants in [my] study. (421)

By revealing what her characters think but do not – and dare not – say Shamsie makes clear the extent to which they "mut[e] … personal and political views."

Isma's experience at the airport and her interrogation responses offer a very clear portrayal not only of the religious and cultural profiling experienced by Muslims in the West but also of the extent to which they, in the words of Mythen, are continually forced to 'self-censor.' Arguably, Shamsie chose to begin the novel with this scene because it so clearly highlights an activity in which all the Muslim characters in the novel are engaged: self-censorship. The inner struggle of these characters is revealed through Shamsie's careful

manipulation of free-indirect discourse enabling readers to see behind the external persona each presents. Access to these characters' interiority presents the reader with a creative portrayal of the painful impact of their desire to keep their place in British society and, at the same time, stay true to their own beliefs, political opinions, familial and personal responsibilities.

This tension finds its most sophisticated representation in the book in the recreation of Parvaiz's radicalisation process. There are many definitions of radicalisation and multiple discussions of it. For the purposes of this thesis, I will use the definition provided in the "Prevent Strategy" document published by the UK government. According to this document, "radicalisation" is "the process through which a person comes to support and forms of extremism leading to terrorism" and adopts an extreme and inflexible degree of ideological extremism which leads them to commit terrorist acts against those who do not share their ideological beliefs (107). A radicaliser or recruiter is someone "who encourages others to develop or adopt beliefs and views supportive of terrorism and forms of extremism leading to terrorism" (107). The *Prevent Strategy* document further explains radicalisation by stating that it is nourished by an ideology that both justifies and glorifies the use of violence "and by personal vulnerabilities and specific local factors which, for a range of reasons, make that ideology seem both attractive and compelling" (5). This document presents radicalisation as a process and not an event, and suggests it is possible to intervene during this process to prevent vulnerable people from engaging in terrorist related activities (8).

For a considerable period of time, especially after 9/11, there were three attempts to explain why some individuals were radicalised and others not. The first, a sociological approach, attempted to find a common social background among jihadists; the second, psychological approach tried to define and describe a certain kind of (dysfunctional) personality type shared by those who are radicalised; the third, communitarian in focus, posited that radicalisation was the result of group dynamics. The first and second approaches have been

discredited as singular and definitive causes, as Claire Chambers outlines in *Making Sense of Contemporary British Muslim Novels*. The sociological approach was discredited because not all jihadists are poor, unmarried, uneducated or loners as first assumed (*Making Sense* 172). The psychological approach was dismissed "because there is little evidence to suggest that jihadists who work in groups (as compared with lone actors) have higher instances of mental illness than the wider population"; "nor is there evidence to suggest that a higher than average proportion of jihadists have experienced childhood trauma that, according to a psychoanalytic approach, might have sent them down the route of violence" (172). Chambers continues: "Rather, what leads people to seek out jihad are the circumstances and social bonds individuals find themselves embroiled in – especially an intense male bonding based on a shared view of religion and politics, and a desire for adventure" (172-3). She goes on to argue that "interpersonal interactions" and "group dynamics" "exert a strong influence" on the radicalisation of characters in the two novels she discusses, *Home Fire* and Tabish Khair's *Just Another Jihadi Jane* (2016), along with "a combination of personal and political circumstances" (173,179) – including the sale of the family home, his twin's failure to come when he sends a message asking for her help (*Home Fire* 139) and pervasive anti-Muslim racism experienced in daily life.

While I agree that Parvaiz might experience "a crisis of masculinity precipitated in part by a fellow British Pakistani Farooq's charming machinations that recruit him to Daesh", I am not wholly convinced that "[r]eaders hear a susurrus of homoeroticism between the two men" (Chambers, *Making Sense* 176). Farooq is a substitute father figure for Parvaiz, not an erotic interest. Farooq is slow and methodical in his grooming of Parvaiz who is not radicalised overnight. Ultimately it is not religion or religious ideologies which motivate him to join ISIS, but rather the desire to find what has been missing from his life. Parvaiz decides to move to the Caliphate to learn about his absent father.

Adil Pasha's absence has left a void in Parvaiz, further compounded by the many ambiguities and questions surrounding the circumstances of his father's departure and death. He is left on his own to cope with the difficulties that he encounters and is immediately attracted to Farooq who claims he will adopt the absent father's role and teach Parvaiz "how to be a man" (*Home Fire* 129). Farooq first fills Parvaiz's mind with many unanswered questions, and when Parvaiz starts looking for answers and sees that he cannot find them within his immediate family, Farooq shows up with beautifully crafted answers and fills the gaps. Parvaiz never knew his father and what he had hoped for his son's future, so Farooq steps up and slyly tells him "those stories of his father for which he'd always yearned" (128). He says that Adil had dreamt of Parvaiz becoming a hero and a warrior. Parvaiz has no real image nor knowledge of who his father was, and Farooq cunningly constructs ideal images of Adil to persuade Parvaiz to join ISIS. We are not simply told this by Shamsie's narrator. The author allows her readers to observe and even understand Parvaiz's lengthy radicalisation process through learning of his inner struggles and the secrets that members of his family have been keeping from each other. As a result of Shamsie's manipulation of focalisation throughout the novel, the reader also comes to realise how Parvaiz's decisions, and the various secrets held by themselves and others, result in his sisters' social victimisation.

Part of Farooq's education in 'manliness' involves having accomplices inflict extreme pain on Parvaiz, using torture methods we know were (and probably still are) are used by the US on terrorist suspects: prolonged exposure to loud noise (Parvaiz was born with a heightened sensitivity to sound) and chaining him in a stress posture. Farooq claims he is making Parvaiz feel the torture his father experienced at Bagram airbase where he was held prisoner by the Americans:

> The chain was so short that it was impossible either to straighten up or topple over entirely, and he could only remain hunched in a squatting position, the

> pressure on his back increasing by the minute. What started as discomfort eventually became pain, shooting from his back down through his legs. When he tried to move – tried to find a way to roll onto his side – the chains cut into his flesh.
>
> …
>
> He [Parvaiz] heard his voice begging, but the two men didn't even look in his direction. The video-game sound designer hadn't accounted for cheap speakers, and the crackling and distortion were more intolerable than gunfire and death screams. He tried prayer but it did nothing. […] Every crackle from the speakers was magnified until it became a physical force attacking his ears. He was screaming in pain, had been screaming in pain, for a very long time. One of the cousins pressed pause. The sounds of the everyday rushed to embrace him – rattling windows, traffic, his breath. The two men walked over, unshackled him. (136-137)

He is given a new name, Mohammad bin Bagram, "both a reminder of what his father has suffered and an acknowledgement that this new Parvaiz was born out of vengeance and justice, Farooq said" (*Home Fire* 158). Farooq claims to be educating him in "those larger responsibilities [taken on by his father] than ones his wife and mother want to chain him to" (*Home Fire* 128). He replaces the "chains" of female family members with the masculine chains of torture and violence. In the interview with Currier, Shamsie explains why she believes it is important to write about the radicalisation process and the issue of home-grown terrorism, and why she chose to do so. According to her, all she had found about radicalisation in fiction (and many populist nonfictional accounts) was "demonization and one-dimensional narratives," where "[i]f you're young, Muslim and male, and angry, then you're going to strap a bomb onto yourself." In the same interview, Shamsie says that her research on the subject

has proven that the reality is far more complex than this. She talks about the recruitment techniques she portrayed Farooq as using on Parvaiz, where he "plays on his insecurities and loneliness and offers him an imagined community of brotherhood" (Currier n.p.). His grooming was tailored to suit his specific situation and emotional needs, as is the case in many real-life instances of radicalisation.

Shamsie's novel is notable for the ways in which she portrays this complex *inner* process, and, in this respect, it differs from many other novels in which characters are radicalicised. Indeed, as I have argued, John Updike's *Terrorist* purports to portray Ahmad's radicalisation but resorts to heavy-handed religious stereotyping and the portrait of the protagonist – including the impact of his fatherless state – is never fully convincing in psychological terms. And in *A Good Country*, while readers are privy to Rez's thinking due to the author's limited third-person narration, his radicalisation basically occurs off the page: we learn that it happens but not *how* it happened. Furthermore, in contrast with other radicalisation novels that I have read (to date), Shamsie represents the *consequences* of the process of radicalisation: how a terrorist is stripped of his/her citizenship for example, and what the cost for their family is. Most other radicalisation narratives that I have read end with the fate of the radicalised person. In *A Good Country*, Khadivi ends the novel with Rez in Syria and the reader is not made aware of when or how his family learnt of his radicalisation or how it affected them not only as a family but also in their society. How Martin Amis's and Don DeLillo's terrorists are recruited, and what the costs of this are for their families and friends is never explored (they are vapourised when the bombs explode at the end of their respective novels). Shamsie's novel, in contrast, shows the devastation that the Pasha family members go through because of the double radicalisation, of father and brother, they have experienced.

Simon Hooper and Daniel Hilton, in an interview, asked Shamsie how important she feels it is to tackle issues such as counter-terrorism, the Prevent strategy and other such matters, to which she responded:

> In 2016, the writer Gillian Slovo wrote a verbatim play *Another World: Losing Our Children to Islamic State*, which was performed at the National Theatre. She found it impossible to talk to the families of those who had gone to join Daesh [ISIS], because of the legal issues you mention (she ended up travelling to Brussels, where there were support groups for such families). [82] I was already working on *Home Fire* and it struck me that if people feel they can't tell their stories in any kind of non-fiction forum then it places an extra sense of urgency for writers and artists to take these matters up. (n.p)

Here Shamsie again returns to the theme of her essay, "The Storytellers of Empire," which I discussed at the start of this chapter: the paucity of (post-9/11) fiction that fully engages with the complexities of terrorism and looks outwards for causes rather than inward to insular trauma. In *Home Fire* she begins to address the deficiencies she assesses.

After Isma moves to the US to do her PhD and Aneeka has received a scholarship to study law, Parvaiz is left to fend for himself and tries to busy himself with his hobby of recording sound. In steps Farooq, who plays on Parvaiz's vulnerabilities, his lack of knowledge of his father, his apparent domination by an elder sister, his insecurities, and his sense of not belonging. Parvaiz is promised a utopian state within the Caliphate, where he would fit in and be treated as the man that he is and more importantly, a place where he can belong. Lydia Wilson points out that the Islamic State's indoctrination tactics exploit the all-consuming desire of recruits to belong and feel accepted. The contextual push factor, she argues, is "we welcome

[82] British citizens who were involved in aid work in Syria but were stripped of their citizenship and unable to return. British Muslim communities are also wary to talk about such issues since they feel under suspicion.

you in a world that continually rejects your identity as Muslim" (8). Parvaiz's primary motivation to leave for Raqqa is to fight for a cause that his father supported and to learn more about Adil, the "warrior." Although he knows his British citizenship will probably be revoked by the UK, he is promised a state in the Caliphate where he will fully fit in and enjoy the brotherhood that he desires, as well as the respect he is told he is due. However, Parvaiz is horrified by the extent of violence that he witnesses in Raqqa and realises he doesn't fit. Unfortunately, by the time he acknowledges this, it is too late.

Farooq is in his thirties, a "compact but powerfully built man, muscles distorting the shape of his tightly fitting bomber jacket" (*Home Fire* 123). Parvaiz's mobile phone is taken from him by Farooq's cousins in what he believes is a random attack and, as he lies on the ground of the car park afterwards, he thinks to himself: "How he hated his life, this neighbourhood, the inevitability of everything" (123). The next day when Farooq meets Parvaiz for the first time and hands him back his phone, he captures Parvaiz's attention by saying, "He [the thief] didn't realise who you were" (123). Although Parvaiz thinks that Farooq is returning his mobile phone because of his beautiful and smart twin, Aneeka, he is soon corrected by Farooq who announces that he knows of Abu[83] Parvaiz. The name is not familiar to Parvaiz, however, and he informs Farooq that he does not know of anyone by this name. Farooq responds: "Don't you know your own father's name?" (124). Upon hearing his father's name, Parvaiz immediately questions whether Farooq belongs to "MI5? Special Branch?" (124) and makes this assumption because he recalls the behaviour of the special agents, who searched the family home for items of interest in relation to his father: "[t]hey, too, had seemed so friendly" (124). Parvaiz knows his father as Adil Pasha and not Abu Parvaiz, but what draws the reader's attention is that Parvaiz had always been instructed by his mother to say, "I never knew my father."

[83] "Abu" is an Arabic word which means "father".

This is the response that he gives Farooq too. Farooq cleverly replies by stating: "He regretted that … . That you never knew him. He fought with my father; I heard all the stories of the great warrior Abu Parvaiz" (125). Farooq claims that Abu Parvaiz was Adil Pasha's "Superhero name." Having captivated Parvaiz's attention, Farooq continues:

> When he entered the fight for justice he called himself Father of Parvaiz. That was his way of keeping you close. So any time someone said his name – his enemies with fear, his brothers with love, his comrades with honour – they were saying your name too. (125)

Research shows that those children who grow up without fathers are more likely to experience negative emotions, feelings of inferiority and embarrassment, poor self-esteem, and low confidence because they evaluate their circumstances in contrast to other children who have fathers and this can raise many psychosocial issues (Simnikiwe Magqamfana and Sandiso Bazana, "Absent Fathers"). Wilson Muna, in "Family-Based Networks: Soft Policy Tools in Countering Radicalisation to Violent Extremism," examines the crucial role of family-based networks both as a means for facilitating violent extremism activities as well as a way to prevent radicalisation and recruitment of youth into violent extremist groups.

According to Muna's research, those individuals who are at risk of radicalisation or are attracted to radical ideologies have often experienced family negligence or have an absent parental figure, notably in their early years. He further explains that family plays a crucial and decisive role in an individual's growth, development and life choices, therefore his/her radicalisation is not only triggered through external factors but also internally through environments in which they have grown. Muna's extensive research reveals that feelings of resentment and isolation are evident in absent father cases, and these feelings can "contribute to a young person's vulnerability to recruitment into violent extremism" ("Family-Based Networks" n.p.). Farooq expertly sparks an interest within Parvaiz by mentioning his father's

name. At this stage the reader has been informed that Adil Pasha was a jihadi fighter, who had abandoned his family and had joined a jihadi group, however Farooq justifies Adil Pasha's absence by claiming that he fought for justice. Once he has Parvaiz's full attention, Farooq declares that not only Abu Parvaiz, but also the other fighters alongside him, when in battlefield, were all "saying your name too," suggesting that this could be Parvaiz's destiny (*Home Fire* 125).

Hearing this, Parvaiz becomes emotional and in awe of Farooq: "Horribly, Parvaiz felt tears come to his eyes in the company of a man who probably wouldn't cry if you drove a tank over his legs" (125). But Farooq is neither horrified nor draws back, and instead expresses his gratitude saying, "I'm glad I've found you, brother"(126). The word brother for Muslims carries a great meaning. It is not just a polite thing to say but a way of expressing deep inner personal feelings to another man and conveying the feeling that there is a close bond between them. *Akhi* is the Arabic word for brother and carries a religious connotation derived from the Quran where it is mentioned that "the believers are but brothers."[84] Brotherhood for Muslims is about caring, protecting, and feeling responsible for each other, it is a way of saying that we are spiritually connected with each other and are equal. Brothers support each other in times of hardship and treat each other with respect and compassion; they offer each other loyalty and unconditional love. In *A Good Country* Rez is called "brother" by Arash, who over a Skype chat reports that he is in a good land. Rez is immediately attracted to the idea of this good land where he can be with his brother. For both Rez and Parviaz, being called "brother," carries a significant emotional meaning.

Secrecy shrouds Farooq and Parvaiz's relationship from the beginning and Parvaiz hides the fact that he has met someone who knows about his father. When Farooq questions

[84] Quran 49:10

Parvaiz on why he knows so little of his father, Parvaiz's flashbacks to the old days reveal why he does not want his sisters to know of his acquaintance with Farooq:

> He'd grown up knowing that his father was a shameful secret, one that must be kept from the world outside or else posters would appear around Preston Road with the line DO YOU KNOW WHO YOUR NEIGHBOURS ARE? And rocks would be thrown through windows and he and his sisters wouldn't receive invitations to the homes of their classmates and no girl would ever say yes to him. (*Home Fire* 126)

In the section of the novel that is focalised via Parvaiz, it becomes clear that the emotional/internal conflicts experienced by him are not associated with his religious or ethnic identity but with the lack of parental figures, his overbearing sisters and public racial profiling. Not only does he have a physically absent father, but even when she was alive, his mother was not emotionally present to support him and answer questions that he might have about his father. Parvaiz is portrayed as a young man with no real family support. From an early age, he has carried an enormous emotional burden: his father's name has been associated with shame, and his existence was something that must be kept secret. Adil Pasha is a name that the family not only keeps as a secret from the outside world, but one that cannot be mentioned in the household either:

> His mother and Isma both carried around an anger towards Adil Pasha too immense for words, and as for Aneeka – her complete lack of feeling or curiosity about their father had been the first definite sign that he and his twin were two, not one. (126)

The only member of the family who had talked about Adil Pasha was his mother, who spoke of her son as the "high-spirited, good-looking, laughing-eyed boy she'd raised" (127) but even she only shared stories of the boy and not the man Adil had become. Consequently, Farooq

captivates Parvaiz's attention when he partners Adil Pasha's name with a description of him as a hero who fought for a cause. When Parvaiz asks to know more about his father, Farooq artfully pretends to hesitate: "Once you know, you'll have to think about what it means to be that man's son. Maybe it's easier never to think about him" (127). Farooq is patient; he understands that the radicalisation process takes time, and he spends this time slowly feeding Parvaiz with the information he craves, details about his father.

The lack of a father figure has affected Parvaiz all his life and it is here, in this section of the novel, that we are made privy to the extent of Parvaiz's inner sense of loss and lack, to which other characters in the novel are largely oblivious:

> He had always watched boys and their fathers with an avidity composed primarily of hunger. Whenever any of those fathers had made a certain kind of gesture towards him – a hand placed on the back of his neck, the word 'son', an invitation to a football match, he'd retreat, both ashamed and afraid in a jumbled way that only grew more so as the years passed and the world of girls and boys grew more separate, so there were times he was not a twin to a twin but rather the only male in a house that knew all the secrets that women shared with one another but none that fathers taught their sons.(127)

What we come to realise is just how much of Parvaiz's childhood and adolescence has been consumed with the mystery of Adil Pasha's absence. Parvaiz watches the way fathers play with their sons and show parental affection and he struggles to understand these relations. He is consumed with the desire to learn more about the man his father was and to find a reasonable answer as to why Adil Pasha abandoned the family. Farooq recognises this void in Parvaiz's life and plays the cards that provoke his curiosity:

> Farooq would talk and Parvaiz would listen to those stories of his father for which he'd always yearned – not a footloose boy or feckless husband, but a man

> of courage who fought injustice, saw beyond the lie of national boundaries, kept his comrades' spirits up through times of darkness. (128)

Farooq tells Parvaiz stories of a misunderstood hero he was, according to Farooq, "The father every son wishes he had," to which Parvaiz sadly responds, "I never had him as a father" (128). According to Farooq, Adil Pasha was driven by a deep understanding of how unjust the world that he was living in was and felt responsible for helping to change it: "Do you think he wanted the world to be as it is? No. But he saw it for what it is. And having seen it, he understood that a man has larger responsibilities than the ones his wife and mother want to chain him to" (128). Farooq talks about history of the world, about Muslims and Islam, to try to explain the larger responsibilities of a man. He manages to keep Parvaiz interested by talking about history and a variety of subjects like football and his daily life, however the core of his conversations always return to "how to be a man"(129), with the implication that to be one was to be like Adil Pasha.

The next step on Farooq's agenda is to demote the Pasha sisters. Farooq tells Parvaiz that his sisters have emasculated him, and that he and not his sisters should oversee the decisions of the household:

> They want you in the house, doing their shopping and mowing the garden, so they've tried to keep you a boy, a child in need of a mother. That older one particularly, you know what I mean? The one who claims to be a good Muslim, and thinks she has the right to decide whether or not you can live in your own house. Tell her it is written in the Quran, 'Men are in charge of women because Allah has made one of them excel the other.' And by Allah's law, you, not your women, dispose of your property. (130)

Parvaiz starts to think that "religion had, since early childhood, been a space he'd vacated rather than lived in, in the shadow of Isma's authority" (130-31). He begins to believe Farooq's claim

that the religion he has been exposed to by his mother and sister is "an emasculated version of Islam, bankrolled in mosques by the British government which wants to keep us all compliant, and there was more than a little satisfaction in knowing this" (131). In driving a wedge between Parvaiz and his sisters by the insistence on the importance of him belonging to a (non-compliant, *masculine*) Islamic community, Farooq follows a strategy that researchers have identified as being used by ISIS to recruit people to its causes. As Lydia Wilson points out, for example, "when someone feels a visceral oneness with the entire Islamic community, over and above his or her own biological family, that person can sacrifice all – including the family – for that one element of identity" (7). It is not surprising that Farooq follows what researchers identify as the common steps or stages of radicalisation, something Noor Dahri refers to as "mind processing" (*Global Jihad* 19-21).

As mentioned above, Shamsie conducted extensive research in this area because she wanted Parvaiz's radicalisation to be believable. In an interview with Jaya Bhattacharji Rose, she admits that in comparison to her other works, this one felt quite like "research lit" ("Interview" n.p.). She further explains that most of her research was done on "life in Raqqa under the Islamic State" and in order to get it right, she drew on documentaries, news reports, interviews, illustrations which she had found online: "The research all followed the needs of the novel, in quite a streamlined way, so I don't think there was anything I wanted to incorporate and didn't" ("Interview" n.p.). What she does differently to sociological and anthropological researchers, and policy analysts, however, is not simply *tell* about these strategies but show us into the mind of someone who is being "processed." She invites readers to understand the psychological drivers and effects of radicalisation. She encourages readers to understand it, as Currier claims in her summary of an interview with Shamsie: "In the narratives that [Shamsie] read of radicalization, of youth attempting to join ISIS, Shamsie saw only demonization and one-dimensional narratives. ... But she dug into research on ISIS

propaganda and youth who were convinced by it and found that the reality for many teenage would-be fighters, was complex" ("Novelist Kamila Shamsie" n.p.). Currier quotes Shamsie as saying "One of the things I was interested in was the lure being something other than violence […] What is it with men, what is it with masculinity, what is it that young men do to prove to themselves or to someone else that they are a man in the right kind of way?" (n.p.).

Shamsie was also deeply concerned with portraying how the radicalisation of a family member (very often a son or brother) affects the family. By structuring the novel in five sections, each focalised through one of the main characters, Shamsie is also able to portray the ways in which the relatives of radicalised youth feel and how they are treated because of their brother's choices. "I mean, what [Parvaiz] did to his sisters is to me the unforgivable bit," she commented to Currier, before adding, "Well, maybe it's unforgivable, but it's not inhuman" (n.p.).

Parvaiz has a very strong bond with his twin, Aneeka, and when he withdraws from his family after meeting Farooq, a concerned Aneeka thinks it is because he is in love. Eventually Parvaiz's behaviour changes towards his favourite sister and he questions the nature of her academic scholarship: "'they only gave you a scholarship because you tick their "inclusive" and "diverse" boxes,' he said, wounded enough to vocalise a sentiment that Farooq had recently dredged out of his unconscious'" (*Home Fire* 132). He continues to voice his dissatisfaction with British society which, he claims, believes that "Muslim women, particularly the beautiful ones, need to be saved from Muslim men. Muslim men need to be detained, harassed, pressed against the ground with a heel on our throat" (132). The meetings and conversations that Parvaiz has with Farooq result in Parvaiz questioning not only his own identity but that of his sisters. too. Caught in a web of confusion and conflicting paths, he feels increasingly excluded from both his immediate family and the wider society around him. According to Ashley M.

Ehman, “It has been documented that the majority of ISIS recruits are people who lacked a sense of belonging within their communities. … ISIS recruiters play into this sense of isolation by convincing recruits that no one understands them” (*True Teen Stories from Iraq* 95-6). Farooq knows this; first he works to alienate Parvaiz from his existing community – familial and local – and then offers him an alternative to which he can belong.

In such circumstances, it is not surprising that Parvaiz is attracted by the notion of brotherhood. Being called “brother” by Farooq makes Parvaiz think that they are both connected and belong to the same community, and consequently Parvaiz thinks of Farooq as “yaar” (friend) and “jigari dost” (best friend). Arie W. Kruglanski believes that ISIS recruitment works less through theology than psychology (“Psychology not Theology” n.p.). Majeed Khader et al. similarly suggests that it is less a military matter than a “human-cultural-psychological” one (*Combating Violent Extremism* xxiii). It is this which makes it hard to definitively list the kind of people, circumstances and personalities that might be radicalised: recruitment involves an approach that is tailored to the specific emotional and psychological drivers of individual prospects. Kruglanski suggests that the appeal of violent extremist groups derives from the manner in which two basic human needs are exploited by recruiters: “the need for *cognitive closure* and the need for *personal significance”* (n.p). The cognitive closure sought by Parvaiz relates to his father; he seeks answers to why he left the family and effectively abandoned his only son. Personal significance is an important missing element in Parvaiz’s life; he is searching for something that can give his life a greater meaning and purpose. According to Kruglanski, ISIS offers its fighters a promise of personal gain that they cannot resist: “It is the sense that, by joining the fight against infidels, they earn the status of heroes and martyrs, thus gaining a larger-than-life significance and earning a spot in history” (n.p.). Shamsie offers an excellent portrayal of precisely this.

In Farooq's apartment there is only one photograph taped to the wall; it shows three men, one of whom is Adil Pasha. While looking at his father's picture, Parvaiz realises that "it was Isma, unfairly, who had their father's wider face, thinner lips" (*Home Fire* 135). The photograph is very significant because the reader knows that the MI5 had taken the pictures of Adil Pasha away and Parvaiz's mother would not allow them to keep pictures of their father. Farooq is seriously playing on Parvaiz's *personal* weaker points, notably those relating to his father. He starts with the story of Adil's heroism and then reveals he has a picture of him.

Farooq justifies the brutal treatment of Parvaiz by saying that he wanted Parvaiz to sense the torture that his father went through, but what is interesting is the fact that Parvaiz goes back for more. After the men torture Parvaiz the first time, Farooq comes in and while crying he says "They did this to your father for months" (138). An unlikely bond is formed here. When Parvaiz, who is physically and mentally drained from this interrogation, stands up to leave, Farooq says: "You're strong enough to bear this. You're his son, after all" (139). The picture of Adil Pasha has been placed there with a purpose: we are told "he [Parvaiz] had turned his head towards the wall, towards the photograph of his father, and there was this understanding, *I am you, for the first time*" (140). Farooq's success becomes evident when Parvaiz returns to his flat several days after and says: "Tie me again. I want to feel my father's pain." In reply, Farooq tells Parvaiz he is his "brave warrior" and Parvaiz kneels, ready to accept more "agony" (140).

Just as in *A Good Country*, one of the things that most attracts Parvaiz and convinces him to join ISIS is his belief in Farooq's description of a utopian place where everyone is equal and follows Allah's laws, no corruption exists and, more importantly, a place where Parvaiz can finally belong and will be able to "speak openly about [his] father, with pride, not shame" (144). The idea of a Caliphate, this utopian land, seems to be particularly alluring to radicalised youths. As reported by Lydia Wilson, they are told:

> For the first time in a hundred years there is a caliphate, an Islamic state; but unlike that of the Ottomans, it is truly following God's law, strictly, with no corruption. This difference makes the caliphate a utopia on earth, and for some people, this utopia will usher in the apocalypse following the defeat of the kuffar armies inevitably ranged against it, and it is every Muslim's duty to travel there (in jihadi terms: make hejira, echoing the hejira of the Prophet Mohammed from Mecca to Medina that marks the beginning of the Islamic calendar) and help build this fledgling state. (5)

Wilson comments on the series of eight short films produced by the "Al-Hayat,"[85] which were created to display a utopian image of ISIS. The videos feature boys, girls, and men (no women) of all ages and races, they highlight the idea of togetherness and the joys of living in a paradisal land, they illustrate an abundant space where markets are full of fresh produce, meals were plentiful and smiling fighters handed candy floss and chocolate to the children playing in the park (5). The 'utopian bribe,' if we can call it that, is one many commentators note as featuring in radicalication processes. The images of the Caliphate presented to Parvaiz by Farooq are irresistible: "Men fishing together against the backdrop of a beautiful sunrise; children on swings in a playground; a man riding through a city on the back of a beautiful stallion, carts of fresh vegetables lining the street…" (*Home Fire* 145).[86] But Parvaiz, like the reader, is well-aware of the brutal and savage violence of ISIS, images of which have been broadcast by not only by western media but also by ISIS itself. Farooq justifies the terror and brutality by saying

[85] A well-branded production company in the Islamic State. Further reading: Rose, Steve. "The Isis Propaganda War: A Hi-Tech Media Jihad." *The Guardian*, 7 October 2014. https://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/oct/07/isis-media-machine-propaganda-war.

[86] On 29 June 2014, ISIS established the idea of a Caliphate where the state borders would have been taken down and Baghdadi would be its ruler. For further reading see: "ISIS FAST Facts" (CNN; 2014), Martin Chulov, "The Rise and fall of the ISIS 'Caliphate'" (2019); "Timeline: The Rise, Spread, and Fall of the Islamic State" (Wilson Centre 2019).

it was, and is, "necessary" to protect, "with blood," the "ideals" of the Caliphate and its "moral power" (147).

Finally, after Farooq has spent endless hours prepping Parvaiz, he asks the important question: "Will you protect the new revolution?" (147). Farooq knows these talks might not be sufficient to convince Parvaiz to join ISIS, so he plays the last card: "Will you do the work your father would have done if he'd lived?" (147). The reader is shown the extent to which Farooq's indoctrination techniques have worked in passages that reveal Parvaiz's thoughts, like this:

> The questions followed him through his days now. Everywhere he saw evidence of rot and corruption, lies and coverups. His two sisters had allowed themselves to become part of it, too: one preparing to go to America, the nation that had killed their father and hundreds of thousands of other Muslim fathers; the other propping up the lie that theirs was a country where citizens had rights and courts of appeal (148).

Farooq's brainwashing is so complete that when Parvaiz looks at a photo of a man kneeling, about to be executed by ISIS soldiers – a photo that had upset him in the past, and made him sorry for the victim – he sees something quite different: "His vision expanded; he saw beyond the expression of the individual kneeling in the desert to the message the Caliphate sent out with his death: *What you do to ours we will do to yours*" (149).

Parvaiz's physical appearance changes too as he starts to grow a beard. Aneeka comments on this

> 'You're going to have to get rid of that growth on your face,' she said, maybe or maybe not noticing the hand he quickly rubbed across his eyes at her approach. 'The Heathrow officials might mistake what is Fashionista for Fundo

> and decide not to let you board the plane to Pakistan. Particularly if you're flying through Istanbul. Jihadi alert!' (152).

Had his sister been more attentive, she might have realised the change in Parvaiz's appearance is an early warning sign of his radicalisation, but his dishevelled look is assessed as early signs of love by Aneeka. She doesn't realise how close she is to the truth in her joke about airport officials. This is one of multiple instances in the novel of dramatic irony as the reader is aware of far more than other characters precisely because they have access to internal thoughts and secrets (here of Parvaiz) that are not known by others.

Like Rez in *A Good Country*, Parvaiz is bitterly disappointed about the reality of Raqqa when he arrives there. But Shamsie offers far more detail than Khadivi about her young jihadi's response to the caliphate and his epiphanic realisation. Parvaiz's training teaches him many things, including truths about himself:

> He had survived the tedium and affront of Shariah classes in which he learnt that everyone he loved was either an infidel or an apostate, and that both categories deserved to die… . He had survived military training, during which he learned that fear can drive your body to impossible feats … [and] he finally saw that he was his father's son in his abandonment of a family who had always deserved better than him. (167)

Indeed, he comes to understand that he is "the terrorist son of a terrorist father" (171). Neither are heroes or warriors. But it is this very knowledge that prevents him from going to the British Consulate by himself.

Shamsie's novel sensitively explores and seeks to explain a difficult issue that has gained extensive attention and been of great concern, particularly in the past two decades: homegrown terrorism. As I have discussed in my previous chapters, there have been a multitude of reports, studies, journal articles, non-fictional and fictional books that treat this

subject. Of the latter, only a few have been successful insofar as they portray radicalised youths – or terrorists – in complex and believable ways. Only a few have successfully managed to evoke the conflicted interiorities of such characters, or to situate them in familial webs and social networks that encourage readers to understand their hopes, fears and motivations without falling back on simplistic religious and racial stereotypes, or mistaken assumptions about poverty or psychological 'type' as primary drivers. Successful radicalisation novels do not offer excuses for heinous behaviour or condone the actions of their misguided protagonists. But they do invite speculation on the inter-familial, and intra- and inter-cultural, conditions that, when conflated, are able to incite unimaginable acts of harm and cruelty and leave a trail of brokenness and horror for victims' families and their own.

Shamsie's *Home Fire* is one of these novels. In large part, its success is due to Shamsie's choice to focalise the novel from five different perspectives, allowing the reader to see the characters' inner struggles, and to comprehend why the protagonists choose to act as they do and how this is complicated by their social and, especially, their familial inter- and intra-relations. Shamsie's narrative choices allow the reader to see how silences and omissions between family members lead to fatal misunderstandings and misinterpretations. This is especially so in relation to Adil's departure which has affected his children in different ways. Each responds differently to the information they have or do not have about their father and his reasons for leaving. *Home Fire* is not *just* about the radicalisation of a susceptible young man. It is a family drama (or dramas), just like Antigone. It is about the fires that ignite, burn and continue to smolder, ready to burn again, within the literal familial home and the metaphoric 'home' of the nation. Adil's actions radically affected his children; Parvaiz's choices radically affect Isma and Aneeka. Karamat's political decisions are influenced by his desire to be 'at home' in Britain and these decisions, in turn, influence his relationship with the state of which he is a citizen, the Muslim community in which he grew up, and his own immediate family.

In a recent multidisciplinary review published in *European Psychology*, Nicolas Campelo et al. explore the psychological and social profiles of European homegrown terrorists.[87] Perhaps unexpectedly, their findings reveal that "Psychiatric disorders are rare among radicalised youths" ("Who are the European Youths Willing to Engage in Radicalisation?" 3). Most of such youths do not have anti-social personality disorders; they are not psychopaths or narcissistic or schizophrenic in any clinical sense. Instead, through assessing 22 qualitative and quantitative studies, Campelo et al. have developed a three-level model to explain radicalisation among young Europeans:

> (1) individual risk factors include psychological vulnerabilities such as early experiences of abandonment, perceived injustice and personal uncertainty; (2) micro-environmental risk factors include family dysfunction and friendships with radicalised individuals; (3) societal risk factors include geopolitical events and societal changes such as Durkheim's concept of anomie. ("Who are the European Youths Willing to Engage in Radicalisation?" 1)[88]

Their extensive research report reveals that "early experiences of abandonment" and "a perceived fragile family structure and painful parental representations" are amongst the vulnerability factors which result in radicalisation ("Who are the European Youths Willing to Engage in Radicalisation?" 8). Parvaiz, as explained above, experiences both these factors. What Parvaiz experiences is an uncertain past full of question marks, and Farooq offers him answers but only in the battlefield. Although Parvaiz surely realises that the utopian land of the Caliphate cannot be what Farooq promises, finding answers to his abandonment issues are at

[87] To be sure, Parvaiz is not European in terms of his ethnic origins, per se, but he is a home-grown British citizen.
[88] Durkheim used the word "anomie" to describe conditions of rapid social change in which previous norms and values have disappeared or disintegrated. In such conditions, he postulated, people feel disconnected from their society. In sociology the word is often used to describe a sense of uprootedness or lack of belonging experienced by an individual or group of individuals. According to Jon Gunnar Bernberg, in Durkheim's works, "anomie" "refers to a widespread lack of commitment to shared values, standards, and rules needed to regulate the behavio rs and aspirations of individuals, is an intermediate condition by which social (dis)organization impacts individu al distress and deviant behavior."

the core of his reasons to go to Syria. In an earlier study, Tore Bjørgo and Yngve Carlsson similarly claim that some young people join an extremist group as a way for them to fulfill "certain fundamental social and psychological needs" although the consequences are not what they anticipate ("Early Intervention" 19). Bjørgo and Carlsson discuss the reasons that attract young people to join extremist groups and argue that a key reason is "the search for substitute families and father figures" (21). According to their findings, many of those who have made the decision to join extremist groups suffer from troubled relationships with their families and their fathers in particular. Interestingly, Bjørgo and Carlsson also discuss the role of "older activists" who "often serve as substitute father-figures or masculine role models for … young boys in particular" (21). This is clearly the case in several of the novels I have discussed in this thesis: Updike's *Terrorist*, Khadivi's *A Good Country* and Shamsie's *Home Fire*. However, only Shamsie's novel offers a convincing, nuanced inner portrayal of how this impacts the psychology of her radicalised protagonist.

Shamsie's narrative choices enable readers to perceive the differences between characters' interiorities and their external social behaviour. This enables readers to hold an ironic viewpoint as we know more about the characters than the other characters they interact with and so we are able to see how misunderstanding and misinterpretation affect their interactions with others. There are many instances in the novel when misunderstanding or misinterpretation between characters is highlighted. Some of these are banal; others are very serious. Aneeka, for example, imagines that her brother's dishevelled look is due to him being in love. She has no inkling that he is being groomed by Farooq – but the reader does. Shamsie not only urges her readers to try and comprehend the reasons behind his devastating decision but also puts them in the position occupied by many ancient Greek audiences as the result of the dramatist's manipulation of dramatic irony. In the same way, when Aneeka is called "Knickers" by the British tabloids, readers know what the journalists and wide British society

do not: her unwise decision to start a relationship with Eamonn is because of her desire to save her twin. And when Isma condemns her younger brothers' actions in her press statement it appears as if the sisters are united in their disapproval of what their brother has done, however the reader is aware of the tension between them. As these examples suggest, *Home Fire* asks the reader to listen to 'all sides of the story' or understand the complex interweaving of individual stories in familial and social contexts before they pass judgement on individuals.

Home Fire is a compelling account of divided loyalties and lost loves, but it also offers a sophisticated portrayal of ISIS recruitment processes. As a result of the extensive research Shamsie acknowledges she undertook, the account of Parvaiz's radicalisation is realistic and believable, unlike that offered in many other radicalisation novels. *Home Fire* offers the reader a chance to consider Parvaiz as a young man who has made a very wrong decision but is not inherently violent, pathological or ultra-religious. Moreover, Shamsie's novel does not just portray the *result* of terrorist recruiters' sly manipulations (radicalisation); she also enables the reader to comprehend how the process occurs and what factors contribute to it. Although his sisters are astonished when they discover Parvaiz has left England to join ISIS, the reader is very aware that his decision was not impulsive. Nor was it the result of psychiatric illness or of religious fundamentalism. Parvaiz is encouraged to believe that in the Caliphate he will not be seen as the terrorist son of a terrorist father but rather as a hero who has stepped in his hero fathers' shoes.

As experts now acknowledge, radicalisation is a complex phenomenon that cannot be explained through one factor. Many (lesser) novels do not explore this complexity and instead offer simple or singular reasons for a protagonist's radicalisation. Worryingly, this can reinforce racial and religious stereotypes which, in themselves, perpetuate cycles of radicalisation and its effects. Shamsie's novel differs from many others in this growing fictional genre, including novels I have labelled as 'third-wave' post-9/11 fiction, not least because she

is attentive to multiple perspectives and all too aware of the distance between what one is thinking and feeling and how one behaves in social contexts. Through her choice of narrative style, she invites readers to understand this too.

Conclusion

When I was 15 years old, my family moved from Iran to the UK, where my father completed a PhD. We lived in Ashford, Kent and I attended Highworth Grammar School for Girls. The move was not easy, I was uprooted at a difficult age not only from my friends and family, but also from my culture. I was desperate to fit in and make friends, so I tried my best to learn the language, slang, take part in activities and sports, however it was not easy. I had to come to terms with the fact that I was an *outsider*, my culture was different, and this put limitations to the types of activities I could take part in. However, the biggest thing was I dressed differently. I wore hijab at the time.

I filled my spare time reading fiction and particularly immigrant fiction, because in every book that I read I could see a part of my life, and the struggles that I had gone through to establish myself as a Muslim, hijabi teenager in Ashford, while trying to keep my conservative, religious parents happy. By reading this genre I also hoped to better understand the actions and behaviour of my parents: like why I was not allowed to dress the way my friends did, go to concerts and late-night movies, or even have sleepovers at my British friends' houses. I was able to look at fictional characters from a distance that it was not possible to achieve when looking at my own life, or those of my parents. I felt frustrated that I could not enjoy the same activities as my friends could, like go swimming. But I guess, most importantly, I felt embarrassed constantly having to turn down the invitations to join my friends when they wanted to go out which ultimately resulted in feelings of isolation and frustration.

My experiences while reading immigrant literature in these change-filled years support Maria Nikolajeva's claim that one of the main attractions of reading fiction, for lay readers and scholars alike, is the possibility it offers for understanding other people in a way which is difficult, perhaps impossible, in real life (95). Similarly, Raymond Mar et al. state that stories

can be used as a powerful tool for educating children and adults about understanding others (708). As Mina Shah says:

> Reading fiction is important for many reasons. It can help heal and promote the cultivation of greater empathy for people who may seem unlike ourselves at first pass. It teaches us how to deal with various ethical conundrums, putting us in positions to imagine what we would do if faced with similar ethical dilemmas as the characters. (n.p.)

This is certainly true, however no fiction could prepare me for what lay ahead. 9/11 was a turning point in my life. I was on a day trip in London when the attacks took place. Oblivious to what was happening in America, I was walking around my beloved London unaware of how after this event things would never be the same again. But soon the news began to spread around the small town I was living in, and I went home feeling as if something had changed forever. It had.

After 9/11, the UK was not the same for hijabi me; I was shouted at, called names, spat at and had my scarf pulled off. I no longer felt safe wearing my hijab, especially in London, and started to wear a cap to cover my hair when in crowded places. I was also trying to make sense of what had happened, because while I also felt unsafe and scared, I was treated with suspicion and perceived as the enemy.

In the days and weeks after 9/11, I developed a habit of regularly reading newspapers and following televised news in an attempt to understand what was happening. Nevertheless, as I have discussed in my first chapter, the initial media response to the 9/11 attacks was a replayed loop of highly circulated media images broadcasted repeatedly on television screens and newspapers. The dominant discourse was constructed and controlled by the media, and it was one in which I, and my home, family and religion, were reviled. I experienced first-hand the effects of the mainstream media's packaging and presenting the attacks and how, in Brian

A. Monahan's words, this constructed a reality that "tilted the balance in favour of certain interpretations and, by extension, determined the social and political response to the attacks" (9). As discussed in my first chapter, the initial 9/11 reporting (in the US and also the countries of its allies) was highly visual, patriotic, and emotive and was far from neutral or objective. It concentrated on stories of American patriotism and loss and paved the way for the public's participation in the US government's retaliation, the War on Terror. Consequently, Muslims became the villains, even in relation to other minority religious 'others.' I was now one of *them*.

As an avid reader, in the years after the attacks, I turned to fiction to try and understand why *they* hated *me*. I especially wanted to see how Muslim characters were being portrayed. As I started to read novels written immediately after 9/11, it became evident that most literary responses to the terrorist attacks, with very few exceptions, worked to further confirm the dominant narrative, not to challenge it or offer wider perspectives. Muslim characters were the villain of the stories, and I could not find an author who portrayed the complex difficulties that Muslim immigrants – like me – faced in the West. Furthermore, the story told by most literary authors in the decade or so after the terrorist attacks cemented the idea that 9/11 was less about (global) politics than religion and, more specifically, a story about Islam and its clash with Christianity or, at least, modernity. This, then, characterised what I have identified as the 'first wave' of post-9/11 fiction.

As discussed in my first chapter, during this time Anglo-American writers, even extremely accomplished ones, seemed unable to effectively engage with or represent the Islamic other in a convincing way. The fiction I read confirmed what Richard Gray suggests is the "triumphalist insularity" (*After the Fall* 85) of the United States and its writers, or what Ruth Franklin referred to in 2011 as "the stubborn, inward gaze of the post-9/11 novel" ("Stubborn" n.p.).

Nonetheless, as the first decade after 9/11 passed, I began to realise fictional writing about 9/11 was slowly changing. The first book to challenge the dominant narrative was Mohsin Hamid's *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* (2007), but American and British writers didn't offer a similar portrait of the impacts of 9/11 on Muslim immigrants (first or second-generation) until Amy Waldman published *The Submission* (2011). As I have argued in my second chapter, in part, this was the result of the new era of politics ushered in by the election of Barack Obama in 2009 and, also, a broadening interest in America's (and Britain's) disenfranchised immigrants and non-white citizens. I consider this to be a transitional 'second wave' of 9/11 fiction, as I discuss in Chapter Two.

Although Hamid and Waldman took important steps to portray the complexity of the experiences of Muslims living in the West, I still found there was something missing. In Hamid's novel, the relationship between Changez and Erica is rather too freighted with symbolism (she represents AmERICA, after all, and is problematically sexually assaulted by the equally representative Changez-as-Muslim-immigrant), and the many ambiguities (like Changez' smile as the Twin Towers collapse and his possible radicalisation at the end) leave too may openings for readers to read him in stereotypical "bad Muslim" terms. In *The Submission*, the professional, secular Muslim-immigrant protagonist is portrayed as becoming more stereotypically Muslim and finally leaves the US permanently.

When I came to New Zealand to begin my PhD, I was still searching for fiction that conveyed the complexities and difficulties of *my* Muslim immigrant experiences. I was excited to discover a new group of writers coming to the fore: writers who themselves are immigrants, writing about the treatment if Muslims in the West, the often-stifling demands of their parents, and their struggle to belong in the country in which they have citizenship and that they call home. This is when I decided to investigate how these Muslim novelists, writing in English, responded to the limited representations of fiction about 9/11 and its effects. I was curious to

see how the *other* Americans (or residents of Western nations) who were or are *also* victims of 9/11 – or the geopolitical and domestic politics that resulted in, and followed, events on that fateful day – chose to portray the impacts of 9/11: Muslim US and UK citizens, refugees, immigrants, or the children of immigrants/refugees in the West. This curiosity led me to encounter narratives with radicalised characters and this fascinated me, because I found it difficult to understand the reasons why someone would choose to become a jihadi, to become the figure of the stereotypical villain projected onto them. I began to study fiction that featured protagonists who are, or who become, radicalised or commit acts of terror, ostensibly confirming the West's worst fears about Muslims but also challenging these in complex ways. Still, many of these fictions didn't show me enough. It was still hard to comprehend.

I decided to focus my thesis on how cultural/ethnic "strangers/others" (including radicalised ones) – especially those who have made western nations their home – were portrayed in post-9/11 fiction by white Anglo-Americans authors *and* to contrast these novels with fictional representations by Muslim immigrant authors, hoping to shed light on how these ethnic/cultural others might imagine themselves, where they stand, and how they feel in the western country that they have either been born into or have voluntarily chosen to call home.

As my thesis argues, in recent years, many Muslim Anglo-American authors have tried to challenge the dominant media and fictional narrative and give voice to their community in their work and announce that they, too, have been affected by the fanatical acts of the 9/11 terrorists. Arab and Muslim Anglo-American writers have tried to respond to stereotypes like "the Faceless Veiled Arab Woman" or "the Islamic Terrorist" by writing their own versions of what it means to be Arab, Arab-American, or Muslim living in western societies that, after 9/11, have become increasingly hostile toward them. Through their works, these authors have presented the challenges their immigrant Muslim characters constantly deal with and explore the multiple facets of their identities. They break the stereotypes associated with the Muslim

identity and enlighten the reader on Muslim characters' diverse experiences, and diverse religious/ political perspectives.

Nonetheless, this corpus of writing is still small and, as I argue in Chapter Three, some of these writings do not provide complex representations and instead have fallen back into problematic stereotyping, largely due to the lack of insight offered into the psychology of their radicalised Muslim protagonists and how they are challenged by familial tensions and social ostracisation. I choose to focus on two authors, Laleh Khadivi and Kamila Shamsie, who I felt had approached the topic of Muslim homegrown terrorism with nuance and accuracy by portraying the lives of radical Muslim characters who are not simply in thrall of the putative latent violence of Islam. It is perhaps a coincidence, but one worth noting: these writers are women (as is Amy Waldman), in contrast to the white male authors who dominated the field of 9/11 fiction for so many years. I have not explored this detail in my thesis, but it remains an issue to which I hope to return in future work.

I have discussed how Khadivi, with partial success, attempts to portray the psychological drivers for her protagonist's (reluctant) radicalisation, doing so with a careful focus on his interiority. This, in turn, requires consideration of how she narrates the novel, using a limited third-person focalisation to bring her reader closely into the mind of her young protagonist, Alireza (Rez) Courdee. Khadivi carefully portrays the difficulties Rez faces in trying to achieve the American Dream (like his father's insistence that he turn away from his cultural religion) which are exacerbated by his father's (seemingly contrary) insistence that he does not mix with his American peers. She offers a powerful portrait of a teenager's need to fit in and how ostracisation might lead to disastrous choices. However, the account of Rez's radicalisation is unconvincing. We are not provided with a detailed portrayal of how he was persuaded to become a jihadist, with his reasons apparently being a vague appeal to "brotherhood" and his desire to resume his relationship with Fatima. The early thematic focus

on his relationship with his father peters out and the novel ends with a whimper and not a bang. Moreover, female characters lack nuance and voice in the novel and are ultimately dismissed in the conclusion as if in accordance with the putative Muslim silencing of women.

In my view it is Shamsie's novel which provides an outstanding model of how fiction might address some of the gaps in understanding evident in mainstream media's supposedly factual accounts of both ordinary Muslim beliefs *and* Islamic extremism. I have argued that Shamsie's success is the result of several factors. The first of these is her own status as a (Pakistani) Muslim who has only recently gained citizenship in the UK. She writes as one who is profoundly aware of what is at stake in British citizenship and the assimilation contract with which this nation expects immigrants to comply, contributing to her sensitivity to the precariousness of belonging for Muslim citizens in the West. Secondly, Shamsie – not least due to her stated opinion that post-9/11 fiction has not done justice to the complex questions involved in Muslim extremism and terrorism – has taken the time and effort to extensively research the topic of radicalisation. Drawing on her research, she offers a chilling and believable account of the painstaking process by which her young jihadist is groomed and prepped. Finally, Shamsie's choice to narrate the novel from the perspective of five characters provides her readers with access to the interiority of each as they negotiate the same devastating series of events with only partial knowledge and understanding. This allows readers to see and experience the web of familial interactions that contribute to Parvaiz's decisions and actions. The dramatic irony that results from readers knowing more that each individual character adds further complexity and is fitting for a novel that reworks an ancient tragedy in a modern setting. Readers are privy to not only the deep fears and desires of each character but also to the secrets that each character keeps from the others. Radicalisation is shown to be the consequence of careful, strategic manipulation of the young jihadist's individual insecurities and needs, and the result of familial tensions, lies, omissions and unspoken secrets that are sustained to fester

and fatally wound. The damage that results is not limited to the radicalised individual, or innocent bystanders, but is shown to permeate his family and wider community in devastating ways.

Both *A Good Country* and *Home Fire* offer insights into the difficulties faced by second-generation immigrant in everyday life in a county in which they desperately seek to belong but cannot, despite their citizenship. However, as I have argued, Shamsie's keen (and informed) eye surveys and a broader canvas than Khadivi's. She counters stereotypes with researched psychological acuity and narratological skill. In our contemporary world, so fraught with tensions arising from misunderstandings of difference – religious, national, gendered, etc. – reading fiction about "strange others" and the ways they negotiate the difficult terrain of immigration, may have considerable social value. Shamsie's novel gives precisely this. In my opinion *Home Fire* is an outstanding example of third-wave post 9/11 fiction as Shamsie invites the reader, through her multiple perspectives, to think about the impacts of discriminatory social contexts and familial tensions on vulnerable Muslim youths. This is the kind of novel I was hoping for, and I finally found it.

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